

# An Attempt to Discuss "Antagonism" and "Antagonistic Contradictions"

Shan Hong [山虹]

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*This unusual article raises important questions about the conventional explanations of so-called "non-antagonistic" contradictions. The author, whose name appears to be pseudonym, defines an "antagonistic contradiction" as a one in which "the two sides do not give in and do not compromise," not merely a contradiction in which the two sides show antagonism at some time or other. He claims that this uncompromising character of an antagonistic contradiction is present in a contradiction in which "both sides are predetermined to take on an antagonistic form of struggle in order to be resolved." He admits that a contradiction can change from an antagonistic to a non-antagonistic character, or vice-versa, but this change involves a much more fundamental and less frequent change in a contradiction than merely displaying or not displaying antagonism.*

This article's aim is to inquire briefly into the following questions: What is an "antagonistic contradiction?" Are "antagonistic contradiction" and "antagonism" the same concepts or not? If they are not, then what kind of relationship is there between them? How can an antagonistic contradiction transform into a non-antagonistic contradiction?

## ONE

"Antagonism" is one kind of form of the struggle of a contradiction---the form of external conflict. This form of struggle mainly indicates the form which the contradiction takes on at the time of its final resolution. [Mao Zedong's] "On Contradiction" points out, in class opposition society, "...it is necessary that in the development of the contradiction of two classes up to a certain stage, both sides take on an external antagonistic form, and develop into revolution." Certainly in the process of development of some contradictions, external conflict can also arise many times, and this is also "antagonism." Nevertheless we should begin to examine these contradictions with regard to the period of their final resolution and the

relation of the forms of struggle which they inevitably take on.

I think that "antagonistic contradiction" and "antagonism" are two different but closely related concepts. "Antagonism" concerns a scientific generalization about the form of struggle of one kind of contradiction. In the natural or social realm, we can always catch sight of the existence of some contradictions in which an external form of conflict arises at the time of their final resolution. Appearances of this kind of external conflict are quite varied, and each is different. There are bomb explosions and eruptions of volcanoes, and there are also armed uprisings and wars that last a comparatively long time. Even though these differ in a thousand ways, however, they still have a common characteristic, and this is precisely external conflict. The concept of "antagonism" is only formed by giving a scientific generalization about these various different phenomena which have the common characteristic of an externally conflicting form of struggle of a contradiction. "Antagonism" merely indicates a characteristic of one kind of form of struggle of a contradiction, not what determines the content of this kind of struggle form.

If it is said that "antagonism" is a reflection of one kind of form of struggle of a contradiction [and not what determines the content of this form of struggle], then "antagonistic contradiction" reflects the content of those contradictions which inevitably take on an antagonistic form to obtain final resolution. "Antagonistic contradiction" and "antagonism" are related as content to form, and the former determines the latter; there is a close, inseparable relation between them, but their distinction must not be obscured. It is like the relation of use value and exchange value. If there were no exchange value then value would not exist. If the final period of resolution did not take on an antagonistic form, then antagonistic contradictions also would not exist.

"Antagonistic contradiction" is an equally scientific concept, but is not a synonym for "class exploitation." Since the natural and social domains always have a number of contradictions which take on an external, antagonistic form of struggle at the moment of final resolution [but do not have class exploitation], why must they take on this kind of struggle form and not another struggle form in order to be able to strive for resolution? Certainly, it is necessary tool for their inherent causes. The specific [129] causes corresponding to the complex content of contradictions in the natural, social, and intellectual realms are not the same. However they also have a common characteristic; as a result of a scientific generalization, this kind of common characteristic results in a scientific concept, which is precisely the concept of "antagonistic contradiction".

Now we must go a step further and study what is the content of "antagonistic contradiction." In other words, we need to study just how a contradiction can be an antagonistic contradiction. I think that a so-called "antagonistic contradiction", is precisely a struggle of both sides of some thing's internal contradiction in which the two

sides do not give in and do not compromise. This kind of contradiction contains the following real possibility (or maximum possibility): its final resolution must pass through the form of external conflict. Some antagonistic contradictions also must pass through many external conflicts in order to be finally resolved.

The two sides of an antagonistic contradiction therefore do not give in and do not compromise because it is a condition of this contradiction's existence, which is determined by the characteristics of both sides of the contradiction, the relation between them, and other factors. For example, a chick is situated in an eggshell. On one side, the chick depends on the eggshell, and on the other side, at a certain period of time it needs to break through the eggshell. If not, it cannot develop and cannot live. As for the eggshell itself, on one side it sets up a protection of the chick's life, and the other side, it also sets up restrictions which affect the chick's development. Neither side of the contradiction concedes to the other or compromises with the other. In contradictions like this, the initial stage moves toward a zone which has an antagonistic character, because its resolution must include the real possibility of taking on an antagonistic form. Under certain conditions, the chick breaks the shell and comes out, and the contradiction is finally resolved. Also inside class society, for instance, in the contradiction between exploiting and exploited classes, in the initial stage, both sides of a contradiction move toward the obvious occurrence of uncompromising and non-conceding qualities. Under normal circumstances, the final resolution of this kind of contradiction, only exists by taking on the real possibility of an antagonistic form. This certainly has something to do with the opposite basic interests of the two sides of the contradiction, but in the study of this sense of "antagonistic contradiction," the more important aspect is that the mass of laboring people absolutely will

not willingly endure exploitation and oppression without rising up in revolution, and the exploiting class absolutely will not surrender unconditionally to the laboring people.

This is what must still be explained: an antagonistic contradiction depends on a certain condition and this condition makes it take on the real possibility of an antagonistic form of resolution of the contradiction; but if this kind real possibility requires having a change into external conflict, then new conditions must still arise. For example, for a bomb explosion, an ignition condition must arise and for a war to break out, the condition that political struggle turn white hot must emerge. In normal circumstances, however, the emergence of this kind of condition is inevitable and cannot be avoided, therefore this kind of possibility can be real possibility. Antagonistic contradiction is absolutely not to be explained as always in a condition of external conflict. Naturally, in the process of development of an antagonistic contradiction, another kind of condition can also appear, which sufficiently changes the characteristics or relationship of the two sides of the contradiction, and then an antagonistic contradiction is transformed into its opposite.

## TWO

Some comrades have concluded that an "antagonistic contradiction" is a "contradiction in which the basic interests of both sides cannot be mediated," or they simply say the result is "a contradiction of basically opposed class interests." This kind of formulation obviously cannot be generalized to natural phenomena, thus it cannot be regarded as a scientific definition of "antagonistic contradiction." Furthermore, this kind of formulation also is not fully suited to social phenomena. Because this generalization does not include the internal contradiction and struggle of exploiting classes, it also does not include the diversity of forms of

class contradiction in new conditions of final resolution.

For example, in the epoch of bourgeois revolution, some countries took up the form of armed struggle and abolished the feudal system. Can this be the opposition of the basic interests of the capitalist class and landlord class or not? If it can be explained this way, then how is it to be explained that some countries also have not taken up the form of armed struggle, because they have adopted more or less improved forms of resolution of contradictions?

Again, war inevitably erupts between imperialists. Certainly, regardless of new conditions which may not have appeared before, contradictions between them also must undergo warfare in order to become resolved. In that case, aren't the class interests between each imperialist group basically opposed but still basically identical? Are all their contradictions antagonistic and also non-antagonistic?

Next we consider briefly whether the formulation that antagonistic contradictions are "contradictions of basically opposed class interests," is suitable even for class contradictions.

Maintaining the comrades' formulation mentioned above encounters the problem of the contradiction of the working class and national bourgeoisie during China's transition period, admitting that its final resolution adopts a non-antagonistic form, but still not admitting that the content (or quality) of the contradiction appeared to change. Their formulation is: "under certain conditions antagonistic contradictions can adopt a non-antagonistic form of resolution." I think this kind of formulation is cannot stand. This is because: First, in the final analysis, the form is determined by the content, [130] and the antagonistic nature of a contradiction determine that its final resolution inevitably adopts and antagonistic form. If the nature of a contradiction and the form of struggle which it is adopts were completely sepa-

rated, and the nature of the contradiction did not give rise to any determinate effect, then this in logic obviously would not make sense. The reply will be that the form of struggle of a real contradiction can change under "specific conditions." But certainly it is necessary to concretely analyze what kind of conditions these so-called "specific conditions" and determine whether or not this kind of condition only appears to influence forms of struggle and cannot actually change the quality of the contradiction. Suppose the apparent condition is this kind of condition: it not only influences the form of struggle, but it above all influences the content of the contradiction, influences the position of both sides of the contradiction, makes one side of the contradiction able to direct the other to surrender peacefully. Suppose, however, that the condition in which both sides of the contradiction do not concede to each other and do not compromise with each other does not already exist, it would it thus be decided that at the time of final resolution this contradiction would also be obliged to adopt a non-antagonistic form? In that case could it be said that the quality of the contradiction appeared to change? I think this can be completely explained like this. In "On Contradiction," Chairman Mao was able to speak clearly about this point: "Contradiction and struggle are universal and absolute, but methods of resolution of contradiction and even forms of struggle, because of the quality of the contradiction, are thus different and not identical. Some contradictions possess open antagonism, some contradictions then are not of this type" (emphasis added by the author). I think that what is called here "open antagonism" just indicates the quality that both sides of the contradiction do not concede to each other and do not compromise with each other, which alone can decide the final "method of resolution of the contradiction" or "form of struggle." On the other hand, if the method of final resolution and form of struggle of one kind of contradiction is non-

antagonistic, then what will determine this? It is obviously determined by the non-antagonistic nature of this kind of contradiction.

Second, suppose one says that an antagonistic contradiction can adopt a non-antagonistic form of final resolution; certainly in another situation it can also be said that a non-antagonistic contradiction can take on an antagonistic form of final resolution. Proceeding this way, isn't the scientific predictive character of Marxism abolished for this question? If, when facing one type of contradiction, we still do not know what form of struggle its final resolution will take on, then we have to "submit to the will of heaven", and sink into the realm of chance!

The purpose of the study of the nature of contradictions is involved here. Contradictions are studied in order to unmask contradictions and resolve contradictions, and the quality of contradictions is studied in order to expose this kind of quality, to provide in advance the form of struggle which this kind of contradiction can inevitably take on at the time of its final resolution, and thus tell us that there is adequate preparation, lay down policies in accord with objective reality, promote the resolution of contradictions.

In "On Contradiction," Chairman Mao pointed out that to know the status of antagonism in a contradiction is extremely important, and "it makes us understand that in class society, revolution and revolutionary war is unavoidable. If this is abandoned, then leaps of social development cannot be accomplished, reactionary ruling classes cannot be overturned to enable people win political power." It is very clear that we recognize the antagonistic contradictions of class society precisely in order to persist in the Marxist-Leninist theory of social revolution (in normal circumstances, to use violence to seize political power), prevent reformist attacks, and finally resolve of this kind of antagonistic contradiction. The qualities of contradictions are definitely not stud-

ied just in order to study the qualities of contradictions. If we regard some kind of contradiction (perhaps a class contradiction) as already destined to adopt a non-antagonistic form when resolution occurs, but we still stubbornly insist that this kind of contradiction is antagonistic, then this makes a big departure from the aim of the study of the quality of contradictions, and thus makes it lose any meaning.

The question of the methods of study is also involved here. All abstract scientific concepts emerge from and summarize a large number of different phenomenon of objective things which differ and but are identical in essence. These concepts should yield concepts that conform to the reality of things, but should not make reality agree grudgingly with a predetermined concept. We cannot prefabricate a concept (no matter whether it is scientific or not) and then arrange things in order and force them inside the circle of this concept; what conforms will remain, but what does not conform will be got rid of. Regarding "basically opposed class interests" as the definition of the concept of antagonistic contradiction is just like this: natural phenomena are not about so-called social classes and do not correspond with this framework, which is only left aside in any case. Contradictions between imperialists do not conform to this framework, and are also an exception. The contradiction of China's working class and capitalist class does conform to this framework and leads to a conclusion about antagonistic contradictions, but as to the form of struggle which the final resolution of these contradictions take on, another theory is also needed, and so forth. I think that this kind of procedure cannot be called a scientific method. For the correct scientific study of the question, it is necessary first to return for a second time to investigate the true content of the concept of antagonistic contradiction. Without the correct concept, thought will sink into confusion.

Certainly this is not to say that the method of regarding "a contradiction whose two sides are basically opposed interests" as the content of an antagonistic contradiction is completely incorrect. If this kind of formulation were only used for the contradiction of exploiter and exploited classes, it would be correct. Both sides of the contradiction of exploiter and exploited classes frequently show the refusal to concede or compromise, but one factor of both sides refusing to concede or compromise is precisely basic opposition of class interest. But this point cannot be regarded as the only factor. In the study of this issue of antagonistic contradiction it will be said that if a change in the balance of class power can give rise to one of the two sides of a contradiction [131] making a concession toward the other side, this constitutes a basic character and can be a very important condition. Once this condition appears, the real possibility taking on an antagonistic form of final resolution of the contradiction can disappear. Even though two class interests still are basically opposed, the quality of the contradiction changes.

This shows that although regarding an antagonistic contradiction as "a contradiction of basically opposed class interests," is partly true, its narrow and one-sided character is also revealed, and it is shown to be an artificial, rigid, unscientific concept. To use it come study the quality of a contradiction would inevitably run into a stone wall.

Some comrades say that to recognize a condition under which the contradiction of the working class and the capitalist class is regarded as non-antagonistic contradiction would obscure the distinction between worker-peasant contradictions and labor-capital contradictions. I also think this kind approach is untenable. Worker-peasant contradictions and labor-capital contradictions have an essential distinction, which is precisely the distinction of basically identical versus basically opposed class interests, but

this is not the distinction between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions."

Antagonistic contradiction" only indicates a kind of contradiction of things in which both sides are predetermined to take on an antagonistic form of struggle in order to be resolved, and it cannot indicate the specific character of "antagonism." The various specific characteristics of contradictions should not all be included in the two concepts of "antagonism" and "non-antagonism." For example, under China's present conditions, the forms of struggle of worker-peasant contradictions and labor-capital contradictions have many specific points of difference, but have one point of identity, which is that these two groups of contradictions both specifically take on non-antagonistic forms to obtain resolution.

If the above-mentioned approach is to be tenable, then we also can ask the questions: can our country's current labor-capital contradictions and the contradictions of the working class and the popular masses of the whole nation before liberation with imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat capitalism, all be regarded as antagonistic contradictions? Can it be said that the distinction between the two groups of contradictions is obscured and can it be said that we treat contradictions with the national bourgeoisie and with imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat capitalism as having to take on completely identical forms of struggle?

### THREE

Antagonistic contradictions and non-antagonistic contradictions can transform into each other, but that is not to say that they must do so. Some qualities of contradictions basically cannot change. For example, the certainty of death will be explained as the final resolution of a contradiction in a person's physiology.

But many qualities of contradictions, however, can change. This kind of transfor-

mation depends on certain natural and social conditions. Once new conditions appear, they give rise to changes in the positions and relations of both sides of a contradiction, and it also becomes possible to change the quality of the contradiction. As examples of antagonistic contradictions changing into non-antagonistic contradictions we cite: in the capitalist system, contradictions of the forces of production and the relations of production, production and waste, city and village, mental labor and physical labor, exchange value and use value, etc., all contradictions which contain a real possibility that their final resolution must take on an antagonistic form. Therefore, these contradictions all are antagonistic contradictions. The quality of these contradictions depends on social conditions which are capitalist institutions (there are some which depend for their existence on any exploitative system). If this condition happened to change, for example, by establishing a New Democratic or socialist system, then, even though contradictions still exist in these things themselves, antagonism would then disappear. Antagonistic contradictions transform into non-antagonistic contradictions.

We can also say this about class contradictions. The quality of class contradictions likewise depends on certain social conditions. In the general situation, class contradictions are antagonistic contradictions, and this is because those depending on someone else for their existence are an exploiting class, which occupies the ruling position of the social system. If major changes were to happen to this system, how could the quality of its contradictions be absolutely unchangeable?

Certainly, a change in objective conditions does not always necessarily give rise to a change in the quality of a contradiction (for example, after the liberation of the whole country, the contradiction of the peasantry and landlord class still has an antagonistic form of resolution), because of its insufficient

application to some kind of contradiction to produce the real possibility of peaceful resolution. It cannot be denied, however, that objective conditions change the quality of a contradiction, a change which gives rise to decisive action. The important issue is the concrete analysis of the quality of every kind of contradiction and finding the real possibilities which are contained inside it.

Some people think that for class contradictions, an antagonistic contradiction must be eliminated and cannot be transformed. I think that this kind of view is a bit too absolute. It is true that in past history, class contradictions transforming and turning into non-antagonistic contradictions is rare, and from now on, this kind of situation is also unlikely to be a universal phenomenon. But I'm afraid it is wrong not to consider changes in the international situation, not to consider changes in the social condition of every country, not to consider internal opposite classes that a country possesses and the change of the characteristics and relations between them, but seize on one obstinate formula. I want to construct a similar but not very precise analogy (because a class contradiction is exactly like a class contradiction, but not all analogous cases can be exactly like a class contradiction): in the past in our country, it was necessary to say that between the parties that represent the interests and thought of the national bourgeoisie and the CPC there existed an [132] antagonistic contradiction. But in the present, perhaps we will arrive at a socialist society after many years, and these party groups will still exist and have coexisted with the CPC over a long period of time. Could it then still be said that their contradiction with the CPC remains antagonistic? I think it is unlikely anyone will admit that this is an antagonistic contradiction. That is just to say that if the quality of this kind of contradiction, which is similar to a class contradiction, can also change along with change and transformation of social conditions, then why is it

that a class contradiction cannot transform into the opposite of what is expected?

In brief, the fact that antagonistic contradictions can be transformed into non-antagonistic contradictions just means that the final resolution of this kind of contradiction appeared to have a real possibility of taking on an antagonistic form but this original real possibility of taking on an antagonistic form of resolution tends to disappear.

Some people say that a contradiction undergoes antagonism several times before it can obtain final resolution, and say that the result is that antagonism and non-antagonism frequently change. Today if a contradiction's struggle takes on an antagonistic form, then it will be said that this kind of contradiction is antagonistic; if in the future the contradiction's struggle takes on a non-antagonistic form, then it will be said that this kind of contradiction turned into a non-antagonistic contradiction. This way of understanding the transformation of a contradiction is one kind of view. It not only confuses form and content, but it drops the determination of form by content into a quagmire.

I think that one kind of contradiction is antagonistic or non-antagonistic, depending on the real possibility of the form of struggle that it takes at the time of resolution. As for the process of development of contradictions, the influence of a certain number of conditions can make an antagonistic contradiction take on a non-antagonistic form of struggle, and can also make a non-antagonistic contradiction take on an antagonistic form.

As an example of the former kind of transformation, consider that in the capitalist system, contradictions of the working class and capitalist class are generally all antagonistic. Besides the form of external antagonism inevitably taken on in final resolution of this contradiction, external antagonism also frequently appears in the process of the development of these contradictions. But it cer-

tainly cannot be said that this kind of external antagonism occurs every day. After an economic crisis there can be a recovery, a prosperous stage, and after a strike struggle is over, there can be a period of return to work. During this time the contradiction takes on a non-antagonistic form. This appearance of this kind of form is determined by many objective conditions. The question is whether these objective conditions are insufficient to change the position and relationship of the two sides of the contradiction, and insufficient to form the real possibility that one kind of final resolution of the contradiction takes on a non-antagonistic form. Therefore, the appearance of this kind of non-antagonistic form is brewing a more serious antagonism.

As an example of the latter kind of transformation, consider the circumstance that the master class is in power, and a peasant disturbance can take place in part of a region. The contradiction of the working class and the peasantry is non-antagonistic, but the emergence of a certain number of objective conditions, give rise to partial, temporary, external antagonism. The question is whether this kind of partial, temporary external antagonism could not possibly change the quality of the contradiction and could not form the real possibility that it will take on an antagonistic form in the period of its final resolution.

It follows from this, I think, that for every kind of contradiction in which the process of its development takes on various forms of struggle, its relation to the real possibility of taking on a form of struggle in the period the final resolution should be examined, its relation to the quality of the contradiction must also be examined. The objective conditions for taking on this or that kind of struggle form must be concretely analyzed, but not there is no need to be confused by forms of struggle.

As for the reaction of the form of struggle to the content of a contradiction,

this should also be appraised. For example, if in one kind of non-antagonistic contradiction, because of the influence of objective conditions, an antagonistic form frequently erupts, then this can give rise to a transformation of the quality of the contradiction. Although this issue has a fairly obvious connection to the subject of this essay, detailed additional study of it cannot be given here.

If the final resolution of one kind of contradiction is regarded as having lost the possibility of taking on external antagonism, that does not at all exclude its simultaneously having additional possibilities. These latter possibilities, however, are not real possibilities (they are comparatively small or very small), and are hardly the possibility of an inevitable need to change. If Marx long ago pointed to the picture of the powerful nation of Great Britain, which had the possibility of the peaceful surrender of the capitalist class to the proletariat, this kind of possibility is still not real possibility. He only regarded the British working class as having the capacity to become big and powerful enough to bring the capitalist class under control, and if condition emerge later that show the intention of the British capitalist class also showed the emergence of conditions producing the intention to surrender peacefully, this kind of possibility can change into a real possibility. At the present time in Britain there is still a real possibility that the contradiction of the working class and the capitalist class will take on an antagonistic form of final resolution. It still can happen that after our country's war of resistance against Japan, we will continue to preserve the existing unified condition and avoid the possibility of civil war between our party and the KMT reactionary group. The party expended a major effort in striving for this change into the loss of one possible aspect. But at that time a real possibility of a civil war crisis was increasingly aggravated (finally Chang Kai-Shek tore up the armistice



agreement, and started a nation-wide civil war against the people), and took on an antagonistic form to resolve this contradiction. Mainly because of this, therefore, the two types of contradictions mentioned above were both antagonistic contradictions at that time.