

Study Guide for *On Contradiction* by Mao Tse-Tung

First Edition

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This document is in the public domain; however, I would like to emphasize that I disapprove of its usage in any generative, “AI,” for any reason.

Introduction

On Contradiction by Mao Tse-Tung is part of a three-part series that these study guides will be covering, preceded by *On Practice* and followed by *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, respectively. Mao Tse-Tung primarily wrote for largely illiterate peasants, meaning his documents tend to be very easy to understand.

Mao’s works largely function as a common-sense filter, with a particular focus on ensuring Marxist-Leninists actually perform their party work instead of just regurgitating theory. *On Contradiction* will continue this discussion, elaborating upon what was written in *On Practice*, with a particular focus on the philosophy of materialist dialectics, which will serve as the backbone for *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*.

As new terms come up in the document that may be unfamiliar or have experienced lingual drift, they’ll be clarified for their individual sections. Additionally, to encourage reading the document rather than seeking summaries, key takeaways for different sections will be presented as questions for the reader to answer, allowing them to seek the answers themselves and come to a greater understanding of the document.

This is unfortunately due to the fact that—while being somewhat viable as onboarding to reading Socialist theory, assuming someone is actively encouraged to learn and possibly assisted in doing so (as opposed to berated)—summarized Socialist theory significantly waters down the original documents and will only provide a rudimentary understanding.

The headings beyond this point in this document will simply denote the relevant sections of *On Contradiction*.

Unlabeled Introduction to *On Contradiction*

Key Takeaways:

- What were the two ideological trends which negatively affected the CCP?

Section 1: The Two World Outlooks

Key Takeaways:

- What is the metaphysical conception of the world? What negative affects do metaphysics have on Marxist theory and praxis?
- What is the difference between materialist dialectics and metaphysics?
- What is a key aspect to the victory of a proletarian revolution?

Section 2: The Universality of Contradiction

Important Context:

- Kulaks were wealthy land-owning peasants.
- The concepts of dialectical materialism and materialist dialectics are explained much more clearly and in much more detail in a Vietnamese textbook, recently translated to English by Luna Nguyen, called *Curriculum of the Basic Principles of Marxism-Leninism* by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, *Part 1: The Worldview and Philosophical Methodology of Marxism-Leninism*.

Key Takeaways:

- How do contradictions work within the proletarian movement? Have they always been there from the beginning?

Section 3: The Particularity of Contradiction

Key Takeaways:

- Where does general knowledge come from? What should be done once the general relationships are known?
- Why is dogmatism harmful to the Marxist movement?
- What did Lenin describe as the most essential part of Marxism?
- Why is subjectivism inherently anti-materialist, and by extension, anti-Marxist? (Why can you not only rely on your own experiences—for example, on the issue of food stamps, who uses them, and what they cover—to understand the objective conditions of something?)
- How does subjectivism harm Party theory and praxis?
- What is the main contradiction of capitalism?

Section 4: The Principal Contradiction and the Principal Aspect of a Contradiction

Key Takeaways:

- How does war affect the principal contradiction? How does imperialism affect the principal contradiction?
- What is the key to solving a complex web of contradictions?
- What can lead to the superstructure being the primary aspect which changes the base? (Why is this usually not the case?)

Section 5: The Identity and Struggle of the Aspects of a Contradiction

Key Takeaways:

- What is dialectics?
- How will the internal contradiction of the dictatorship of the proletariat inevitably be solved?
- How does quantitative change transform into qualitative change? (Note: The *Ship of Theseus* thought experiment concerns the concept of the transformation of quantitative change (one board at a time) to qualitative change (the whole ship has been replaced, so is it the same ship, or a new ship? If it changed, when did it change?) through the aspect of internal contradictions (the ship remains a ship the entire time, but is gradually replaced piece by piece))

Section 6: The Place of Antagonism in Contradiction

Key Takeaways:

- How does the antagonism between classes resolve? What ideas must Marxist-Leninists combat?
- Why can the formula of antagonism not be applied universally to all contradictions?

Section 7: Conclusion

Key Takeaways:

- Why is dogmatism contrary to Marxism-Leninism?