

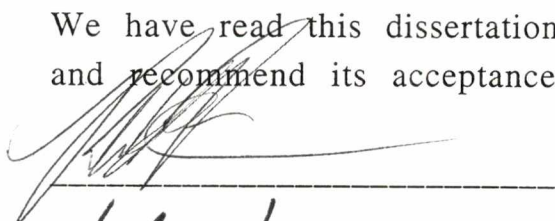
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Caimu Cui entitled *Mao Zedong's Traditionalism*. I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Political Science.



Robert B. Cunningham, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

MAO ZEDONG'S TRADITIONALISM

**A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Caimu Cui
May, 1997**

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ABSTRACT

Mao Zedong has been widely explained in terms of Marxism-Leninism. Although there are occasional references to his traditional traits, this line of inquiry has never been seriously pursued. The present study attempts to explain Mao in terms of his traditionalism. The main argument is that Mao Zedong is a traditionalist more than a Marxist-Leninist and that his traditionalism accounts for both his successes and failures.

Based on the premise in political socialization theory that an individual's political orientations are the result of his or her political socialization, the study examines Mao's political socialization process. More specifically, it looks at what influences his political socialization agents had on him. It seeks to ascertain whether Mao's political socialization was predominantly a traditional one or a Marxist-Leninist one. Data are garnered mainly from Mao's biographies, memoirs by those close to him, and other monographs and articles on Mao. Mao's own works, including his writings, speeches, and talks, are also used.

The study finds that Mao's political socialization as a whole was predominantly a traditional one. His village, parents, schools, and teachers all exerted largely traditional influences on him. His interest in Chinese history, a result of his socialization, made him all the more exposed to and knowledgeable of Chinese traditional culture. His encounter with Marxism-Leninism was superficial and did not significantly alter his traditional frame of reference. Relying on his traditional frame of reference, Mao deviated from Marxist-Leninist

revolutionary theory, carved out a unique revolutionary path for the Chinese Communist Party, and led the Chinese revolution to victory. His continued reliance on his traditional frame of reference after 1949 led to his leadership failure in the Great Leap Forward and in the Cultural Revolution.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no one had a greater impact on the 20th-century China than did Mao Zedong. He was one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Under his leadership the CCP turned from a small persecuted political organization into the ruling party of China. Mao was also instrumental in transforming the Chinese Red Army from a negligible guerilla band to a formidable military force that defeated the numerically superior and better-equipped Kuomintang forces. More importantly, he played a key role in founding the People's Republic of China (PRC), thus unifying China for the first time in decades and elevating the battered nation from profound shame to some international respectability.

Mao also impacted China in negative ways. His Great Leap Forward resulted in millions of people being starved to death. His Cultural Revolution ravaged China's social and political stability, delayed its economic development, and brought onto the Chinese people tremendous poverty and mental anguish.

Arguments

Scholars have realized Mao's significance for the 20th-century China, for they have produced countless books and articles on Mao. These books and articles have for the most part presented Mao as a Marxist-Leninist. The present study, however, puts forth another version of Mao. The two main arguments of the study are:

1. Mao was primarily a traditionalist, contrary to the prevailing view that he was a Marxist-Leninist.
2. Both of Mao's successes and failures were due to the same factor, i.e., his traditional frame of reference.

In elaborating on the two arguments, the present study constitutes the most comprehensive inquiry into Mao's traditionalism yet, for no other monograph or dissertation has hitherto been devoted to the study of Mao's traditionalism.¹

To support the first argument, the study uses political socialization theory to examine Mao's political socialization process. According to political socialization theory, the political socialization process is important in determining an individual's political orientations, for here an individual learns and acquires political attitudes, values, outlooks and behavior.² In the political socialization process, political socialization agents transmit political values and behavior to individuals. Family, school, peer groups, media, and political experiences are the most important political socialization agents.³ In Mao's case, the examination of his political socialization process would reveal what political socialization agents he had and whether it was traditional values or Marxist-Leninist values they imparted to him. If the examination reveals that Mao's political socialization agents imparted mostly traditional political values to him, the first argument is strengthened. If, on the other hand, the examination yields the result that Mao's political socialization agents transmitted

¹ Refer to the ensuing literature review in this chapter.

² Refer to Kenneth P. Langton, *Political Socialization*. London: Oxford University Press, 1969, pp. 4-5. Also Richard E. Dawson, et al., *Political Socialization*. 2nd ed.. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977, p. 1.

³ See Kenneth P. Langton, *ibid.*, pp. 21-160. Richard E. Dawson, et al., *ibid.*, pp. 114-202. Also see, Alan Isaak, *An Introduction to Politics*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1987, pp. 125-129.

to him mostly Marxist-Leninist political values, the first argument is called into question.⁴

Two points concerning political socialization theory deserve special mention here. The first point is the factor of discontinuities in political socialization which refer to "breaks in the flow of messages from the agents of socialization to those being socialized".⁵ The present study will pay attention to the possible discontinuities in Mao's political socialization. The second point concerns the question of whether an individual's political socialization is a life-long process or a pre-adulthood experience. While stressing the importance of childhood political socialization, the present study subscribes to the view that political socialization does not stop when an individual enters into adulthood and that it continues throughout his life.⁶ Life-long political socialization means the existence of the possibility that "adult life may modify or reinforce predispositions created during childhood".⁷ The present study will examine whether Mao's adult political socialization modified or reinforced the predispositions created in his childhood.

To further test the validity of the first argument, the present study also examines Mao's intellectual frame of reference. There are many definitions of frame of reference. Here it is defined as the guidance system for an individual's behavior. It consists of one's intimate

⁴ It is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify the political values and ideas an individual receives from his or her political socialization agents. Therefore, the present study does not attempt to give a number as to which more influenced Mao, Chinese traditional political culture or Marxism. But through the qualitative examination of Mao's socialization process the study would give a general idea of which more influenced Mao.

⁵ Richard E. Dawson, et al., op cit., p. 27.

⁶ Refer to *Political Learning in Adulthood*. Ed. Roberta S. Sigel. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989. Also Robert E. Dowse and John A. Hughes, *Political Sociology*. Chichester, Britain: John Wiley and Sons, 1972, pp. 193-196. Also Richard E. Dawson, et al., op cit., pp. 73-92.

⁷ Robert E. Dowse and John A. Hughes, op cit., p. 193.

knowledge and deeply held values. One's frame of reference is closely related to one's political socialization process in that the former is the result of the latter. In other words, the make-up of one's frame of reference depends in large measure on the nature of one's political socialization process. By examining Mao's frame of reference, the study essentially double-checks the result of examining Mao's political socialization process. If the double-check reveals that Mao's frame of reference consists of mainly traditional knowledge and values, we accept the first argument with a greater degree of certainty. If, on the other hand, the double-check reveals that Mao's frame of reference consists of mainly Marxist knowledge and values, we reject the first argument with more certainty.

To examine his intellectual frame of reference, the study looks at Mao's works (which include his writings, talks and speeches), assuming that his works are for the most part expressions of his frame of reference.

The study also draws from observations of his behavior, assuming that his behavior is for the most part the manifestation of his frame of reference. The present study obtains observations of Mao's behavior from memoirs and biographies. For example, Li Zhisui was Mao's personal doctor for more than 20 years. He had extensive access to Mao and thus had the opportunity to observe his behavior. Li recorded his observations in his recently published memoirs *Mao Zedong Siren Yisheng Huiyilu* (*The Private Life of Chairman Mao*).⁸ It

⁸ Li Zhisui, *Mao Zedong Siren Yisheng Huiyilu* (*The Private Life of Chairman Mao*). Taipei: China Times Publishing Company, 1994. Like any book of influence, Li's book has its detractors. Lin Ke (who was Mao's secretary from 1954 to 1966), Xu Tao (who was Mao's doctor from 1953 to 1957), and Wu Xujun (who was Mao's nurse from 1953 to 1974) co-authored a book in 1995 titled *Lishi de Zhenshi* (*The True Life of Mao Zedong*) (Hong Kong: Liwen Chubanshe). It was a frontal assault on Li's book. It charged that Li's book had some historical inaccuracies. But perhaps one should be more suspicious of the historical accuracies of *Lishi de Zhenshi*, for it was authored by three people who were still serving the Chinese communist government which mounted a campaign

is partly from these observations of Mao's behavior that the present study draws in revealing Mao's frame of reference. Figure 1.1 illustrates the strategy of inquiry used by the present study and the relationships among the variables. While the arrows with dashed lines indicate the logical relationships of the variables, the arrows with plain lines show the direction of inquiry.

In the present study, there is a dichotomy between Marxism-Leninism and Chinese tradition. This dichotomy is real, for Marxism-Leninism and Chinese tradition represent different intellectual legacies. While the former is clearly Western, the latter is unmistakably Eastern. Marxism-Leninism and Chinese tradition are different in terms of not only intellectual pedigree but also content. A complete examination of the differences in content between Marxism-Leninism and Chinese tradition is beyond the scope of this study. But the present study will lay out in the later chapters some of the content differences between the two as reflected in Mao.

In the present study, Marxism-Leninism is defined as all the ideas and theories that are found in the writings of Marx and Lenin. Chinese tradition is defined as all the ideas, values, and practices that are handed down from China's past to Mao's time. Sometimes certain ideas, values and practices that are handed down from China's past may have originated in foreign lands. For instance, Buddhism did not originate in China. But since it has been accepted in China for centuries, it is taken in the present study as part of Chinese tradition.

The present study will not discuss the totality of Marxism-Leninism or that of Chinese tradition. Rather, it will discuss some specific

against Li's book. It seems likely that *Lishi de Zhenshi* was part of a concerted effort by the Chinese government to discredit Li's book.

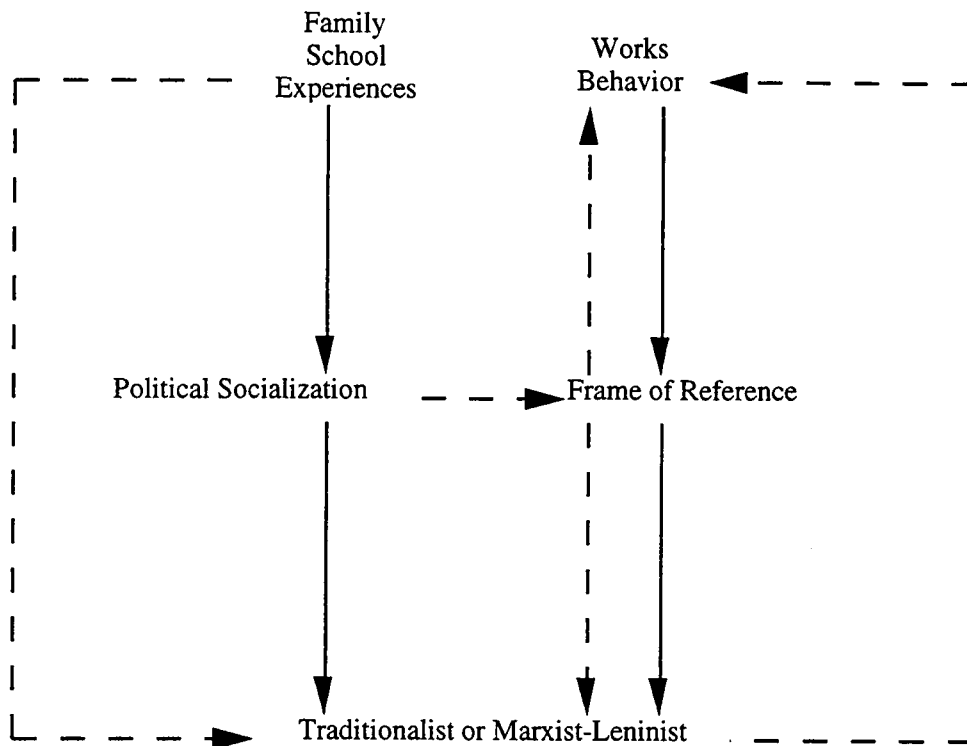


Figure 1.1: Strategy of Inquiry and Relationship of Variables

aspects of Marxism-Leninism and Chinese tradition that are relevant to Mao Zedong.

In general, there are two kinds of data used in the study: Mao's own works and professional literature. Mao's own works include his writings, speeches, and talks. While most of Mao's works used by the study were published in China with the sanction of the Chinese government, some were published in the West without the official approval of the Chinese government. Professional literature in both English and Chinese is used.

Review of Relevant Literature

There is abundant professional literature on Mao. Some writings focus on Mao's life or thinking; others are concerned primarily with the Chinese communist revolution and secondarily with Mao. The present study reviews current literature on Mao by looking at how they are related to the two aforementioned arguments. Other aspects of current Mao literature are not discussed.

Perhaps the earliest major work on Mao is Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*,⁹ which was first published in 1938. Snow was the first Western journalist to interview Mao. With apparent sympathy toward the Chinese revolution and Mao, and without adequate knowledge of Chinese culture and history, Snow was ready to accept whatever Mao said about himself and the nature of the Chinese revolution. Operating from his Western intellectual tradition, Snow was also ready to interpret what he saw in Yanan in terms of the ideals of liberalism. The result of Snow's journalistic efforts in Yanan was a heart-warming portrayal of Mao Zedong and the Chinese

⁹ Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China*. New York: Random House, 1938.

revolution. Mao was depicted as a Marxist engaged in an unprecedented social and utopia-like revolution.

In 1948, the eminent China scholar John King Fairbank published *The United States and China*. In it he pointed to "one seeming anomaly of Chinese Marxism," namely, "its use of a peasant movement as the class basis for revolution." Fairbank noted that this practice deviated from Marxism: "The Chinese Communists were obliged ... to build their movement on a peasant base. For fifteen years Chinese Communism has been a peasant, not a proletarian movement. In this respect it follows the Chinese tradition of revolution more than the Marxist."¹⁰ But Fairbank did not develop in detail the link between the Chinese communist revolution and Chinese tradition. With regard to Mao's relation to Marxism, Fairbank said: "Mao Tse-tung may have his own special brand of Marxism but it is still firmly in the Russian camp."¹¹ Fairbank's Mao Zedong was a Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist.

In his *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (1951), Professor Benjamin I. Schwartz came to the same conclusion: "Mao Tse-tung is a man committed to the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist tradition."¹²

Both Fairbank and Schwartz saw in the Chinese communist revolution Chinese traditional heritage, which was a great improvement on the studies of the Chinese revolution and Mao at the time. But they did not go far enough in that direction, for they eventually assigned to Mao a Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist identity.

¹⁰ John King Fairbank, *The United States and China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948, p. 260-261.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 335.

¹² Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951, pp. 116-117.

In 1960, Karl A. Wittfogel and Benjamin Schwartz debated the meaning of Maoism. In his article "The Legend of 'Maoism'",¹³ Wittfogel criticized Fairbank and Schwartz for their contention that Mao contributed to Marxism-Leninism in his reliance on the peasantry as the backbone of the Chinese communist revolution. Wittfogel argued that Mao did not contribute anything original to Marxism-Leninism. Wittfogel may have had a hidden agenda in making this argument. He was a member of the Committee of One Million Against the Admission of Communist China to the United Nations. For him, to prove that Mao had not made original contribution to Marxism-Leninism was perhaps to prove that Mao was a willing tool of international communism and that the Chinese revolution was the result of an international conspiracy manipulated from Moscow.

In his reply to Wittfogel, Schwartz reiterated his view that Mao was an innovator to Marxism-Leninism. He also criticized Wittfogel's contention that Mao's strategy of revolution was dictated by Lenin.¹⁴

Arthur A. Cohen in his *The Communism of Mao Tse-tung* (1964) studied the various deviations of Maoism from Marxism-Leninism. But Cohen still treated Mao as a Marxist-Leninist. As he put it, "the 'thought of Mao Tse-tung' may be viewed as the Marxist-Leninist legacy, plus certain new guidelines for rural revolution (and construction of the economy), minus certain conclusions found to be obsolete or incompatible with Mao's view of his own and China's interests."¹⁵

¹³ Karl A. Wittfogel, "The Legend of 'Maoism'". *The China Quarterly*. 1960, No. 1, pp. 72-86 and No. 2, pp. 16-34.

¹⁴ Benjamin Schwartz, "The Legend of the Legend of 'Maoism'". *The China Quarterly*. 1960, No. 2, pp. 35-42.

¹⁵ Arthur A. Cohen, *The Communism of Mao Tse-tung*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964, pp. 192-193.

In 1966 Professor Stuart Schram published a biography titled *Mao Tse-tung*. It was perhaps the most authoritative of Mao biographies. Regarding the questions of whether Mao was a Marxist-Leninist or a traditionalist and what ideas guided his actions, Schram said the following:

Throughout his political career, Mao Tse-tung has taken as his goal the radical transformation of Chinese society in order to liberate the energies of its citizens, and he has been guided in this enterprise by *ideas of Western origin*, first nineteenth-century liberalism and then Leninist collectivism.¹⁶

Jerome Chen's *Mao and the Chinese Revolution*, published in 1965, considered Mao "a Marxist." He drew parallels between Mao and some rebels in China's past, but he emphasized differences between Mao and these rebels: "Mao differs, however, from both the self-strengthening leaders and peasant insurgents of the past in that he is a Marxist-Leninist seeking to strengthen his country by the application of Marxist-Leninist doctrines to Chinese conditions."¹⁷ With regard to Mao's leadership, Chen gave a very positive assessment. He noted that Mao was not only an "able revolutionary" but also an "able ruler."¹⁸

In his *Mao Tse-tung: A Critical Biography* (1975), Stephen Uhalley, Jr. showed unbridled enthusiasm for Mao, proclaiming him to be "one of the greatest political leaders in the history of mankind."¹⁹ Even though Uhalley saw authoritarianism in Mao, he excused him as "a

¹⁶ Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966, p. 13. Italics added.

¹⁷ Jerome Chen, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 8.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁹ Stephen Uhalley, Jr., *Mao Tse-tung: A Critical Biography*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1975, p. x.

beneficent despot" who "has accomplished much that is positive."²⁰ Uhalley regarded Mao as "a Marxist teacher-leader."²¹

A. L. Rowse had the same assessment of Mao. Writing in 1976, Rowse said that "Mao is by far the greatest man in the world today-- probably the greatest of this century" and that he was "a convinced communist."²²

Han Suyin's *The Morning Deluge: Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Revolution 1893-1954* (1972) was a hagiography. Han Suyin considered Mao to be a Marxist. She also portrayed Mao as a Christ-like leader:

Mao Tsetung has embodied the aspirations, needs, and desires of his nation and of his people; their will to revolt, to end exploitation, misery, injustice; to free themselves and become masters of their destiny. Not a single day has Mao Tsetung departed from this goal, and he has always gone back to the peasants and workers, the downtrodden of his land, to learn from them, with magnificent humility. The source of his creative power, as he will say himself, is the boundless creative power of the masses, who topple empires and transform the earth. He found his own people with limitless enthusiasm for revolution, and unhesitatingly gave all of himself to it, and hence became their leader, the nation-man.²³

²⁰ Ibid., p. 194.

²¹ Ibid., p. 195.

²² A.L. Rowse, "Forward". in C.P. Fitzgerald, *Mao Tse-tung and China*. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1976, p. vi.

²³ Han Suyin, *The Morning Deluge: Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Revolution 1893-1954*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972, p. 4.

In "Mao and Marx in the Marxist-Leninist Tradition" (1976), Professor Richard M. Pfeffer argued that "Mao is more than anything else a Marxist-Leninist." He made this argument by focusing on the goals that Mao wanted to achieve in China. He saw that the goals that Mao wanted to achieve in China were Marxist. He said: "The thought of Mao Ze-dong must be placed within the Marxist-Leninist tradition not to certify its intellectual and revolutionary pedigree, but to enable us to better understand it and the Chinese Communist Revolution."²⁴

In 1977, one year after Mao's death, *Mao Tse-tung in the Scales of History* was published. Organized by *The China Quarterly* to assess Mao's life and work, this book contained 10 essays by 10 prominent China scholars. Although these essays looked at Mao's life and work from different perspectives, they all based analysis on the premise that Mao was a Marxist-Leninist. Dick Wilson's preface made this point clear: "[Mao] assumed ... the role of the conscience of international Marxism-Leninism as one of its leading practitioners and innovators."²⁵

John Bryan Starr's *Continuing the Revolution: The Political Thought of Mao* (1979) concludes:

There is no question, I think, that Mao saw himself as starting from and working within an intellectual framework drawn from his interpretation of the ideas of Marx and Lenin.²⁶

²⁴ Richard M. Pfeffer, "Mao and Marx in the Marxist-Leninist Tradition". *Modern China*. Oct. 1976, p. 455.

²⁵ *Mao Tse-tung in the Scales of History*. Ed. Dick Wilson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. vii.

²⁶ John Bryan Starr, *Continuing the Revolution: the Political Thought of Mao*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p. x.

Raymond F. Wylie's *The Emergence of Maoism* (1980) examines the historical process that gives rise to Maoism. Specifically, he analyzes the formation of Maoism between 1935 and 1945 with the conclusion that Maoism is the "synthesis" of nationalism and Marxism-Leninism.²⁷

Lynn H. Miller (1981) noted that "Mao often seemed to rule China after 1949 in the spirit of China's emperors."²⁸ But Miller apparently regarded Mao as a Marxist-Leninist. Mao's traditional leadership, according to him, was only a means to a Marxist goal. As he put it, "Mao cultivated the role of the traditional Chinese ruler specifically so that he might go over the heads of Party officials and the government bureaucracy to invoke continual and direct revolution."²⁹

In *Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism* (1982), Maurice Meisner studied the differences between Marx's and Mao's utopianism. He argued that Mao's "'utopian' departures from Marxist and Leninist orthodoxies ... were essential in transforming the inherited body of Marxist theory into a doctrine relevant to the needs of revolution in the modern Chinese historical environment."³⁰ But Meisner couched his analysis in the context of treating Mao as a Marxist.

In 1983, Stuart Schram published *Mao Zedong: A Preliminary Reassessment*. In it, his early emphasis on Mao's debt to Marxism-Leninism was shifted to Mao's revision of Marxism:

²⁷ Raymond F. Wylie, *The Emergence of Maoism: Mao Tse-tung, Chen Po-ta, and the Search for Chinese Theory 1935-1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980, p. 3.

²⁸ Lynn H. Miller, "Demystifying Mao: China's Altered Course". *The Humanist*. Jan./Feb. 1981, p. 26.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

³⁰ Maurice Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982, p. xi.

Obviously, if Marxism is to have any impact in a non-European country, it must be presented to the people of that country in language which is vivid and meaningful in the light of their mentality and traditions. But such Sinification of the form of Marxism, though indispensable in Mao's view, was only the outward manifestation of a more fundamental enterprise, aiming to transform the very substance of Marxism in order to adapt it to Chinese conditions.³¹

But Schram was reluctant to say that Mao was not a Marxist. Instead, he thought that Mao was "a crude Marxist".³²

Lucian W. Pye's *Mao Tse-tung: The Man in the Leader* is a unique work in Mao literature. It is a psychoanalytic study which explains Mao in terms of an Oedipus complex. As Pye said, "We have found, however, that in the case of Mao Tse-tung the critical developments were related to pre-Oedipal experiences and involved primarily Mao's relationship with his mother, a relationship which gave him strong feelings of narcissism but which also gave him a sense of being unjustly treated when he found he could no longer command her undivided attention. Our hypothesis is that this range of experiences best explains Mao both as rebel and as charismatic leader."³³ Pye's work does offer useful insights into Mao. But Pye did not address the question of whether Mao was a Marxist-Leninist leader or a traditional leader. Also, the explanation of Mao only in terms of his relationship with his mother is simplistic.

³¹ Stuart R. Schram, *Mao Zedong: A Preliminary Reassessment*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1983, p. 35.

³² Ibid., p. 25.

³³ Lucian W. Pye, *Mao Tse-tung: The Man in the Leader*. New York: Basic Books, 1976, p. 1.

Inside China, study of Mao was part of the state's propaganda effort, particularly before Mao's death in 1976. Consequently there is no scholarly value to most of the Mao literature produced inside China before 1976. For example, Li Rui's *Mao Zedong Tongzhi de chuqi geming huodong* (*The Early Revolutionary Activities of Comrade Mao Tse-tung*) (1957)³⁴ was written under the auspices of the Chinese government. Not surprisingly, Li Rui's portrayal of Mao was in line with the Chinese government's official version of Mao. In this book, Mao was portrayed as the ultimate communist revolutionary. Mao's leadership was described as infallible-- every decision he made was correct and on many occasions he was the one who rescued the Chinese revolution from defeat.

After 1976, partly because of Deng Xiaoping's effort to de-mystify Mao, studies of Mao inside China began to have a different focus. The focus shifted to the link between Mao's thinking and China's traditional heritage. Several books are particularly worth noting. Wang Shubai's *Mao Zedong Sixiang yu Zhongguo Wenhua Chuantong* (*The Thought of Mao Zedong and Chinese Cultural Tradition*) (1987)³⁵ explores the link between several aspects of Mao's thinking and Chinese traditional culture. Another book is *Wannian Mao Zedong* (*Mao Zedong in his Later Years*) (1989)³⁶. It is an edition by Xiao Yanzhong. The focus of the book is on Mao's political thinking after 1949. The link between Mao's thinking and Chinese traditional culture is not as pronounced in this book as it is in Wang's book. *Mao Zedong de Dushu Shenghuo* (*Mao Zedong's Reading Life*) (1986)³⁷

³⁴ It was published in English in 1977. Li Rui, *The Early Revolutionary Activities of Comrade Mao Tse-tung*. Tr. Anthony W. Sariti. Ed. James C. Hsiung. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1977.

³⁵ Wang Shubai, *Mao Zedong Sixiang yu Zhongguo Wenhua Chuantong* (*The Thought of Mao Zedong and Chinese Cultural Tradition*). Xiamen: Xiamen Daxue Chubanshe, 1987.

³⁶ *Wannian Mao Zedong* (*Mao Zedong in his Later Years*). Ed. Xiao Yanzhong. Beijing: Chunqiu Chubanshe, 1989.

³⁷ *Mao Zedong de Dushu Shenghuo* (*Mao Zedong's Reading Life*). Ed. Gong Yuzhi, et al. Beijing: Shenghuo Dushu Xinzhi Sanlian Chubanshe, 1986.

contains an essay by the former rector of Mao's personal library, Pang Xianzhi. Titled "Guji Xinjie, Guwei Jinyong-- Ji Mao Zedong Du Zhongguo Wenshishu" ("New Interpretation of Old Books and Application of Ancient Culture to Today-- A Record of Mao Zedong Reading Chinese History"), this essay provides valuable information on what books Mao read after 1949. Li Zehou's *Zhongguo Xiandai Shixiang Shilu* (*History of Chinese Contemporary Thinking*) (1987)³⁸ is not, as the title indicates, devoted to the exclusive study of Mao. In discussing how Marxism came to China, Li's book greatly helps the understanding of Mao's Marxist credentials. "Wenhua Dageming" *Shinianshi 1966-1976* (*The Ten-Year History of "the Great Cultural Revolution" 1966-1976*) (1986)³⁹ by Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi provides extensive details of Mao's activities during the Cultural Revolution. *Mao Zedong Zhuan 1893-1949* (*A Biography of Mao Zedong 1893-1949*)⁴⁰, published in 1996, represents the latest in the study of Mao Zedong inside China. The book contains many hitherto unpublished sources and offers great details on Mao's life and work before 1949.

In 1996, the publication of *Mao Zedong Pingdian Ershisishi* (*The Twenty-four Standard Histories Commented by Mao Zedong*)⁴¹ began in Hong Kong. Consisting of 175 volumes, *Mao Zedong Pingdian Ershisishi* contains valuable information on how Mao read and viewed, in the years from 1952 to 1976, China's four thousand years of history. This series of books may even enable us to see how Mao applied his knowledge of Chinese history to his political practices. But unfortunately, the publication of this series has just started.

³⁸ Li Zehou, *Zhongguo Xiandai Shixiang Shilu* (*History of Chinese Contemporary Thinking*). Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 1987.

³⁹ Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi, "Wenhua Dageming" *Shinianshi 1966-1976* (*The Ten-Year History of "the Great Cultural Revolution" 1966-1976*). Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 1986.

⁴⁰ *Mao Zedong Zhuan 1893-1949* (*A Biography of Mao Zedong 1893-1949*). Ed. Jin Chongji. Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1996.

⁴¹ *Mao Zedong Pingdian Ershisishi* (*The Twenty-four Standard Histories Commented by Mao Zedong*). Hong Kong: Qiu Hai Tang Wenhua Qiye, 1996.

Most of the Chinese works published after 1976 greatly furthered the understanding of Mao Zedong. This is because of two factors. First, some of these works drew parallels between Mao's thinking and Chinese traditional culture, which, in the view of the present study, is the right direction. Mao's roots in Chinese traditional culture are too deep to ignore. Secondly, these works provided many details on Mao's life and work which had not been known before.

But most of these Chinese studies did not directly address the question of whether Mao was a Marxist-Leninist leader or a traditional leader. When this question was touched upon, it was done in a manner that did not violate the boundary set by the Chinese government. This boundary was set by the Chinese government at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP on June 27, 1981. The "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China" adopted by the Sixth Plenary Session read partly as follows:

Comrade Mao Zedong was a great Marxist and a great proletarian revolutionary, strategist and theorist. It is true that he made gross mistakes during the "cultural revolution," but, if we judge his activities as a whole, his contributions to the Chinese revolution far outweigh his mistakes. His merits are primary and his errors secondary. He rendered indelible meritorious service in founding and building up our party and the Chinese People's Liberation Army, in winning victory for the cause of liberation of the Chinese people, in founding the People's Republic of China and in advancing our socialist cause. He made major

contributions to the liberation of the oppressed nations of the world and to the progress of mankind.⁴²

Li Zhisui's *Mao Zedong Siren Yisheng Huiyilu* (*The Private Life of Chairman Mao*) (1994) was not confined by the official line of the Chinese government, for it was published in Taiwan. Li Zhisui was Mao's personal doctor from 1954 to 1976. Twenty-two years of proximity and access to Mao enabled Li to know Mao in a way most writers on Mao could not. Li Zhisui's book offered a rare look into Mao's private life that had hitherto been carefully protected by Mao's public image. Li Zhisui depicted Mao Zedong as a calculating and ruthless emperor.

Most of the literature on Mao can be summed up as follows:

Mao was a Marxist-Leninist who applied Marxism-Leninism to the Chinese conditions. Although he was indebted in some ways to Chinese traditional culture, Mao was essentially guided in his thinking and in his work by Marxism-Leninism.

In treating Mao as a Marxist-Leninist, current literature gives a distorted picture of Mao. As the present study will demonstrate, Mao resembles the prominent emperors in China's past more than a Marxist-Leninist. He operated from the framework of Chinese traditional culture more than from Marxism-Leninism; his understanding of politics and government was that of a Chinese emperor; his behavior as a revolutionary and as a ruler was more in keeping with that of a Chinese traditionalist than with that of a Marxist-Leninist. Those individuals who consider Mao a Marxist-

⁴² "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China." Adopted by the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on June 27, 1981. Text can be seen in Stuart Schram, *Mao Zedong: a Preliminary Reassessment*. p. 89.

Leninist fail to see beyond the image that Mao deliberately cultivated. This Marxist-Leninist image was essential to sustain his legitimacy as the leader of the Chinese revolution and of the PRC.

Although some works noticed Mao's Chinese traditional traits, this line of investigation was not pursued further. It appeared as either a footnote or an occasional reference. Even these works could not break away from the view that Mao was a Marxist-Leninist.

It is not difficult to see why existing literature has mostly considered Mao a Marxist-Leninist. The revolution Mao led was proclaimed to be a communist revolution; the party whose chief was Mao was called the Chinese Communist Party; above all, Mao claimed himself to be a Marxist-Leninist, particularly in the first part of his career. All these outward signs do suggest that Mao was a Marxist-Leninist. But outward signs are frequently deceiving. It is the view of the present study that in Mao's case these outward signs do deceive, for an examination of Mao's substance reveals a traditional leader more than a Marxist-Leninist leader.

Organization of the Study

Besides the introduction, the present study has six chapters. The second chapter focuses on Mao's earliest years, which include the social and intellectual climate into which he was born in 1893, his relationships with his parents, and his education prior to his exposure to Western ideas. This chapter describes the traditional Chinese environment which influenced the young Mao.

The third chapter is on Mao's relationship with Marxism-Leninism. It looks at how Mao first came into contact with Marxism and how he understood it. It examines some of the major differences between Mao's thinking and Marxism. It also documents how Mao defied the Comintern which was considered to be the true messenger of

Marxism-Leninism. It draws the conclusion that Mao's encounter with Marxism-Leninism did not significantly alter his traditional frame of reference and that he was a traditionalist more than a Marxist-Leninist.

The fourth chapter deals with Mao's two decades of activities in the countryside and among the peasantry. It describes how he used his knowledge of the Chinese peasantry to lead a successful peasant-based revolution. It looks at the affinity between Mao's military expertise and Chinese traditional writings on warfare. This chapter also argues that Mao's two decades of experiences among the peasantry reinforced his traditional frame of reference.

The fifth chapter examines Mao's economic activities after 1949. Particular attention is paid to the Great Leap Forward. This chapter argues that because of his traditional frame of reference and because of his lack of knowledge of the modern large-scale economy, Mao was particularly ill qualified for leading the economic construction in the post-1949 China. Mao was an anachronism when he tried to use traditional methods to solve modern economic problems.

The sixth chapter concentrates on Mao's behavior during and around the Cultural Revolution. It documents Mao's handling of his power struggle with Peng Dehuai and Liu Shaoqi. It contends that the Cultural Revolution, contrary to the dominant view that it was Mao's perpetual revolution, was nothing more than his attempt to get rid of his enemies. It points out that his traditional frame of reference significantly contributed to his destructive behavior during the Cultural Revolution.

The seventh and final chapter ties together the loose ends and summarizes the arguments of the dissertation.

The study employs "*pinyin*" romanization, the standard form currently used in China, for transliteration of all Chinese names and terms except a very few for which other spellings are well known (such as "Chiang Kai-shek"). When quotations are used, the original spelling of Chinese names and terms is retained.

CHAPTER TWO

MAO'S EARLIEST YEARS

This chapter looks at the various socialization agents in the earliest years of Mao's life. More specifically, it examines Mao's native village, his parents, the schools he attended, and his teachers. It also attempts to determine what Mao's intellectual interests were. The purpose of this chapter is to draw upon the influences on the young Mao to produce an interpretation of his early frame of reference.

The Village of Shaoshan

Mao Zedong was born on December 26, 1893. China at that time was fast approaching the end of its two-millennium-old imperial system. It was in the throes of decline and disintegration. In such circumstances, many individuals began to search for ways to halt China's decline. Many of these individuals looked to the West and Japan for answers to China's problems.

Prior to the Opium War, China had been a largely insulated nation. During the Opium War China's door was violently opened to the West by British gunboats. After the War, Western ideas began to reach people of learning in China. Impressed by Western power and wealth, and eager to revitalize China, some Chinese officials undertook a series of reforms looking to the West and Japan as models. Thus, Western ideas had reached China at the time of Mao's birth. But they had by no means permeated China. Their influence was limited to a small group of scholars and officials in the ruling circles. Most of China was still in the grip of tradition.

Mao's birthplace was the village of Shaoshan in the province of Hunan. In the late 19th-century China, Shaoshan was a remote place of isolation. "... [A]bout two hours' steamboat journey from the capital [of Hunan Province], Changsha, there is a district named Siangtan. About forty or fifty kilometers beyond this, in the region called Yin Tien Shih, the traveler comes to a high mountain, with a lower one just beyond, and then another high mountain beyond that. There lies the valley of Shaoshan...."¹ The geographical location of Shaoshan effectively cut its inhabitants off from the outside world. The events of the outside world were very slow in reaching Shaoshan, if they reached it at all. For instance, Mao heard the news of Empress Dowager Ci Xi's death two years after the event when he left Shaoshan to attend a new primary school in his neighboring county.² Although Hunan Province was relatively more exposed to progressive ideas at the time than most inland provinces, it is likely that these ideas did not spread to the peasants in the remote Shaoshan. Robert C. North thus describes Shaoshan. "In the days of Mao Tse-tung's boyhood very little news reached communities like Shao Shan [Shaoshan] except by word of mouth. Imperial rescripts were posted from time to time and read aloud by the schoolmaster, but these usually dealt with taxes, the conscription of scholars from among the people, and celebration of special events such as the Empress Dowager's birthday."³ In terms of its isolation and insulation from the social developments in the outside world, Shaoshan in the late 19th century was reminiscent of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Macondo as is described in his *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.⁴

¹ Siao-yu, *Mao Tse-tung and I Were Beggars*. London: Hutchinson, 1961, p. 5.

² See Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China*. First revised and enlarged edition. New York: Grove Press, 1968, p. 138.

³ Robert C. North, "Historical Commentary and Notes." In Siao-yu, op cit., p. 221.

⁴ Refer to Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York: Bard Books, 1970.

The Chinese society exhibited a kind of stability unsurpassed by any other societies. This does not mean that the Chinese society did not change or evolve. Change and evolution did take place. But China's evolution remained "comparatively uninterrupted."⁵ Since the founding of the Qin Dynasty in 221 B.C. the Chinese political system changed little. It was a dynasty ruled by an imperial family. The imperial system survived until 1912. Confucianism had been the central ideology of Chinese society for the most of the time. The "ultra-stability" of the Chinese society led Marx to refer to China as a "living fossil".⁶ The "ultra-stability" in China made it possible for tradition to accumulate its weight and influence. The influence of tradition upon the behavior of the Chinese people can hardly be exaggerated. The isolation of Shaoshan resulted in even greater influence of tradition upon its people, for geographical isolation protected tradition from the intrusion of unconventional ideas.

Besides being a remote village shrouded in tradition, Shaoshan was also affected by bandit activities at the time. For instance, there was the secret society of "*Ge Lao Hui*" ("Society of Brothers and Elders) in Shaoshan.⁷ The bandit activities in Shaoshan were only part of a larger phenomenon of banditry in the whole province of Hunan. Hunan had a long history of nurturing rebels and bandits. Siao-yu, who was a Hunanese and Mao's schoolmate, called Hunan the "land of heroes and brigands."⁸ Of course, the line between heroes and brigands was sometimes difficult to draw. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Hunan boasted many bandits. As Siao-yu said, "there have always been so many bandits that *Chun tao ju mao* is a common saying, which means, 'The bandits are as

⁵ John King Fairbank, *The United States and China*. 4th ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 28.

⁶ See Karl Marx, *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization*. Ed. Shlomo Avineri. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969, p. 442.

⁷ Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (1968). p. 135.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

thick as the hairs on your head."'.⁹ It can be argued that the large numbers of bandits fostered a culture of banditry and rebellion in Hunan. Evidence shows that Mao was influenced by this culture. First of all, Mao was sympathetic toward rebels and bandits.¹⁰ Secondly, Mao was fascinated by novels dealing with rebellion. As a boy, he "read the *Yo Fei Chuan* [the *Yo Fei Chronicles*], *Shui Hu Chuan* [*The Water Margin*], *Fan Tang* [*Revolt Against the Tang*], *San Kuo* [the *Three Kingdoms*] and *Hsi Yu Chi* [*Travels in the West*], the story of Hsuan Tsang's seventh-century semilegendary pilgrimage to India]...."¹¹

Mao did not leave Shaoshan until he was 16 years old. These sixteen years of physical "confinement" was also a period of intellectual confinement because of the one-sided influence of tradition. The physical as well as intellectual confinement was not a good beginning for Mao's intellectual development. His boyhood lack of exposure to different ideas and even to different behaviors limited his frame of reference. Boyhood being a vital stage for a person's intellectual development, Mao's intellectual development was handicapped from the very beginning.

In spite of the confinement or rather because of it, Mao was a very curious and inquisitive boy. He compensated for the intellectual poverty in Shaoshan by reading whatever books he could lay his hands on. But in Shaoshan he could only get hold of a few books. These books were mostly Confucian classics and popular novels. Most of the popular novels were Confucian in content as well.¹²

⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰ Mao related to Edgar Snow his sympathetic reaction to the rebellion of "*Ge Lao Hui*". See Edgar Snow, op cit., p. 135-6.

¹¹ Edgar Snow, op cit., p. 133.

¹² In such popular novels as *The Water Margin*, *Three Kingdoms*, and *Travels in the West*, protagonists conduct their relationships with others according to Confucian prescriptions as to how relationships should be conducted. Even though the heroes in *The Water Margin* revolted against the Emperor in the

Parents

Mao's parents were simple village folks, highly reverent of tradition. In his autobiography as recorded by Edgar Snow, Mao vividly described how his father insisted that he observe the Confucian moral code of a son's subservience to his father.¹³ Mao's father was a tyrannical man.¹⁴ He was also a severe task master. From an early age, Mao was forced by his father to work in the fields as well as to keep the family books. Mao hated doing those things. Because of this, Mao came to frequent conflicts with his father. In those conflicts Mao liked to quote Confucian classics to justify his actions, knowing very well that his father could not possibly rebut what Confucius said.¹⁵ It can be argued that Mao's strained relationship with his father begot significant consequences. In his battles against his father, Mao from an early age learned Confucian classics; secondly, Mao learned the usefulness and power of being in command of a legitimate ideology or philosophy; thirdly, Mao may have inherited from his father the tyrannical style of treating peers and subordinates; fourthly, in his battles against his father, Mao learned the use of "psychological warfare" and recognized the merits of rebellion. One incident related

beginning, they finally surrendered themselves willingly to the Emperor and went into his service, realizing that revolt was against the Way.

¹³ Edgar Snow, *op cit.*, pp. 132-133.

¹⁴ Mao described his father as being "a hot-tempered man" and "frequently beat[ing] both me and my brothers." See Edgar Snow, *op cit.*, p. 132.

¹⁵ Upon this subject Mao said: "But when I was thirteen I discovered a powerful argument of my own for debating with my father on his own ground, by quoting the Classics. My father's favorite accusations against me were of unfilial conduct and laziness. I quoted, in exchange, passages from the Classics saying that the elder must be kind and affectionate. Against his charge that I was lazy I used the rebuttal that older people should do more work than younger, that my father was over three times as old as myself, and therefore should do more work. And I declared that when I was his age I would be much more energetic." Edgar Snow, *op cit.* p. 132. From what Mao said here it can be seen that Mao's arguments were highly contorted. It indicates that Mao was willing to use contorted arguments to gain the upper hand. We would see that Mao used contorted arguments to perfection after he became the ruler of China.

by Mao was particularly illustrative of his learning and use of "psychological warfare" and rebellion:

When I was about thirteen my father invited many guests to his home, and while they were present a dispute arose between the two of us. My father denounced me before the whole group, calling me lazy and useless. This infuriated me. I cursed him and left the house. My mother ran after me and tried to persuade me to return. My father also pursued me, cursing at the same time that he commanded me to come back. I reached the edge of a pond and threatened to jump in if he came any nearer. In this situation demands and counterdemands were presented for cessation of the civil war. My father insisted that I apologize and *koutou* as a sign of submission. I agreed to give a one-knee *koutou* if he would promise not to beat me. Thus the war ended, and from it I learned that when I defended my rights by open rebellion my father relented, but when I remained meek and submissive he only cursed and beat me the more.¹⁶

Mao's mother was a product of Chinese traditional culture. She was a typical example of what Chinese traditional culture prescribed women should be. Mao remembered her as "a kind woman, generous and sympathetic, and ever ready to share what she had."¹⁷ She was a devout Buddhist. Unlike his father, Mao's mother treated him very well. The influence of Mao's mother on him was exhaustively discussed by Lucian W. Pye. While disagreeing with Pye regarding many points he made about Mao's relationship with his mother, the present study concurs with Pye when he said: "... Mao's mother had indeed been very responsive at an early age to Mao's wishes and so

¹⁶ Edgar Snow, op cit., pp. 132-133.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 132.

made him feel that he was extraordinarily precious."¹⁸ It can be argued that Mao gained much self-confidence from his relationship with his mother.

Like most Chinese people at the time, particularly villagers, Mao's parents were very superstitious. Their being superstitious testifies again to the traditional influences Mao was exposed to in his boyhood. A story concerning Mao's name is illustrative of the superstitiousness of his parents. Following Chinese tradition, Mao had another name-- "Mao Runzhi". It was said that when Mao was born, his parents asked the village fortune-teller to tell his fortune. The fortune-teller said that Mao had the fortune of an emperor, but added that he lacked water in him. It is believed in Chinese traditional culture that five basic elements constitute everything in the world. They are gold, wood, water, fire, and earth. The fortune-teller predicted that Mao would become an emperor if he could make up what he lacked-- water. He specified that ordinary water would not make up the water a "true dragon" (Chinese metaphor for emperor) needed, and that only water from the Eastern Seas could make up the water that the would-be emperor Mao lacked. There used to be a superstitious belief that people could make up what they lacked by putting the absent element in their names. Mao's parents did exactly that for Mao. "*Mao*" is the family name which has to be in the name and consequently does not mean anything. "*Zedong*", which is his first name, is actually two characters in Chinese. Literally, "*ze*" means "to make use of"; "*dong*" means "east". In Mao's name, "*dong*" stands for the Eastern Seas. "*Runzhi*" consists of two characters as well. "*Run*" means "to moisten"; "*zhi*" is a pronoun indicating a person or a thing. In Mao's name, "*zhi*" refers to Mao himself. Thus, when connected, Mao's two first names mean "to make use of the water in the Eastern Seas to moisten him."

¹⁸ Lucian W. Pye, *Mao Tse-tung: The Man in the Leader*. New York: Basic Books, 1976, p. 80.

Besides demonstrating the superstitiousness of Mao's parents, the above story also shows that lofty expectations were placed upon Mao. These high expectations upon a boy of peasant origin were not out of the ordinary, however. In the late nineteenth-century China, the legacy of the meritorious examination system had reached even the most remote parts of the country. Such a legacy encouraged even peasant boys to dream great dreams. In the remote and isolated village of Shaoshan, the folklore was filled with tales of Hunanese who had achieved greatness at the highest levels in China. Hunan had produced a long line of great generals, and such great scholar-statesmen as Zeng Guofan and Zuo Zongtang, heroes of nineteenth-century Chinese officialdom's suppression of rebellion and banditry. This culture, which stressed achieving greatness, may have contributed to Mao cherishing great ambitions from an early age.

School

"*Sishu*": the Old-Style Private Schools

Mao began to attend "*shishu*" (the old-style private schools) in Shaoshan at the age of ten. Typically, there were only a few students in these schools; all students were taught together by a single teacher; the curriculum consisted of learning Confucian classics and writing classical essays. Most of Mao's readings in these old-style private schools include the Confucian classics *Shi Jing* (*Book of Poetry*) and *Lun Yu* (*Analects*) and other popular readings with Confucian content such as *San Zi Jing* (*Three-Character Songs*), *Bai Jia Xing* (*Book of Family Names*), *Zeng Guang Xian Wen* (*Essentials of Confucian Teachings*) and *You Xue Qiong Lin* (*A Primer for Beginning Students*).¹⁹

¹⁹ See *Mao Zedong Zhuan 1893-1949* (*A Biography of Mao Zedong 1893-1949*). Ed. Jin Chongji. Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1996, p. 5. The copies

Mao attended these old-style private schools for six years. Judging by the curriculum, the first six years of Mao's formal education were mostly Confucian in content. This fact is significant in that the early Confucian education developed in the young Mao great interest in Chinese traditional culture. This interest would last throughout his entire life.

At this time, Mao also read a pamphlet which told of "the dismemberment of China". This pamphlet had a great impact on Mao. Years later in 1936, Mao still remembered that the pamphlet began with the sentence "Alas, China will be subjugated!" This pamphlet instilled a strong feeling of nationalism in Mao. He said of the pamphlet and its impact on him:

It told of Japan's occupation of Korea and Taiwan, of the loss of suzerainty in Indochina, Burma, and elsewhere.

After I read this I felt depressed about the future of my country and began to realize that it was the duty of all the people to help save it.²⁰

Interest in Chinese History

Mao lived in Shaoshan until he was 16 years old. But the young Mao yearned for experience in the outside world. For him, the outside world represented an escape from his tyrannical father and the tedious village of Shaoshan. At the age of 16, Mao "heard of an unusual new school [in the neighboring Xiang Xiang county] and made up my mind to go there...."²¹ But Mao's father strongly opposed the idea, arguing that Mao did not have money for school and that

of *Shi Jing* and *Lun Yu* that Mao read when he was attending the old-style private schools are still kept in the Mao Zedong Museum in Shaoshan today.

²⁰ Edgar Snow, op cit., p. 136.

²¹ Ibid., p. 136.

Mao's going to school meant a laborer short on his farm. But Mao "had his plan of action and decided to take the first step toward the freedom he was seeking."²² Mao borrowed money from relatives, gave 12 dollars to his father to pay for the hiring of a laborer, and used the rest for school.²³

Mao's initial experience in the new school was not good. He was ridiculed and looked down upon by his schoolmates because his clothes were not so good as theirs and because his age had passed that of typical primary school students.

Many of his schoolmates, belonging to landlord families, were richly dressed in long gowns and dark jackets over colorful waistbands. Many of them wore leather-soled brocade shoes to match. Mao, on the other hand, had only one suit of clothes-- trousers and a jacket of blue cloth, homespun and exceedingly plain.²⁴

The experience of living among the rich and being humiliated by them because of his poverty had a great impact on the young mind of Mao. Years later Mao still remembered that "[m]any of the richer students despised me because usually I was wearing my ragged coat and trousers."²⁵ This kind of early experience may have fostered in Mao egalitarian ideals and contributed to his identification with the downtrodden.

Despite his unhappy experience at the school, Mao seemed to have done well in his studies. "The teachers liked me, especially those who taught the Classics, because I wrote good essays in the Classical

²² Siao-yu, op cit., p. 10.

²³ Ibid., pp. 9-11.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁵ Edgar Snow, op cit., p. 137.

manner. But my mind was not on the Classics."²⁶ What really interested Mao was Chinese history, especially the history of rebellions.²⁷ His interest in and subsequent knowledge of Chinese history formed a big part of Mao's frame of reference. Although Mao also "dipped into the history and geography of foreign countries" at that time, Chinese history remained his forte. It influenced and moulded him in many ways. Mao's interest in Chinese history lasted throughout his life. After the founding of the PRC, Mao seemed to have increasingly immersed himself in the study of Chinese history, to the near exclusion of other fields of learning.

First Contact with Socialism

If Mao's arrival at the new school in his neighboring county at the age of 16 represents his first breakthrough from geographical and intellectual confinement, going to Changsha, the provincial capital of Hunan, signifies his second breakthrough. Mao went to Changsha to attend a middle school in September 1911, one month before the 1911 Revolution. Changsha was "in the early 1900's... a center for intellectual radicalism."²⁸ There Mao was exposed to the revolutionary fermentation that had been going on in major Chinese cities. The revolutionary fermentation, together with the plethora of intellectual richness that the revolutionary fermentation brought about, greatly enlarged Mao's intellectual horizon. Mao said of his life in Changsha: "In Changsha I read my first newspaper, *Min-li-pao* [*People's Strength*], a nationalist revolutionary journal which told of the Canton Uprising against the Manchu Dynasty and the death of the Seventy-two Heroes, under the leadership of a Hunanese named

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See Robert C. North, op cit., p. 226.

²⁸ Han Suyin, *The Morning Deluge: Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Revolution 1893-1954*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1972, p. 35.

Huang Hsing. I was most impressed with this story and found the *Min-li-pao* full of stimulating material."²⁹

When the 1911 Revolution erupted, Mao joined the revolutionary army. As a soldier, Mao continued to satisfy his intellectual curiosity. His salary was seven yuan a month, most of which he spent on newspapers. He described himself as "an avid reader" of newspapers. One of the papers that he read was *Xiangjiang Ribao* (*Xiang River Daily News*).³⁰

Socialism was discussed in it, and in these columns I first learned the term. I also discussed socialism, really social reformism, with other students and soldiers. I read some pamphlets written by Kiang Kang-hu about socialism and its principles.³¹

Thus began Mao's acquaintance with socialism. But how much influence the theory of socialism had on Mao we do not know at this point. One thing is certain: Mao did not immediately begin to experiment with socialism. It was not until he met Li Dazhao in Beijing in 1918 that he began to experiment with socialism.

Mao stayed in the army for half a year. When the Qing Dynasty was overthrown, Mao thought that the revolution was over and resigned from the army. The fact that Mao thought the revolution was over when in reality the country was still in great disorder and the society was basically unchanged indicated that he did not understand what a revolution meant. He went to join the revolution partly because he felt that some changes should be made in order to save China from

²⁹ Edgar Snow, op cit., p. 139.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 142.

³¹ Ibid.

falling into the fate of being "subjugated" and partly because he was swept into the revolution like many other students.³²

Self-Education

After leaving the army, Mao entered the First Provincial Middle School. "A Chinese teacher there helped me very much; he was attracted to me because of my literary tendency. This teacher lent me a book called the *Yu-pi Tung-chien* (*Chronicles with Imperial Commentaries*), which contained imperial edicts and critiques by Chien Lung [Qian Long]."³³ This book no doubt influenced Mao tremendously, for after "reading *Yu-pi Tung-chien*", Mao had "come to the conclusion that it would be better for me to read and study alone."³⁴ Before he read the imperial book, Mao had found the curriculum of the First Provincial Middle School "limited" and its regulations "objectionable".³⁵ Now having discovered that he could learn more by teaching himself, Mao left the school. The fact that he was so interested in a book written by Qian Long that it helped him decide to leave school to concentrate on reading alone is significant. Did the book strike an imperial chord in Mao's heart? Was he interested in statecraft already? Did he assimilate Qian Long's heritage into his thinking and frame of reference? The answers to these questions are very likely to be in the affirmative.³⁶

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 144. Qian Long was the fourth emperor of the Qing Dynasty, whose reign (1735-1796) was one of the longest in Chinese history.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ An interesting note concerning Mao's fascination with Qian Long's book was that after he became the ruler of China in 1949, Mao used Qian Long's personal library and living room as his own residence. See Li Zhisui, *Mao Zedong Siren Yisheng Huiyilu* (*The Private Life of Chairman Mao*). Taipei: China Times Publishing Company, 1994, p. 74.

Mao subsequently devoted half a year to studying alone. Everyday he read in the Hunan Provincial Library. He thus described this experience to Edgar Snow:

I was very regular and conscientious about it [studying alone], and the half-year I spent in this way I consider to have been extremely valuable to me. I went to the library in the morning when it opened. At noon I paused only long enough to buy and eat two rice cakes, which were my daily lunch. I stayed in the library every day until it closed.

...

During this period of self-education I read many books, studied world geography and world history. There for the first time I saw and studied with great interest a map of the world. I read Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, and Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and a book on ethics by John Stuart Mill. I read the works of Rousseau, Spencer's *Logic*, and a book on law written by Montesquieu. I mixed poetry and romances, and the tales of ancient Greece, with serious study of history and geography of Russia, America, England, France, and other countries.³⁷

In half a year, with the intensity of his studying Mao must have read a lot of books. But why did he identify only those books written by Western writers or concerning Western countries? It should be remembered that Mao was talking to a Western journalist. It can be reasonably argued that Mao identified those Western books partly to establish a basis of understanding between himself and Edgar Snow. In 1936, Mao was still widely regarded by the Kuomintang and the West as the leader of a group of red bandits. Edgar Snow was the first Western newsman to interview Mao. Mao may have chosen to

³⁷ Edgar Snow, op cit., p. 144.

identify only Western books in order for Snow and the outside world to know that he was different from a bandit.

Pursuit of Studies in Chinese History and Classics

Mao's father strongly disapproved of Mao's "idle" reading. He could not think of any practical significance to Mao's self-education, for, according to him, this would not qualify Mao to take up a career and to make money. He refused to support Mao financially unless Mao entered school. In 1913, Mao entered the Hunan Normal School. He was there for five years.

... [D]uring this period my political ideas began to take shape. Here also I acquired my first experience in social action.³⁸

The logical question is: what political ideas took shape in Mao when he was at the Hunan Normal School? In his autobiography Mao did not elaborate as to what ideas took shape. But when his studies and activities at the Hunan Normal School are examined, it is clear that his political ideas were not Marxist-Leninist, but nationalist.

At the Hunan Normal School Mao continued to pursue his intellectual interest which was one-sidedly in the fields of old classics and history. According to Siao-yu, who was a schoolmate and close friend of Mao's, "[e]very morning I used to hear from [Mao] reading aloud from the old classics and I know he studied hard. But of all the subjects in the curriculum, only his essay-writing was good. He received no marks at all for English, only five out of a hundred for arithmetic, and in drawing the only thing he managed was a circle."³⁹ "He [Mao] spent most of his time reading old classical essays and

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Siao-yu, *op cit.*, p. 32.

history."⁴⁰ Some of the classics Mao read are *Ershisi Shi* (*The Twenty-four Standard Histories*), *Zi Zhi Tong Jian* (*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*) by Si Maguang, *Zhao Ming Wen Xuan* (*Selected Essays of Zhao Ming*), *Han Changli Quan Ji* (*Complete Works of Han Changli*), and *Du Shi Fang Yu Ji Yao* (*The Essentials of Geography for Reading History*) by Gu Zuyu. In his letter to Siao-yu, Mao listed more than seventy books on Chinese history and philosophy that he considered to be his prerequisite reading.⁴¹

It should be noted that Mao's one-sided intellectual interest and the nature of his education is in conformity with the Confucian concept of education which stresses the importance of the classics and disparages functional disciplines of learning. Mao told Edgar Snow in his autobiography that he was not interested in the old classics when he was a little boy. But why did he become interested in them now in the Hunan Normal School? The answer to this question might lie in three factors. The first factor is that by the time he was attending the Hunan Normal School Mao had already read Emperor Qian Long's *Yu-pi Tung-chien* and was fascinated by it. This book, which was classical in style as well as in content, may have kindled his interest in the classics. The second factor is that at this time there was in the Chinese intellectual circle a movement which emphasized respecting Confucius and reading Confucian classics.⁴² The third and perhaps most important factor is Yang Changji who was Mao's favorite professor at the Hunan Normal School and who later became Mao's father-in-law.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

⁴¹ See *Mao Zedong Zhuan 1893-1949*. pp. 18-19.

⁴² Ibid., p. 16.

The Confucian Yang Changji

Yang Changji exerted great influence on Mao. "Yang was deeply rooted in the Chinese Classics and had made the philosophies of the Sung Dynasty his specialty."⁴³ Siao-yu, who also was one of Yang's students, said that Yang "was so familiar with the doctrine of Confucius that his friends and his students regarded him as if he were a reincarnation of the great sage."⁴⁴ Yang was also very much learned in Western philosophy. He studied in Japan, England, and Germany. "Among Western philosophers Kant, Spencer and Rousseau were his favorites."⁴⁵

Though learned in Western philosophy, Yang did not really embrace it. Unlike many prominent Chinese intellectuals of the time such as Chen Duxiu who advocated "complete and radical Westernization" of China,⁴⁶ Yang was very much a nationalist.⁴⁷ He said:

Each country has its own national spirit, just as each person has his own personality. The culture of one country cannot be transplanted in its entirety to another country. A country is an organic whole, just as the human body is an organic whole. It is not like a machine, which can be taken apart and put together again. If you take it apart, it dies.⁴⁸

⁴³ Robert C. North, op cit., p. 240.

⁴⁴ Siao-yu, op cit., p. 38.

⁴⁵ Robert C. North, op cit., p. 240.

⁴⁶ Chen Duxiu was one of the founders of the CCP who later became its first secretary. He was eventually condemned by Mao as the first rightist opportunist in the CCP history.

⁴⁷ Yang Changji was also very patriotic. When he was studying in Japan, he changed his name to "*Huaizhong*". "*Huaizhong*" means "thinking of China". See *Mao Zedong Zhuan 1893-1949*. p. 17.

⁴⁸ Yang Changji. Quoted in Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966, p. 35.

Yang's rejection of wholesale Westernization was in conformity with the formulation of the late Qing Dynasty conservative reformer Zhang Zhidong, who advocated "*Zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*" ("Chinese learning for the essence, Western learning for practical application"). Yang's attitude toward the application of Western learning to China's needs no doubt influenced Mao's later adaptation of Marxism.

The importance of will power is prominent in Yang's thinking. He advocated and practiced strengthening the will by tackling difficult things.

While he was in Changsha, he had an especially large tub made for him. He filled it with cold water and each morning took a bath, immersing himself completely. He continued this practice of a cold bath in Peking, saying, "Every day one must do something difficult to strengthen one's will. Cold water not only strengthens the will; it is good for health!"⁴⁹

Yang's stress on the importance of the will entered into and occupied a large place in Mao's thinking. When Mao later led the Chinese revolution and economic construction, he exhorted the Chinese people to overcome great difficulties and hardships through, among other things, the exercise of the will. At the Hunan Normal School, Mao wrote an essay entitled "*Xin Zhi Li*" ("The Power of the Mind"). As the title indicates, this essay stresses the importance of the will in human behavior. Yang was so impressed and pleased with the essay that he gave Mao the maximum mark of 100 and added 5 extra points.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Siao-yu, op cit., p. 41.

⁵⁰ See Siao-yu, op cit., p. 40.

Mao's stress on the importance of will power in determining human behavior was in opposition to Marx's emphasis on the primacy of the material world. At this time, Mao was an idealist in philosophy, not a materialist. His idealist philosophy was made more clear when he wrote: "The history of human civilization was determined by ideas." "Human kind have only spiritual life and no physical life."⁵¹

Mao's Concept of Revolution

Mao's five years at the Hunan Normal School (1913--1918) was a time of great social disorder in China. The old order had largely gone when the 1911 Revolution overthrew the Qing Dynasty; the new order had not yet taken shape. Local warlords partitioned China and held the real power. China was weak. This dire situation further prompted patriotic and socially conscious Chinese to seek ways to save China and to restore China's power and status.

Mao's sense of crisis concerning China's future had already been kindled when he read in Shaoshan the pamphlet telling of the dismemberment of China. At the Hunan Normal School, Mao's concern for China's future deepened. Mao's idea of how to save the country was borrowed from his favorite novel *Shui Hu Zhuan* (*The Water Margin*). In 1917, when Mao and some of his schoolmates were talking about how to save China, some students suggested building a large army, learning science, building railways and factories, and becoming politicians and sweeping away corruption. On this topic Mao stated his view as follows:

It takes money and influence to become a politician. As to learning science or becoming a teacher, that also requires money and influence and time. To build an army... what kind of an army that would not oppress the people could

⁵¹ Quoted in *Mao Zedong Zhuan 1893-1949*. p. 27 and p. 31. Translation mine.

one build... unless one does like the heroes of Liang Shan-po [Liangshanbo]....⁵²

From this, one can see that Mao's concept of a revolution was the traditional type of peasant rebellion. When he later led an army to Jinggangshan, Mao put his concept of revolution to practice. The parallel between his army and the heroes of Liangshanbo was strong.

In expressing his concept of revolution, Mao showed a sense of urgency and impatience. The same sense of urgency and impatience was still in Mao in 1920. When discussing with Siao-yu about how to save China, Mao said: "I admire your patience in being willing to wait a hundred or a thousand years. I cannot wait even ten years. I want us to achieve our aims tomorrow."⁵³ We are tempted to ask the question: did this sense of urgency and impatience play a vital part in prodding Mao into making the decision to launch the Great Leap Forward in 1958?

"Xinmin Xuehui"

In the Hunan Normal School, Mao not only studied hard but also was socially very active. Together with others, Mao in 1917 started evening classes for workers and shop assistants. Not surprisingly, Mao taught history which was his forte. He also taught current affairs, "read the newspapers to the workers, and made them discuss what was happening."⁵⁴ Mao, being a nationalist intent on saving China, wanted to instill in the workers a social and national conscience. It was also in 1917 that Mao and Siao-yu organized the *Xinmin Xuehui* (New People's Study Society). According to Siao-yu,

⁵² Quoted in Han Suyin, op cit., p. 57.

⁵³ Siao-yu, op cit., p. 194.

⁵⁴ See Han Suyin, op cit., p. 49.

In the beginning, it [the New People's Study Society] was merely a society of carefully selected students of good moral character who had ideas and ideals similar to ours. The aims would be stated simply as the betterment or improvement of each individual, strengthening his moral and spiritual fiber and improving his education, as well as bringing about needed reforms in the country, but without expressing any political opinions nor affiliating with any party.⁵⁵

The first aim of bettering each individual, strengthening his moral and spiritual fiber, and improving his education is nothing new and original. This is also the aim of Confucius's ideal man of "*junzi*". Considering the powerful influence that the Confucian Yang Changji had on Mao and Siao-yu, it is not surprising that Mao and Siao-yu borrowed Confucius's standard for the ideal man to apply to the members of the *Xinmin Xuehui*. The idea of "*xinmin*" ("new people") is interesting in that the standard for the "*xinmin*" is still the traditional Confucian standard. Perhaps Mao and Siao-yu realized that China needed new people to save it. But because their frame of reference had been limited largely to the Chinese traditional culture, they automatically turned to Confucius for inspiration when they conceptualized "*xinmin*".

"*Tiyu zhi Yanjiu*"

In 1917, Mao contributed an article to *Xin Qing Nian* (*New Youth*), a periodical founded by Chen Duxiu. As was mentioned earlier, Chen was an advocate of "complete and radical Westernization" of China. Mao's article, entitled "*Tiyu zhi Yanjiu*" ("A Study of Physical Culture"), did not conform to Chen's advocacy, however. The main theme of the article was to save China by developing in Chinese

⁵⁵ Siao-yu, op cit., p. 60-61.

people physical strength and a military spirit. In this article Mao's prescription for saving China was derived partly from Yang Changji's stress on the importance of health, partly from Mao's admiration for the physically strong heroes in *The Water Margin*, and partly from his knowledge of both Japan and Germany becoming powerful through the popularization of physical education.⁵⁶ Before 1949, China was called by foreign powers "the sick man of East Asia". Mao's idea of developing physical strength and a military spirit might have been prompted by this humiliating appellation as well.

Another point worthy of note in this article is the fact that most references in it are to Chinese traditional sources, such as Confucius and Chuang Tzu.⁵⁷ This article indicates that Mao was familiar with Chinese traditional culture, but unfamiliar with Western culture. His brief references to Japan and Germany reflect his superficial knowledge of them. His preponderant references to Chinese traditional sources, by comparison, indicate a deep knowledge.

Mao's Thinking by the End of his School Years

In 1936, Mao told Edgar Snow about his thinking in the latter part of his Hunan Normal School Years:

At this time my mind was a curious mixture of ideas of liberalism, democratic reformism, and utopian socialism. I had somewhat vague passions about "nineteenth-century democracy," utopianism, and old-fashioned liberalism, and I was definitely antimilitarist and anti-imperialist.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*. Ed. Stuart Schram. Revised and enlarged edition. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969, p. 153.

⁵⁷ Refer to Stuart Schram, "Introduction". In Li Rui, *The Early Revolutionary Activities of Comrade Mao Tse-tung*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1977, p. xxiii.

⁵⁸ Edgar Snow, op cit., pp. 148-149.

In this summary Mao was not entirely truthful.⁵⁹ One indicator of his untruthfulness was that he was not antimilitarist at this time. Instead he was rather militarist, as his article "A Study of Physical Culture" made clear. Mao also revealed his militarist attitude in his talk with Siao-yu. "[M]ilitary education is much more important. If the country is weak, what's the good of talking about aesthetics? The first and most important thing to do is to conquer one's enemies!"⁶⁰ In the Hunan Normal School, Mao also "adored Bismarck and Wilhelm II."⁶¹

Another indicator of his untruthfulness was the fact that he failed to mention an important element of his thinking, that is, the Chinese traditional heritage. This omission was perhaps deliberate. When he talked to Edgar Snow in 1936, Mao was already the leader of the Chinese Communist revolution. This revolution purported to be anti-feudal and anti-imperialistic. Chinese traditional culture was regarded in the revolution as a product of the feudal society. It was viewed as backward in comparison with Marxism-Leninism which was enshrined as the guiding principles of the revolution. It would have eroded his revolutionary legitimacy and stature if Mao had admitted that an important component of his thinking of his student days was Chinese traditional culture.

⁵⁹ Mao frequently distorted the facts or feigned ignorance of the facts when so doing served his purpose. One good example is that Mao feigned ignorance of an essay he wrote in Yen-an when Edgar Snow asked him about it. Mao was perhaps embarrassed about his poor understanding of Marxism the essay exhibited. Snow asked Mao: "An essay called 'Dialectical Materialism,' not included in your *Selected Works*, has been attributed to you by Mao Tse-tung specialists in the West. Did you write any such essay?" Snow thus described Mao's response to this question: "Mao asked the question to be repeated. He replied that he had never written an essay entitled 'Dialectical Materialism.' He thought that he would remember it if he had." See Edgar Snow, *The Long Revolution*. New York: Random House, 1972, p. 207.

⁶⁰ See Siao-yu, op cit., p. 70.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 69.

Conclusion

In Mao's earliest years Chinese traditional culture was the greatest influence on his life. This influence came to him mainly from his village, his parents, and his teachers. The remote location of his native village Shaoshan prevented unconventional ideas from affecting the villagers. Tradition reigned over Shaoshan. In Shaoshan Mao could only lay his hands on the Confucian classics and classical novels such as *The Water Margin* and *Three Kingdoms*. *The Water Margin*, which told of a peasant rebellion, particularly influenced Mao.

Mao's parents were deeply reverent of tradition. His father insisted that Mao abide by rules of conduct prescribed by Confucius. His mother was a devout Buddhist. Judging by the criteria of Chinese traditional culture, she was also a virtuous wife and a kind mother.

Partly because of the traditional intellectual atmosphere of Shaoshan and the availability of only traditional books, Mao excelled in such traditional subjects as Chinese history and the Confucian classics in school. Mao became particularly interested in Chinese history. At Hunan Normal School he met his favorite teacher Yang Changji, who later became his father-in-law. Yang was so erudite in the Confucian classics and in the philosophies of the Song Dynasty (which were mostly neo-Confucian) that his friends and his students regarded him as if he were the reincarnation of Confucius.

At Hunan Normal School, Mao became socially conscious and active. Mao's social consciousness was hallmarked by nationalism. Mao wanted to save China from being subjugated by foreign powers. The way he proposed for saving China was traditional-- peasant rebellion like the one his heroes in *The Water Margin* had.

By the time he graduated from Hunan Normal School in 1918, Mao was 25 years of age. His frame of reference and his thinking were beginning to take shape under the impact of various socialization agents. As we have seen, up to 1918 Mao's socialization agents had been largely traditional. These socialization agents gave Mao a frame of reference which consisted of elements of Chinese traditional culture. Mao's concept of revolution and his various activities allowed us to have a glimpse of his frame of reference. This glimpse revealed that it was indeed marked by characteristics of Chinese traditional culture.⁶²

⁶² Refer to Table 2.1 which lists Mao's socialization agents from 1893 to 1918.

Table 2.1: Mao's Socialization Agents 1893-1918

Socialization	Agents	Description
	Village of Shaoshan	Remote, isolated, and shrouded in tradition; Only books available in Shaoshan were Confucian classics and traditional novels; Bandit activities nearby.
	Parents	Simple villagers, reverent of tradition, and superstitious; Tyrannical Confucian father and loving Buddhist mother;
	School	Mao's first school was a <i>Sishu</i> whose curriculum consisted mainly of Confucian classics; In both middle school and the Hunan Normal school Mao excelled in Confucian classics and Chinese history; In the primary school Mao's poverty was ridiculed.
	Teacher	Yang Changji, the most influential teacher of Mao's life, was a Confucian. A teacher in the Hunan Provincial Middle School introduced Mao to Emperor Qian Long's <i>Yu-pi Tung-chien</i> .

CHAPTER THREE

MAO'S RELATIONSHIP WITH MARXISM-LENINISM

This chapter focuses on Mao's Marxist-Leninist credentials. It looks at how he first got acquainted with Marxism-Leninism through Li Dazhao. It examines some of the important differences between Mao's thinking and Marxism-Leninism. It presents how Mao's understanding of Marxism-Leninism was influenced by his traditional frame of reference. It also documents how Mao defied the Comintern, the agent of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism.

Not Going to Europe

In Spring 1918, Mao graduated from the Hunan Normal School. At about this time, the *Xinmin Xuehui* (the New People's Study Society) began to organize the movement of "*Qingong Jianxue*" ("diligent work and frugal study"). This movement was intended to send people abroad, mainly to France, to study through working. Many of Mao's friends at the *Xinmin Xuehui* wanted to make use of this opportunity to study Western political, social and economic institutions and practices. But Mao decided not to go abroad. The reason Mao gave for not going abroad was: "I felt that I did not know enough about my own country, and that my time could be more profitably spent in China."¹

Mao's decision not to go to Europe was highly significant. In the short run, Mao benefited from staying behind in China, for he studied more

¹ Mao Zedong, in Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (1968). p. 151.

of China's problems and prepared himself for organizing and later leading the Chinese communist revolution. His knowledge of China clearly gave him great advantages over such people as Li Lisan and Wang Ming, who, fresh from the Marxist-Leninist indoctrination in Moscow, insisted on launching the Russian-style revolution in China. Mao, by comparison, was relatively free from the dogmatism of Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory. In short, Mao's staying behind in China gave him a double advantage, that is, the further study of the Chinese society and freedom from the dogmatism of Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory. This advantage enabled Mao to find a unique way to lead China's revolution to victory. But in the long run, his decision not to go abroad to study cost Mao the opportunity to enlarge his frame of reference. Mao's narrow frame of reference became a liability when he led China's economic construction after 1949. Large-scale economic activity was alien to Mao. Had he decided to go to Europe in 1919, Mao could have enlarged his frame of reference by experiencing and studying the large-scale economic activities in Europe. His narrow frame of reference was also largely responsible for the fact he was bent on crushing his power rivals during the Cultural Revolution and consequently wrecked the political and social stability of China. Mao did not experience democratic ideas or institutions. In his frame of reference, power was absolute and not to be shared.

Mao's decision not to go to study in Europe revealed his attitude toward learning from the West. It was one of reluctance. Regarding this issue, Stuart Schram said: "Mao was in fact slower and more reluctant than most members of China's May Fourth generation, to which he belonged, to move towards a Westernizing stance."² This attitude would later impact his experience with Marxism-Leninism.

² Stuart R. Schram, "The Marxist." In *Mao Tse-tung in the Scales of History*. Ed. Dick Wilson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 37.

In April 1919, Mao went to Shanghai to see some friends who were going to France. On his way Mao "stopped at Chu Fu and visited Confucius' grave." Mao said: "I saw the small stream where Confucius' disciples bathed their feet and the little town where the sage lived as a child. He is supposed to have planted a famous tree near the historic temple dedicated to him, and I saw that. I also stopped by the river where Yen Hui, one of Confucius' famous disciples, had once lived, and I saw the birthplace of Mencius."³ That Mao could still remember the details of his pilgrimage to Confucius' grave seventeen years later indicated his strong interest in Chinese traditional culture. This pilgrimage can serve as a symbol, if not proof, of his roots in Chinese tradition. While his friends were going to France to learn from the West, Mao was visiting Confucius' grave.

Li Dazhao's Influence

Instead of going to Europe, Mao went in the fall of 1918 to Beijing, the intellectual center of China. At that time, Marxism-Leninism was being introduced to China by some leading Chinese intellectuals, one of whom was Li Dazhao. Li Dazhao was the Director of the Library at Beijing University. In Beijing, Mao was introduced to Li Dazhao by Yang Changji who was then teaching at Beijing University. Li gave Mao a position as assistant librarian in his library. From 1918 to early 1919, Li published several articles hailing the victory of the October Revolution in Russia and introducing Marxism-Leninism, the most prominent of which are "*Buershiweike Zhuyi de Shengli*" ("The Victory of Bolshevism") and "*Wo de Makesi Zhuyi Guan*" ("My View of Marxism"). Regarding the relationship between Mao and Li's articles, Schram wrote that "[w]e can be particularly certain that Mao read these articles attentively".⁴ Schram's view was well founded. Working under Li, with an "interest in politics" that "continued to

³ Edgar Snow, op cit., pp. 152-153.

⁴ Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966, p. 42.

increase", and a "mind" that "turned more and more radical",⁵ Mao must have read these radical articles. If Mao's understanding of Marxism was made possible by Li Dazhao, this understanding was highly incomplete. The reason, according to Schram, is that "Li Ta-chao himself was at this time very far from completely accepting Marxism or even adequately understanding it."⁶ When the teacher was far from adequately understanding Marxism, his pupil's understanding of the same subject was likely to be suspect as well.

A discernible influence that Li had on Mao is the former's attention to the Chinese peasantry and the Chinese countryside. Li wrote an article in early 1919 titled "*Qingnian yu Nongcun*" ("Youth and Villages"). In this article, Li praised the countryside as a place of happiness and condemned the city as a place of evil. "While evil flourishes in the cities, happiness abounds in the villages. While there are many dark aspects in the life of the cities, there are many bright aspects in the life of the villages. While city life is virtually the life of the devil, village life is all human life. While the air in the cities is dirty, the air in the villages is fresh and clean."⁷ Li called on Chinese youth to go to the villages to live the idyllic life:

Youth! Go to the countryside! With sunrise you work and with sunset you rest. You obtain food by ploughing the fields; you secure water by digging wells. Those old and young, men and women who work in the fields year in year out are your companions. The idyllic countryside should be the place where you lead your life.⁸

⁵ Edgar Snow, op cit., p. 152.

⁶ Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*. p. 43.

⁷ Li Dazhao. Quoted in Li Zehou, *Zhong Guo Xiandai Sixiangshi (History of Chinese Contemporary Thinking)*. Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 1987, pp. 155-156. Translation mine.

⁸ Ibid., p. 156.

Li realized the political importance of the peasantry in China. He called on Chinese youth to undertake the more important cause of developing the villages:

It is imperative for us [Chinese youth] to undertake the cause of developing the villages. Our China is an rural nation. Most of the working class are peasants. Without liberating them there is no liberation of our whole nation; their suffering is the suffering of our whole nation; their ignorance is the ignorance of our whole nation; the betterment or deterioration of their lives is the betterment or deterioration of our whole politics.⁹

It should be noted that there is a distinct contrast between Li's sympathy for rural China and the contempt for the "idiocy of rural life" that runs through most Marxist literature. The fact that Li, as one of the most prominent promoters of Marxism in China, attached so much positive value to the countryside may have caused Mao to revise the role that Marx relegated to the peasantry in the revolution. More on this later in the chapter.

While working as assistant librarian at Beijing University, Mao also joined Li Dazhao's Marxist Study Group. At the meetings of the Marxist Study Group "Mao attracted attention by his efforts to combine socialism with the most diverse schools of ancient Chinese thought."¹⁰ Mao's efforts to combine socialism with ancient Chinese thought can be explained in terms of his intellectual frame of reference. Because his intellectual frame of reference consisted overwhelmingly of Chinese traditional culture, it was natural for Mao to try to understand alien ideas in terms of similar ideas found in Chinese traditional culture. Mao used this method to understand

⁹ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁰ Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*. p. 45.

Marxist ideas and concepts throughout his life, as we would see later. There is a danger in using this method of understanding. Frequently Marxist concepts and similar Chinese concepts are not the same. In the understanding process, the Chinese concepts may very well distort the original meaning of the Marxist concepts. When distortion occurs, understanding is flawed.

Mao's Concept of the Union of the Masses

At about the beginning of the May Fourth Movement, Mao was in Changsha. The May Fourth Movement was an anti-imperialistic and anti-feudal movement. In 1919, the victors of World War I were convening the Peace Conference at Paris. The Chinese people, who had contributed to the war effort on the side of the victors, hoped that the Peace Conference would restore to China Germany's rights over Shandong Province. But when the news that the Peace Conference had decided to transfer Germany's rights over Shandong to Japan instead of restoring them to China reached Beijing, the hope of the Chinese people was shattered. Students, workers, and merchants at Beijing took out their frustration by launching demonstrations on a great scale. Their demonstrations were against not only the Japanese imperialists but also the pro-Japanese Duan Qirui regime. This movement soon spread to other parts of China. The governor of Hunan, General Zhang Jingyao "was a representative of the pro-Japanese Anfu clique" of General Duan Qirui,¹¹ and hostile to the May Fourth Movement. In Hunan, Mao played an active part in organizing and leading "a general strike against Chang [Zhang], demanding his removal."¹² He became editor of *Xiangjiang Pinglun* (*Xiang River Review*), the paper of Hunan students, which "had a great influence on the students movement in South China."¹³

¹¹ Ibid., p. 46.

¹² Edgar Snow, op cit., p. 153.

¹³ Ibid.

Mao wrote prolifically as the editor of the *Xiangjiang Pinglun*.¹⁴ His most important article of this period was "*Minzhong de Dalianhe*" ("The Great Union of the Popular Masses"), the first installment of which was published in the *Xiangjiang Pinglun* on July 21, 1919. This article was the first of Mao's many articles dealing with the important role that the masses played in the revolution. Mao maintained in this article that if the masses united against the "aristocrats, the capitalists and other powerful people", they would succeed in getting rid of their sufferings imposed upon them by those people.¹⁵ On the surface, this idea seems to be quite similar to Marx's call of "Workers of the world, unite!" But there is a difference. Mao's masses cover a wider diversity of people than Marx's workers. While Marx's workers consist of only the urban proletarians, Mao's masses are made up of not only urban proletarians but also merchants and peasants.

Mao did not borrow his idea of the union of the masses from Marx. The first section of Marx's *Communist Manifesto* was published in Chinese in November 1919 after the appearance of Mao's "The Great Union of the Popular Masses". Mao could not have read the *Communist Manifesto* in any other language because he did not know any other language. Furthermore, Mao did not consider himself a Marxist at this time. Schram noted that Mao's analysis in this article did not show "a trace of Marxist categories."¹⁶ Mao drew inspiration for his idea of the union of the masses from history. He said: "If we study history, we find that all the movements that have occurred in the course of history, of whatever type they may be, have all without exception resulted from the union of a certain number of people."¹⁷

¹⁴ Refer to *Mao Zedong Zhuan 1893-1949 (A Biography of Mao Zedong 1893-1949)*. Ed. Jin Chongji. Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1996, p. 48.

¹⁵ Mao Zedong, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*. Ed. Stuart Schram. Revised and enlarged edition. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969, p. 239.

¹⁶ Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*. p. 48.

¹⁷ Mao Zedong, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*. p. 239.

Mao drew specific examples from the history of the West to illustrate his point. "When the great union of the popular masses of France opposed the great union of the adherents of the monarchy and the victory of 'political reform' had been attained, many countries followed the French example and undertook all sorts of 'political reforms'. After last year's struggle in Russia, which pitted the great union of the popular masses against the great union of the aristocracy and the great union of the capitalists and led to the victory of 'social reform', many countries-- Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany-- have followed Russia's example and have undertaken all sorts of social reforms."¹⁸ Mao could have more conveniently cited Chinese examples of the union of the popular masses since he was much more knowledgeable about Chinese history. But why did he choose to cite Western examples? It should be emphasized that Mao was writing in the period of the May Fourth Movement. The May Fourth Movement looked to the West for ways to save China. Chen Duxiu's prescription for China at this period was "Mr. Science" and "Mr. Democracy". It was the tendency and fashion among Chinese intellectual circles to refer to Western sources in one's writings. Mao may have succumbed to this tendency, too.

Mao's stress on the union of the popular masses was an important factor in his thinking. He saw the masses as possessing great strength and potential. When he was still a student at the Hunan Normal School, Mao told his friend Siao-yu that reforming a country was "a matter of many people getting together to work out one predetermined fixed idea."¹⁹ This stress on the masses can be found in Chinese traditional thinking. The Chinese saying goes: "Common people are like water; government is like a boat. Common people can sustain a boat; they can topple a boat as well." When Mao later led

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 239-240.

¹⁹ Mao Zedong. Quoted in Siao-yu, *Mao Tse-tung and I Were Beggars*. London: Hutchinson, 1961, p. 57.

the Chinese Communist revolution, he effectively used the strength of the common people in China to topple the boat of the Kuomintang government. When Mao himself became the leader of the PRC, he again effectively used the strength of the common people to sustain his government and to crush his rivals. It should be noted that Mao's emphasis on the masses was in sharp contrast with Lenin's emphasis on the party cadres.

Revision of Marxism-Leninism

After the May Fourth Movement, Mao was no longer an unknown student or an obscure assistant librarian. *Xiangjiang Pinglun* had a wide influence and attracted the attention of such prominent figures as Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu. In 1919, Mao went back to Beijing, but stayed there only briefly. Mao availed himself of the brief stay to enrich himself intellectually. As he said:

During my second visit to Peking I had read much about the events in Russia, and had eagerly sought out what little Communist literature was then available in Chinese. Three books in particular deeply carved my mind, and built up in me a faith in Marxism, from which, once I had accepted it as the correct interpretation of history, I did not afterwards waver. These books were the *Communist Manifesto*, translated by Chen Wang-tao and the first Marxist book ever published in Chinese; *Class Struggle*, by Kautsky; and a *History of Socialism*, by Kirkup.²⁰

It should be reiterated that Mao was speaking to Edgar Snow in Yanan as the leader of the Chinese Communist movement and consequently had a tendency to exaggerate the influence of Marxist writings on him. Mao was trying to reinforce legitimacy for his

²⁰ Mao Zedong, in Edgar Snow, op cit., p. 155.

leadership. At the time he faced serious contenders for the leadership position from those who were much more knowledgeable than he was in Marxism.

Mao was influenced by Marxism-Leninism. Marx's call of revolution by the downtrodden against the exploiting class found a ready response in Mao. Mao had experienced the life of the downtrodden as a student. Also, the success of the Marxism-guided Russian Revolution inspired the nationalist Mao to think about having in China a revolution which would restore its lost power.

In 1936 Mao said: "By the summer of 1920 I had become, in theory and to some extent in action, a Marxist, and from this time on I considered myself a Marxist."²¹ One is struck by the opportune time when Mao became a Marxist, for in 1921 Mao was to participate in the founding meeting of the CCP. Did Mao really think that he was a Marxist by the summer of 1920? Or did Mao distort the facts so as to inflate his Marxist credentials? He might believe himself a Marxist, but actually he was far from being one. First of all, Mao was not widely exposed to Marxism. By 1920, only a fragment of Marxist literature had been translated into Chinese. Furthermore, it was not until 1937 that Mao began to study Marxism.²² Secondly, Li Dazhao, who was Mao's major Marxist influence, had a very partial and distorted understanding of Marxism, as was demonstrated above. Thirdly, Mao did not wholeheartedly accept Marx's revolutionary tenets. As will be elaborated later, Mao differed on many important points from Marx.

In the relatively stable years of Yanan, Mao had the opportunity to write on Marxism-Leninism. Mao's motive in writing on this topic at this time may lie in the power struggle among the top leaders of the

²¹ Ibid.

²² Laszlo Ladany, *The Communist Party of China and Marxism 1921-1985: A Self-Portrait*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1988, pp. 80-81.

CCP. Marxism-Leninism being the expressed official ideology of the CCP, the mastery of it or the seeming mastery of it by the CCP leaders would strengthen their leadership positions. Mao had been slighted by experts on Marxism-Leninism such as Qu Qiubai, Li Lisan, and Wang Ming during the Jinggangshan years and the Long March. In Yanan Mao was the Chairman of the CCP. But Wang Ming still enjoyed considerable influence in the CCP and posed a formidable challenge to Mao's power and authority. In order to overcome such a challenge, Mao had to have some kind of claim to Marxist-Leninist expertise. As Professor Li Tien-min said: "As Mao Tse-tung prepared for the removal of his major rival in the Party [in 1937], he had to distinguish himself in doctrinal matters."²³

For Mao, whose frame of reference consisted predominantly of Chinese traditional culture, an alien ideology such as Marxism-Leninism must be revised to fit into it. He approached Marxism-Leninism by combining it with China's cultural legacy. In October 1938, Mao gave a report to the Sixth Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee. Part of the report is as follows:

Contemporary China has grown out of the China of the past; we are Marxist in our historical approach and must not lop off our history. We should sum up our history from Confucius to Sun Yat-sen and take over this valuable legacy. This is important for guiding the great movement of today. Being Marxists, Communists are internationalists, but we can put Marxism into practice only when it is integrated with the specific characteristics of our country and acquires a definite national form. ... Foreign stereotypes must be abolished, there must be less singing of empty, abstract tunes, and dogmatism must be laid to

²³ Li Tien-min, *Liu Shao-chi*. Taipei: Institute of International Relations, 1975, p. 86.

rest; they must be replaced by the fresh, lively Chinese style and spirit which the common people of China love.²⁵

Mao sinified Marxism-Leninism, to such a great extent that it had lost much of its original substance. He departed from Marxism-Leninism on many points. The following is a list of only the important ones.

Dialectics

Dialectics is an important part of Marxism. In Marxist dialectics there are three basic laws: the law of the unity of opposites, the law of quantitative and qualitative change, and the law of the negation of the negation.²⁶ The three laws are the broad patterns in which Marx saw change occurring in the world. The law of the unity of opposites has "identity and difference", "necessity and chance", "cause and effect", "positive and negative", "love and hate", "good and bad", "north and south" and other like opposites for its subject matter. It asserts that qualities which appear opposite and distinct are in reality joined by internal relations and that they are not logically independent of one another. It makes the point that the truth of any contrasting observation depends on the angle or point of view of the observer. Viewed in another way, for other purposes, on the basis of other values, or in connection with other things, what was identical is seen to be different, what was north is now south, what was a cause is now an effect, what was good is now bad.

The law of quantitative and qualitative change states that an increase or decrease in the amount or number of any entity will at

²⁵ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Vol. II. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965, pp. 209-210.

²⁶ For a detailed explanation of the three laws, refer to Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, pp. 55-59.

some point transform this entity into a qualitatively new one. "Qualitatively new" means that the altered relations make the entity appear as something different, or enable it to do new things that were not possible before. At what point in adding more of the same this change occurs will differ with the entity and the particular quality involved.

The law of negation of the negation considers what are ordinarily taken as different objects as components of the same one. The development of each component is a function of the particular configuration of circumstances in which it stands. In order to progress further in the direction made necessary by its own links of mutual dependence, a component may require that the probable course of change of another component be altered. The developments of the two stand in contradiction, and it is through the working out of such contradictions that the larger entity takes on the form it does. Contradiction never completely destroys what is contradicted but merely refashions it to suit new ends. When one component of an entity is forced by what it is and must become to predominate over another it incorporates certain characteristics of the latter and carries them into the next stage.

In 1964, Mao declared that "he did not believe" in the law of quantitative and qualitative change and the law of negation of the negation. He regarded the transformation of quality and quantity into one another merely as a special case of the unity of opposites, and denied the existence of the law of negation of the negation altogether. Mao said:

Engels talked about the three categories [laws], but as for me I don't believe in two of those categories. ... The most basic thing is the unity of opposites. The transformation of quality and quantity into one another is the unity of the

opposites quality and quantity. There is no such thing as the negation of the negation.²⁷

In denying the existence of the law of negation of the negation, Mao offered a different view concerning "the development of things":

Affirmation, negation, affirmation, negation ... in the development of things, every link in the chain of events is both affirmation and negation.²⁸

This view is reminiscent of the Chinese traditional view of historical development as flux and reflux, rather than linear forward development. Stuart Schram commented on the significance of Mao's view:

Mao could be held to have seriously undermined the whole Marxist and Hegelian justification, in philosophical terms, for the idea that history moves irreversibly forward. His vision of a random succession of opposites, or in any case the absence in his thought of a continuing progression in a definite direction built into the structure of the dialectical process, may have certain advantages over the original Marxist view of an inexorable trend leading to a communist stage in which the dialectic breaks down or evaporates. Mao's ideas on this theme none the less raise serious problems about the conformity of his thinking as a whole to the basic logic of Marxism, and of Leninism.²⁹

²⁷ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong Unrehearsed: Talks and Letters 1956-1971*. Ed. Stuart Schram. Tr. John Chinnery and Tiejun. Penguin Books, 1974, p. 226.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Stuart R. Schram, "The Marxist". In *Mao Tse-tung in the Scales of History*. pp. 63-64.

It can be argued that the reason why Mao accepted the law of the unity of opposites is that there is a similar idea in Chinese traditional culture. Mao expounds the law as follows:

The fact is that no contradictory aspect can exist in isolation. Without its opposite aspect, each loses the condition for its existence. Just think, can any one contradictory aspect of a thing or of a concept in the human mind exist independently? Without life, there would be no death; without death, there would be no life. Without "above", there would be no "below"; without "below", there would be no "above". Without misfortune, there would be no good fortune; without good fortune, there would be no misfortune. Without facility, there would be no difficulty; without difficulty, there would be no facility. ... It is so with all opposites....³⁰

The above passage so strikingly resembles Lao Tzu's discourse on the Way that one suspects whether Mao borrowed it from Lao Tzu. Compare what Mao said on the unity of opposites with Lao Tzu's discourse on the Way:

Being and nonbeing give birth to each other,
Difficult and easy complete each other,
Long and short form each other,
High and low fulfill each other,
Tone and voice harmonize with each other,
Front and back follow each other-- it is ever thus.³¹

³⁰ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Vol. I. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964, p. 338.

³¹ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Tr. Victor H. Mair. New York: Bantam Books, 1990, p. 60.

In talking about the transformations of opposites into one another, Mao used examples from Chinese mythology:

There were innumerable transformations in mythology, for instance, Kua Fu's race with the sun in the *Book of Mountains and Seas*, Yi's shooting down of nine suns in *Huai Nan Tzu*, the Monkey King's seventy-two metamorphoses in the *Pilgrimage to the West*, the numerous episodes of ghosts and foxes metamorphosed into human beings in the *Strange Tales of Liao Chai*, etc.³²

Mao can hardly be regarded as a Marxist dialectic. Of the three basic laws in Marxist dialectics, Mao rejected two. He accepted the law of the unity of opposites largely because of its similarity to Lao Tzu's Way. At least his understanding of this law was in terms of Lao Tzu's Way. It would probably be more accurate to regard Mao as a subscriber to Lao Tzu's Way than as a Marxist dialectic.

Idealism

The Importance of Human Will It was mentioned in Chapter Two that Mao was greatly influenced by his teacher Yang Changji who stressed the importance of will power. As a student, Mao wrote an article entitled "*Xin Zhi Li*" ("The Power of the Mind") in which he argued that will power was key to success. Later Mao exalted the revolutionary will of human beings until it became not merely an important factor, but an all-powerful force capable of re-shaping the material environment. When he was fighting a guerrilla war against the Kuomintang and the Japanese, Mao was convinced that men, not weapons, were the decisive factor. In June 1945, he delivered the concluding speech at the Seventh National Congress of the CCP. Entitled "*Yugong Yishan*" ("The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the

³² Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Vol. I. p. 340.

Mountains"), this speech was another expression of Mao's emphasis on the limitless power of the human will. In this speech, Mao told the story of an old man who removed the two mountains which were obstructing his way. During the Great Leap Forward, Mao tried to invoke people's will power to develop China's economy without much regard to the nature of the country's economic circumstances. "*Ren Ding Sheng Tian*" ("Human beings are bound to defeat nature."), a slogan used by Mao, summarizes in a nutshell his notion of the relationship between the subjective activity of man and the objective reality.

Mao's emphasis on the power of human will was such that it could be argued that he was an idealist, not a materialist. Marx, on the other hand, was a materialist. He made this clear when he said:

Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. *Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.*³³

Thus between Marx and Mao there is marked difference in their basic philosophical orientation. While Marx is a materialist, Mao is basically an idealist. That Mao is an idealist is not surprising. Chinese traditional culture, which formed the bulk of his intellectual frame of reference, was largely idealist.

³³ Karl Marx, *Marxism: Essential Writings*. Ed. David McLellan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 8. Italics added.

The Economic Factor Consistent with his materialist philosophy, Marx used the economic factor as key to his analysis of society. It is the criterion for the division of classes, and it is the foundation for what Marx called superstructure which includes ideology, politics, values, etc.. Marx said:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. *The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general.*³⁴

Compare this to what Mao said on the same topic:

First and foremost, create public opinion and seize power. Then resolve the question of ownership. Later, develop the productive forces to a large extent. This in general is the rule.³⁵

Thus, Mao stood Marx on his head. For him, the economic factor was not as important as the superstructure. Mao liked to put a premium on politics. In 1955, Mao said: "Political work is the lifeline of all economic work."³⁶ During the Cultural Revolution, he put forth the

³⁴ Karl Marx, op cit., pp. 48-49. Italics added.

³⁵ Mao Zedong, *Miscellany of Mao Tse-tung Thought, 1949-68*. Part. II. Arlington, Virginia: Joint Publications Research Service, 1974, p. 269.

³⁶ Mao Zedong, *The Writings of Mao Zedong 1949-1976*. Vol. I. Ed. Michael Y.M. Kau and John K. Leung. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1986, p. 701.

slogan of "politics in command" rather than "economy in command". Mao's position on the relationship between the economy and politics was diametrically opposite that of Marx.

The Concept of Class Mao's idealist philosophy is also reflected in his concept of class. In March, 1926, Mao wrote "Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society". Mao based his analysis on the economic status of people. According to this article, the poorer people were, the more revolutionary potential they had. Thus, the industrial proletariat, being the most poor, had the most revolutionary potential. The identification of the industrial proletarian class as the most revolutionary was Marxist.

But Mao's concept of class as revealed in this essay was un-Marxist. In Marxist terminology, class is not based specifically on wealth or property, but rather on social relations to the economic mode of production. In different economic modes, there are different types of wealth or property. But Mao failed to distinguish different modes of production and urban-rural class relations. For him, social structure was simply based on wealth.

This concept of class in Mao's early career is relatively close to Marxism in that it uses the economic factor as the criterion to divide social classes. Later in Mao's life, his concept of class evolved further away from Marxism. Consider the definition which Mao put forward in the 1950s for the so-called "five bad elements": landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements and rightists. Two of these categories are socio-economic, two political and one moral. From this definition we can see that Mao's classes do not refer to objective categories or to different relationships to the means of production, as Marx's classes do. Mao's classes are partially determined by ideological and moral attitudes. The use of moral attributes in defining one's class is reminiscent of the Confucian emphasis on morality.

During the Cultural Revolution, Mao often spoke of two broad classes, that is, the proletarian class and the bourgeois class. The basis for distinction between the two classes is not people's relationship to the means of production, but their support for Mao or for Liu Shaoqi. If one supported Mao, he was in the proletarian class; if one supported Liu, he was in the bourgeois class. In using the concept of class as a weapon in his power struggle, Mao completely subverted what Marx meant by class.

The Peasantry

Since Mao did not subscribe to Marx's concept of class, his treatment of the issue of peasantry in the revolution is not surprising. Mao differed drastically from Marx about the revolutionary potential of the peasantry. Unlike Marx, who considered the peasants passive and the countryside a place of idiocy, Mao as early as 1926 saw in peasants the "closest friends" of the revolution.³⁷

In 1927 Mao wrote the "Report on an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan". In the report, Mao attached unprecedented importance to the peasants as a revolutionary force. He pointed out that the peasant question was the decisive question for the entire Chinese revolution.

Leadership by the poor peasants is absolutely necessary. Without the poor peasants there would be no revolution. To deny their role is to deny the revolution. To attack them is to attack the revolution. They have never been wrong on the general direction of the revolution.³⁸

³⁷ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Vol. 1. p. 18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Mao thus identified the revolution with poor peasants. In his thinking, the poor peasants replaced the industrial proletariat as the leader of the revolution. Such thinking was the direct antithesis of Marxism.

In December 1955, Mao went even further in his evaluation of the peasants:

Our population is large and our location is good. Though diligent and able to endure hardship, the peasants will have no future if they do not cooperativize. *Chinese peasants are even better than British and American workers*; we can therefore step into socialism faster and with greater and better results.³⁹

Mao's view that the peasantry possess great revolutionary potential is consistent with his idealist philosophy. According to Mao's idealist philosophy, what determines an individual's revolutionary potential is not his class (in the Marxist sense), but his elan and consciousness which can be shaped through propaganda and education.

View of Communism

Marx considers communism as the final stage of human development. In Marx's communist society, all contradictions have been resolved, which means, in simple terms, that human development stops with communism and that communism is the end of history. Marx thus describes communism:

[Communism] is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man -- the

³⁹ Mao Zedong, *The Writings of Mao Zedong 1949-1976*. Vol 1. p. 682. Italics added.

true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.⁴⁰

Mao has an entirely different view of communism. He wrote in 1967:

*In the communist period there will also be continuous development. Communism will probably go through many different phases. Can it be said that after communist society is reached, nothing will change?*⁴¹

Unlike Marx, Mao does not consider communism the final stage of human development.

The Mass Line

Mao deviated not only from Marxism but also from Leninism. One of the hallmarks of Leninism is the central role of the Communist Party in the revolution. Lenin said:

I assert: (1) that no revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organization of leaders maintaining continuity; (2) that the broader the popular mass drawn spontaneously into the struggle, which forms the basis of the movement and participates in it, the more urgent the need for such an organization, and the more solid this organization must be (for it is much easier for all sorts of demagogues to side-track the more backward sections of

⁴⁰ Karl Marx, *Essential Writings of Karl Marx*. Ed. David Caute. Collier Books, 1967, pp. 227-228.

⁴¹ Mao Zedong, *Miscellany of Mao Tse-tung Thought, 1949-68*. Part. II. p. 264.

the masses); (3) that such an organization must consist chiefly of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity.⁴²

On this issue, Mao differed from Lenin in that he gave the masses a much greater role. He said in 1943:

In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily "from the masses, to the masses". This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action.⁴³

In 1962, Mao went even further in emphasizing the role of the masses:

If there is no democracy, if ideas are not coming from the masses, it is impossible to establish a good line, good general and specific policies and methods. Our leading organs merely play the role of a processing plant in the establishment of a good line and good general and specific policies and methods. Everyone knows that if a factory has no raw material it cannot do any processing.⁴⁴

During the Cultural Revolution, Mao turned against the CCP. He encouraged the Red Guards to destroy the Party organs at various

⁴² Vladimir Lenin, *Marxism: Essential Writings*. Ed. David McLellan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 148.

⁴³ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Vol. III. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965, p. 119.

⁴⁴ Mao Zedong, *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*. Ed. Stuart Schram. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974, p. 164.

levels. In this period, it seemed that he regarded the masses as the only source of legitimacy and authority. Mao's action during the Cultural Revolution represented his complete departure from Leninism over the question of Party leadership.

Mao's revision of Marxism and Leninism was not accidental. It has personal, social, and cultural reasons. Mao's frame of reference consisted so predominantly of Chinese traditional culture that it was difficult for him to absorb alien ideas. When alien ideas came into conflict with his limited frame of reference, Mao would revise those ideas so that they would fall in line with his frame of reference. Mao probably did this on the idea of Marxist dialectics.

China's revolution had its own peculiar characteristics. It occurred in a overwhelmingly rural society. To subscribe to the Marxist line of relying on the proletariat in such a revolution would be tantamount to courting failure. Being a good tactician, Mao turned toward the Chinese peasants for support.

Reluctance to accept foreign ideas was a Chinese cultural tradition. China had long regarded itself as the center of the civilized world and dismissed the outside world as barbarian. Mao's revision of Marxism was in conformity with this tradition. Until the late eighteenth century, China's dynastic cycles had proceeded with little interference from the outside world. China's forced encounter with the modern Western world and its defeat and humiliation by Britain in the Opium War led many Chinese intellectuals to seek reform by learning from the West. But it was psychologically difficult for the proud Chinese to learn from the "barbarian" West. Zhang Zhidong's formula of "*Zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*" "Chinese learning for the essence, Western learning for practical application" was able to make it less galling for Chinese to learn from the West, for it still maintained that Chinese culture would be the essence and that what China needed from the West was only its technology. This formula

was widely accepted as the guide in the process of learning from the West.

This formula also conforms to an important aspect of Chinese philosophy, that is, the Middle Way. From the perspective of this philosophy, the necessity of learning does not mean that Western learning should be introduced in a wholesale manner. Being an ardent nationalist as well as a product of Chinese culture, Mao also succumbed to this formula, as can be seen from the following words of his:

The substance was like our General Line, which cannot be changed. We cannot adopt Western learning as the substance.... We can only use Western technology.⁴⁵

These words were almost a paraphrase of Zhang Zhidong's formula.

Mao not only revised those parts of Marxism that did not fit in with his frame of reference but also tried frequently to understand those parts of Marxism that fit in with his frame of reference from the prism of Chinese traditional culture. Mao's major claim to expertise in Marxist theory lies in his two articles of "On Practice" and "On Contradiction". But a study of these two articles would reveal that Mao probably drew more from Chinese traditional philosophy than from Marxism in writing them. Stuart Schram records that in his original version of "On contradiction" Mao "illustrates his point rather by the exegesis of a quotation from Su Dongpo, a poet of the Song Dynasty, who is said to have thoroughly understood the relation between the universal and the relative."⁴⁶ Examples of this kind abound in Mao's writings. Mao used the old Chinese saying "Heaven changeth not, likewise the Tao changeth not" to illustrate

⁴⁵ Mao Zedong, *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed: Talks and Letters 1956-71*. p. 235.

⁴⁶ Stuart R. Schram, *Mao Zedong: A Preliminary Reassessment*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1983, p. 22.

metaphysical thinking.⁴⁷ To illustrate materialist dialectics he made extensive use of Chinese sources:

When Sun Tzu said in discussing military science, "Know the enemy and know yourself, and you can fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat", he was referring to the two sides in a battle. Wei Cheng of the Tang Dynasty also understood the error of one-sidedness when he said, "Listen to both sides and you will be enlightened, heed only one side and you will be benighted." ... In the novel *Shui Hu Chuan* [*The Water Margin*], Sung Chiang thrice attacked Chu Village. Twice he was defeated because he was ignorant of the local conditions and used the wrong method. Later he changed his method; first he investigated the situation, and he familiarized himself with the maze of roads, then he broke up the alliance between the Li, Hu and Chu Villages and sent his men in disguise into the enemy camp to lie in wait, ... There are many examples of materialist dialectics in *Shui Hu Chuan*, of which the episode of the three attacks on the Chu Village is one of the best.⁴⁸

In "On Practice" Mao said:

Hence a man's knowledge consists only of two parts, that which comes from direct experience and that which comes from indirect experience.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Vol. I. p. 313.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 323-324.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 300.

This distinction of knowledge may have been borrowed from Mo Tzu who divided knowledge into direct and indirect knowledge.⁵⁰

In the early Qing Dynasty, philosopher Yan Xizhai gave great importance to direct knowledge. He contended that only by tasting the vegetable could one know its flavor.⁵¹ Mao wrote in "On Practice":

If you want to know the taste of a pear, you must eat it yourself.⁵²

When we compare "On Practice" and "On Contradiction" with Mao's other writings on problems of revolutionary policies and strategies, we can see that these two articles were written not in his typical literary style. His typical literary style is free, lucid, and fluent. Mao's writings on revolutionary policies and strategies were invariably executed in this style. When he was writing on the subject that he knew best, that is, the peasantry, his literary style was at its best, as his "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" shows. But in his two articles on Marxism, his fluency gave way to laboriousness, which suggests the author's unfamiliarity with and lack of understanding of the subject.

Identification with China's Past

As indicated before, Mao had developed a penchant for Chinese classics, Chinese history, and Chinese romances such as *The Water Margin* and *The Three Kingdoms* ever since he was a child. This interest never waned. Even during the hard Jinggangshan years, Mao still wanted to read Chinese traditional books. In 1938 when he was

⁵⁰ See Wang Shubai, *Mao Zedong Sixiang yu Zhongguo Wenhua Chuantong* (*Mao Zedong Thought and Chinese Cultural Tradition*). Xiamen: Xiamen Daxue Chubanshe, 1987, p. 30.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Vol. I. p. 300.

delivering a speech to the students of the Anti-Japanese University, Mao mentioned that he had tried to look in a landlord's house for such books as *The Three Kingdoms* to read. In Yanan, Mao arranged to have two books on the complete history of China purchased for him.⁵³

According to the rector of Mao's library, Mao submerged himself all the more in books about China's past after he entered Beijing in 1949. Mao bought *Si Bu Bei Yao* (*A Summary of Essentials of Chinese Scholarship*). He also systematically bought other books on China's past. His rector in 1952 bought for Mao *Ershisi Shi* (*The Twenty-four Standard Histories*). His rector recalled that Mao read almost all of *Si Bu Bei Yao* and all of *Ershisi Shi*. Certain parts of *Ershisi Shi* Mao read again and again. Mao also read such classics as *Zi Zhi Tong Jian* (*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*), *Xu Zi Zhi Tong Jian* (*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government, Continued*), and *Gang Jian Yi Zhi Lu* (*An Outline of Chinese History*). Mao's fascination with Chinese history can also be seen from his rector's record: On September 20th, 1962, Mao asked for *Song Shi* (*The History of the Song Dynasty*). On November 23rd of the same year, Mao asked for the histories of other dynasties. On the 24th, Mao asked for *Xu Tong Jian Ji Shi Ben Mo* (*A Comprehensive Chinese History, Continued*). Mao told his rector that after finishing *Yuan Shi* (*The History of the Yuan Dynasty*) he read *Tong Jian Ji Shi Ben Mo* (*A Comprehensive Chinese History*) and that now he would begin to read *Xu Tong Jian Ji Shi Ben Mo*.⁵⁴

Mao's fascination with Chinese history and his submergence in China's past had a dual effect on him. First of all, he borrowed ideas

⁵³ The details as are recorded here are taken from an account by the rector of Mao's personal library Pang Xianzhi in his article "Guji Xinjie, Gu Wei Jin Yong" ("To Reinterpret and to Learn from the Ancient"). In Gong Yuzhi, et al., *Mao Zedong de Dushu Shenghuo* (*The Reading Life of Mao Zedong*). Beijing: Shenghuo, Dushu, Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian, 1986, pp. 196-219. Translation mine.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

of government from China's past rulers. Secondly, Mao progressively identified himself with the emperors of China's past rather than with the Communist leaders like Lenin and Stalin. Andre Malraux, a French writer and statesman, who met Mao several times, once recounted: "I once asked him [Mao] if he did not think of himself as the heir of the last great emperors of the sixteenth century. Mao said, 'But of course I am their heir.'"⁵⁵ On other occasions, Mao compared himself specifically to the First Emperor Qin Shi Huang of the Qin Dynasty and to Tang Tai Zong of the Tang Dynasty.⁵⁶ In the winter of 1944 - 1945, Mao composed a poem titled "Xue" ("Snow"). The second stanza of the poem reads:

This land so rich in beauty
Has made countless heroes bow in homage.
But it is a pity that Qin Shi Huang and Han Wu Ti
Lack literary brilliance;
And Tang Tai Zong and Song Tai Zu
Have but few romantic inclinations.
The prodigious Gengis Khan
Knows only how to bend his bow
and shoot at vultures.
All are past and gone!
For truly great men
We must seek among the present generation.⁵⁷

In this poem Mao was clearly comparing himself to the prominent emperors of China's past.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978, p. 558.

⁵⁶ See Lucian W. Pye, *Mao Tse-tung: The Man in the Leader*. New York: Basic Books, 1976, p. 63. Also see Li Zhisui, *Mao Zedong Siren Yisheng Huiyilu (The Private Life of Mao Zedong)*. Taipei: China Times Publishing Company, 1994, p. 64.

⁵⁷ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zhuxi Yulu, Mao Zhuxi de Wupian Zhuzuo, Mao Zhuxi Shici (Quotations of Chairman Mao, Five Works of Chairman Mao, Poems of Chairman Mao)*. Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1969, pp. 27-29. Translation mine.

Mao identified himself not only with the great emperors of China's past but also with the great philosophers of China's past. Mao's "On Practice" was written in 1937 and published in 1951. When Mao was preparing the article for publication, he added the subtitle of "On the Relation Between Knowledge and Practice, Between Knowing and Doing." The relation between knowing and doing was an important topic in Chinese traditional philosophy. There is good reason to believe that Mao added this subtitle because he wanted to solve the traditional problem in Chinese philosophy. After the publication of "On Practice", many Chinese philosophers wrote books and articles on it. One of the articles was by Feng Youlan. Feng Youlan reviewed Mao's article by recalling the views of Chinese philosophers from Confucius down to Sun Yat-sen on the relation between knowing and doing, and concluded that Mao "solved the problem of the relation between knowing and doing that had existed in Chinese philosophy."⁵⁸ Of all the flattering articles, Mao was only appreciative of Feng Youlan's.⁵⁹

In 1964, Mao again brought up the philosophical problem of the relation between knowing and doing:

With regard to the leap from practice to perceptive knowledge and from perceptive knowledge to rational knowledge, ... ancient Chinese philosophers did not explain it clearly. Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu did not explain it clearly. Mo Tzu touched upon the problem of knowing but did not explain it clearly. Zhang Zai, Li Zhou, Wang Chuansan, and Tan Sitong did not explain it clearly.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Feng Youlan. Quoted in Wang Shubai, op cit., p. 31. Translation mine.

⁵⁹ See Wang Shubai, op cit., p. 32.

⁶⁰ Mao Zedong. Quoted in Wang Shubai, op cit., p. 32. Translation mine.

What Mao implied was that only he himself succeeded in explaining this problem clearly. In the above passage Mao did not mention any Western philosophers, not even Marx or Lenin.

It is in keeping with Chinese tradition that Mao identified himself with not only the emperor but also the philosopher. In Chinese traditional culture, while an emperor like Qin Shi Huang is considered an accomplished man of the sword (*wufu*) a philosopher like Mo Tzu is regarded as an accomplished scholar (*Wenren*). Although Chinese traditional culture values an accomplished man of the sword in his own right, it values him more if he could be an accomplished scholar at the same time. Chinese traditional culture stresses accomplishments in both military and scholarly pursuits. There is a special Chinese idiom for a man who is accomplished on both fronts. He would be called "*wenwu shuangquan*". Mao clearly subscribed to the value system of Chinese traditional culture, which is probably why he compared himself to both prominent warriors and scholars in China's past.

Defying the Comintern

An examination of Mao's relationship with the Comintern points to his un-Marxist and sometimes anti-Marxist practices. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Comintern was the headquarters of international communism. It sent representatives to direct the activities of most communist parties around the world. The Comintern at that time tried to control the CCP. Mao before 1935 was not yet the top leader of the CCP, but he rigorously resisted directives and policies issued by the Comintern. The history of Mao's rise to power in the CCP hierarchy was in some sense the history of his struggle against the Comintern. Mao fought his way to the chairmanship of the CCP by overcoming tremendous opposition from the CCP leaders appointed and sanctioned by the Comintern. He developed his political, military,

and ideological lines in opposition to the lines dictated by the Comintern.

Before 1935, the top leadership of the CCP consisted of people appointed by the Comintern. Under the direction of the Comintern, the CCP adopted extremely leftist policies. In the Central Committee Plenum of November 1927, the CCP "decided that its previous policy of compromise with the leaders of the petty bourgeoisie must be abandoned and that it must resolutely lead the masses of the workers and peasants to rise in armed insurrection."⁶¹ Such a line was too radical at the time because a break with the petty bourgeoisie and armed insurrection would expose workers and peasants to the onslaught of overwhelming enemy forces. As a result of this leftist line, a number of armed insurrections ended in disastrous defeats. Mao was opposed to this line. In the Autumn Harvest Uprising he had armed all the peasants, making no class distinctions among them. He decided that the policy of terrorizing every one except the workers and the very poor peasants was not expedient for the CCP when it needed broad support. He followed a rather lenient policy toward the rich peasants and small landlords.

In 1928, Mao led his forces to Jinggangshan. There he began to establish peasant soviets. This practice was based on his analysis of China's special circumstances. In his analysis, Mao laid out five characteristics of China's social condition:

1. China was a semicolonial country. Its political development was uneven. It had relatively few workers, who were concentrated in the great industrial cities on the coast, under the guns of the imperialists. Modern cities

⁶¹ CCP Politburo Resolution on Political Discipline (Nov. 14, 1927), as translated in Karl A. Wittfogel, "The Legend of 'Maoism'", *China Quarterly*, No. 2, Apr.-June 1960, pp. 32-33.

coexisted with a backward, semifeudal countryside teeming with hundreds of millions of peasants.

2. China was large; it had abundant resources for revolution. The southern provinces had passed through a great revolution in the course of which the seeds of future revolutions had been sown. Moreover, a workers' and peasants' Red Army had been created.

3. The counterrevolutionary forces were strong. Politically organized in the KMT [Kuomintang], they now controlled the country and were recognized by imperialist powers. Therefore they could organize huge armies, and secure weapons to slaughter the people and surround and attack the small, scattered Red Armies.

4. The revolutionary forces were weak. The Red Armies existed only in poor, backward, mountainous areas. They had no consolidated bases. They were dependent on the enemy, either through raiding or through illicit trading, for all of their supplies. This factor, Mao held, should be the major determinant of strategy and tactics.

5. Finally, the peasants were ready to revolt and redistribute the land if given the opportunity. The opportunity could arise if the revolutionary army directed by the Communist party offered them protection. In turn, the revolutionary army could exist and withstand the offensive campaigns of the counterrevolutionaries if-- and only if-- it were amply supported by the peasants.⁶²

Mao's analysis and strategic prescription were heresy in communist literature. They were in direct opposition to Stalin's policy governing the activities of the CCP. In late 1927, Stalin urged the immediate formation of urban soviets in China. Accordingly, Heinz Neumann, who was sent to China by the Comintern, organized the Canton

⁶² Agnes Smedley, *The Great Road: The Life and Times of Chu Teh*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1956, p. 228.

Commune. But the Canton Commune was a complete failure. It existed less than three days. The Canton Commune also led to the total destruction by the Kuomintang of the CCP's Canton branch, which had been one of the most powerful and best organized of its urban units.

In October 1928, Li Lisan returned from the Soviet Union to China to assume the leadership of the CCP. He was committed to the Comintern policy of how to conduct revolutionary activities in China. Upon his return, almost all party cells in China's cities were destroyed by the Kuomintang. Following the Comintern policy, Li Lisan tried throughout 1929 to restore the CCP's activities in the cities. He maintained that the main duties of party members lay in China's great industrial cities-- Shanghai, Wuhan, Nanjing, Tienjin, Dalien, Harbin, and Canton. In a report on the Sixth Congress dated October 1928, Li wrote: "The Congress recognized that there is a danger that the base of our party may shift from the working class to the peasantry and that we must make every effort to restore the party's working-class base."⁶³ Later in the same month, in a letter addressed to all party members, he wrote:

As a result of the particular development of the struggle in the countryside during the past year, and the fact that peasants now constitute 70 to 80 percent of our party membership, *the peasant mentality* is now reflected in our party.... The Communist Party acknowledges that the peasantry is an ally of the revolution. At the same time, [the party] recognizes that the peasantry is petty-bourgeois and cannot have correct ideas regarding socialism, that *its conservatism* is particularly strong, and that it lacks organizational ability. Only a proletarian

⁶³ "Political Activities After the Sixth Congress." In Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952, p. 128.

mentality can lead us onto the correct revolutionary road. Unless we proceed to correct the dangers involved in this peasant mentality, it may lead to a complete destruction of the revolution and of the Party.⁶⁴

Thus Li began his attack on "peasant consciousness" immediately after his return to China. This attack struck at the core of Mao's revolutionary strategy. But Mao never acknowledged that his strategy was incorrect. He refused to concede control of his Fourth Red Army to Li Lisan's representatives, and he refused to accept recommendations, or orders, from the military bureau of the Central Committee of the CCP which was then controlled by the Comintern.

In the meantime, Mao continued to develop his political, military, and ideological lines based on the utilization of the Chinese peasantry. He was convinced that the Red Army could be used as a major instrument of the revolution by establishing soviet governments and inciting the peasants to rise against their landlords and redistribute the land. Due to his peasant-based political and military strategy, his Fourth Red Army became the largest and best disciplined Red Army in China before the end of 1929.

In 1930, 28 steadfast Stalinists returned from Moscow to China and took over the leadership of the CCP under the direction of the Comintern. These 28 Stalinists were known as the 28 Bolsheviks. They were headed by Wang Ming. Upon taking over the leadership of the CCP, the 28 Bolsheviks set out to apply the Comintern line. In the early 1930s, the Comintern line could be summed up as follows:

[A] struggle on two fronts with the right deviation as the main danger in every section of the Comintern, a united front with the masses against all rival elites of whatever

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 137.

political persuasion, and a subordination of the struggle for power of all Communist parties to the essential task of protecting the Soviet Union--- the stern fatherland of the proletariat.⁶⁵

As the leader of the 28 Bolsheviks and the CCP, Wang was assigned the task by the Comintern of applying this line to the Chinese revolution and analyzing deviations in the CCP. His first major analysis was published in 1932 in Moscow with the title *Struggle for the More Complete Bolshevization of the CCP*. In this analysis, Wang "denounced the idea that the peasantry has an unusual revolutionary character in colonial and semicolonial countries, as well as the idea that the peasants could play an independent revolutionary role. He laid heavy emphasis on the leading role of the proletariat and censured CCP members who made light of their role in the Chinese revolution by overstressing that of the peasantry."⁶⁶ Mao was of course the main object of Wang's censure.

In May 1930 Mao wrote an article titled "Oppose Book Worship". It was an implicit critique of those Comintern-appointed leaders who dogmatically applied Marxist-Leninist theories to China without investigating into China's concrete conditions. "Unless you have investigated a problem, you will be deprived of the right to speak on it.... Talking nonsense solves no problems."⁶⁷ Mao was clearly resentful of those Comintern-appointed leaders who arrogantly talked about Marxist-Leninist theories but knew little about China's specific conditions and special needs. He was rightfully convinced that he knew China much better and that consequently he could solve China's problems. That Mao's article was an implicit critique of

⁶⁵ John E. Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition 1927-1935*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966, pp. 253-254.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 255.

⁶⁷ Mao Zedong. Quoted in Han Suyin, *The Morning Deluge: Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Revolution 1893-1954*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1972, p. 228.

the Comintern-appointed leaders and by association of Moscow is suggested by the surprising omission of this article from the 1951 Chinese edition of Mao's works. In 1951, Mao wanted the Soviets to help his new and fragile regime. By omitting the article, Mao may have wanted to avoid hurting the feelings of Moscow.

Mao's critique of the 28 Bolsheviks and their influence became more explicit as the years went by. In 1935, Mao's critique was directed not only at the 28 Bolsheviks but also at Marxism-Leninism. Please note the following passage by Mao where he sarcastically parodied the 28 Bolsheviks:

The forces of the revolution must be pure, absolutely pure, and the road of the revolution must be straight, absolutely straight. *Nothing is correct except what is literally recorded in Holy Writ.* The national bourgeoisie is entirely and eternally counter-revolutionary. Not an inch must be conceded to the rich peasants.⁶⁸

Mao sarcastically referred to Marxism-Leninism as the Holy Writ. This reference clearly shows Mao's hostility toward Marxism-Leninism, his non-Marxist-Leninist identity, and his anti-Marxist-Leninist attitude.

In his 1942 article "Rectify the Party's Style of Work", Mao heaped scorn on Marxism-Leninism. Addressing those who dogmatically used Marxism-Leninism in the Chinese revolution, Mao said:

"Your dogma is of no use," or, to use an impolite formulation, *"Your dogma is less useful than shit."* We see that dog shit can fertilize the fields and man's can feed the

⁶⁸ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Vol. I. p. 164. Italics added.

*dog. And dogmas? They can't fertilize the fields, nor can they feed a dog. Of what use are they?*⁶⁹

Although no direct reference to Marxism-Leninism as "shit" was made by Mao, indirect reference was sufficient to indicate Mao's irreverence and hostility toward Marxism-Leninism.

With regard to military strategy, the 28 Bolsheviks urged that the Chinese Red Army be built into a regular army big enough to capture and hold large cities. Such a strategy was the result of the arbitrary copying of the Soviet urban strategy and the dogmatic application of Marxism-Leninism. Wang, like Li Lisan and other Comintern followers, made the mistake of ignoring the special circumstances in China which called for a different revolutionary strategy. Wang's military strategy proved suicidal. In October 1933, Chiang Kai-shek launched the fifth campaign of encirclement and annihilation against the CCP. Encircling the whole of the central soviet district with blockhouses and using a force of a million men, the Nationalists had drawn a tight ring around the soviet area. The Red Army was neither large enough nor well enough armed to withstand this assault. Mao had argued that the Red Army should break through the encirclement, split into small units, and fight a guerrilla war in the plains to the north and east of the Nationalist lines. Wang Ming rejected this strategy, insisting that the Red Army must defend the base in the same way the Kuomintang attacked it--- with positional warfare, complete with trenches and blockhouses. This strategy resulted in the decimation of the Red Army. At this point, the Red Army was forced to evacuate the central soviet district in Jinggangshan.

⁶⁹ Quoted in John Bryan Starr, *Continuing the Revolution: The Political Thought of Mao*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 53. The quoted passage was omitted from *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* published in Beijing in 1965. Italics added.

In 1935, the Red Army reached Zunyi, a small town in northern Guizhou. There the CCP held a conference to reorganize the Revolutionary Military Council. The result of the reorganization was the purging of the 28 Bolsheviks from leadership positions in the CCP and the ascent of Mao to power. This conference marked the triumph of Mao over the 28 Bolsheviks. It also marked Mao's triumph over the Comintern in terms of political, military, and ideological lines of the CCP although its influence lingered on in the CCP for a long time to come.

Mao's triumph in Zunyi validated the correctness of the political, military, and ideological policies that he advocated and practiced. The correctness of his policies was, as maintained earlier, the result of his intimate knowledge of China and his ignorance of Marxism-Leninism. It can be reasonably argued that had he gone to Moscow to study Marxism-Leninism, Mao could have been another Bolshevik blindly following Marxist-Leninist dogmas. Mao's struggle against the Comintern and his insistence on pursuing his own policies indicate just how un-Marxist-Leninist Mao was. Mao was not concerned about whether the Chinese revolution was ideologically consistent with Marxism-Leninism. He was concerned with how to make the Chinese revolution a success. In order to achieve success, he was willing to resort to everything, including going against Marxist-Leninist teachings. In this sense, Mao was not at all representative of the ideological revolutionary but typical of a rebel who did not have much ideological underpinnings. Thus, Mao was reminiscent of the countless peasant rebels in China's past whose concern was the success of their rebellions and not the correctness of their ideologies.

In 1964, Mao reminisced about his defiance against the Comintern:

Even before the dissolution of the Third International, we did not obey the orders of the Third International. At the Tsunyi Conference we didn't obey, and afterwards, for a

period of ten years, including the Rectification Campaign and down to the Seventh Congress, when we finally adopted a resolution, and corrected [the errors of] 'leftism', we didn't obey them at all.⁷⁰

Conclusion

In Mao's political socialization process, Marxism-Leninism influenced him only superficially. He came into contact with Marxism-Leninism through reading Li Dazhao. But Li Dazhao's version of Marxism-Leninism was a superficial and distorted one. In the late 1910s and early 1920s Li Dazhao did not completely accept or adequately understand Marxism-Leninism. When the teacher did not adequately understand Marxism-Leninism, the pupil's understanding must be limited, too. Because Mao did not understand any foreign languages, he could not read Marxist-Leninist books in languages other than Chinese. In the late 1910s and early 1920s there were only a few Marxist-Leninist books in Chinese. Mao's brief encounter with Marxism-Leninism in the late 1910s and early 1920s was followed by long years of guerrilla warfare in the Chinese countryside where his experience with Marxism-Leninism was largely negative. This negative experience was mainly in the way of his policy differences with the 28 Bolsheviks and the Comintern.

It was not until the late 1930s that he began to dabble in Marxism-Leninism. But this exercise was occasioned by ulterior motives more than by any real interest in Marxism-Leninism on Mao's part. Evidence shows that Mao wanted to use Marxism-Leninism to safeguard his leadership position in the CCP which was under the assault of the 28 Bolsheviks who were much more knowledgeable about Marxism-Leninism.

⁷⁰ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong Unrehearsed*. pp. 218-219.

Mao's dabbling in Marxism-Leninism did not significantly alter his frame of reference which had been made up of predominantly Chinese traditional culture. This is evidenced by the fact that Mao did not readily accept Marxism. Mao's later writings, talks, and actions revealed that he differed from Marxism and Leninism on a number of important points. Mao's difference from Marxism and Leninism on these points rendered it unjustifiable to call him a Marxist-Leninist. Mao's non-Marxist-Leninist identity was revealed with more clarity when he defied the Comintern and their appointed men in China. By resisting and fighting against the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist approach to the Chinese revolution as enforced by the Comintern, Mao carved out a Chinese way to revolution. In his fight against the Comintern and its appointees in China Mao in several instances showed his irreverence and hostility toward Marxism-Leninism.

In his major writings on Marxism, Mao frequently tried to explain Marxist concepts in terms of Chinese traditional culture. The laboriousness with which these writings were rendered suggests his unfamiliarity with Marxism. In "On Practice", Mao changed from expounding on Marxism to solving a Chinese traditional problem of philosophy.

In the years after 1949, Mao was immersed in Chinese history, which was indicated by his voracious reading in Chinese history and his increasing identification with and comparison to emperors and philosophers in China's past.

Was Mao a traditionalist or Marxist-Leninist? While one cannot say categorically that he was the one or the other, one can conclude, on examining his knowledge and acceptance of Chinese traditional culture and of Marxism, that Mao was more of a traditionalist than a Marxist-Leninist.

CHAPTER FOUR

YEARS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

This chapter deals with Mao's more than two decades (1924 - 1949) of experiences in the remote Chinese countryside and among the peasants. It reviews how Mao organized peasants and how in doing so he developed his expert knowledge on the Chinese peasantry. It looks at how Mao, by relying upon the peasants, created a rural approach to the Chinese revolution. It documents Mao's military exploits in the Chinese countryside and examines the affinity between his military prowess and Chinese traditional art of war. It makes the point that Mao's two decades of experiences among the peasantry reinforced his already traditional frame of reference.

The Founding of the CCP

Marxism-Leninism was introduced to China around the Russian October Revolution of 1917. As Mao said: "The salvoes of the October Revolution brought us Marxism-Leninism."¹ Mao experimented with Marxism-Leninism at the time largely because the Russian October Revolution demonstrated its value as an instrument for solving a nation's problems. "The October Revolution," Mao continued to say, "helped progressives in China, as throughout the world, to adopt the proletarian world outlook as the instrument for studying a nation's destiny and considering anew their own problems."² China at the time had many problems, for the solution of which many Chinese had

¹ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Vol. IV. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1969, p. 413.

² Ibid.

been searching for a long time. The Russian October Revolution, which succeeded by using Marxism-Leninism, provided a possible solution the Chinese had been looking for. Li Zehou, China's foremost contemporary philosopher, argued that it was the urgent need to save China from further decay that caused the few Chinese to accept Marxism-Leninism around the Russian October Revolution.³ It was documented in Chapter Three that Mao did not adequately understand Marxism-Leninism. But his lack of understanding of Marxism-Leninism did not deter him from seeing in Marxism-Leninism an effective instrument to save China. For Mao, Marxism-Leninism was an instrument which would help him to realize his personal ambition as well. Discussing the formation of the CCP with his friend Siao-yu, Mao revealed that his motive in joining the CCP was to "rule China".⁴

It was largely in the spirit of saving China that the CCP was founded. In the fall of 1920, Mao organized a communist group in Hunan. Mao's organization was modeled upon similar organizations in Shanghai and Beijing. Communist groups were soon formed in Jinan, Hangzhou, Wuhan, Tokyo, and Paris, too. In July 1921, delegates from various communist groups met in Shanghai and then in South Lake, Zhejiang Province to discuss the founding of the Chinese Communist Party.

In the Chinese official communist history, this event was recorded as the First Congress of the CCP, and it marked the birth of the CCP. Mao, as a delegate from the Hunan communist group, attended the First Congress, but he did not play a prominent role in it. The policies set by the First Congress for the CCP conformed remarkably to Marxism-Leninism. The goal of the CCP was to "overthrow the capitalistic

³ See Li Zehou, *Zhongguo Xiandai Sixiang Silun (The History of Chinese Contemporary Thinking)*. Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 1987, p. 145.

⁴ See Siao-yu, *Mao Tse-tung and I Were Beggars*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, p. 197.

classes" with the "revolutionary army of the proletariat" and to "adopt the dictatorship of the proletariat" in order to abolish classes. "Toward the existing political parties, an attitude of independence, aggression, and exclusion should be adopted. Our party should stand up on behalf of the proletariat, and should allow no relationship with the other parties or groups."⁵ Li Dazhao, who cherished notions of cooperating with peasants and other non-proletarian classes, did not attend the congress. At this time, Mao did not show much originality in carving out a way for the Chinese revolution. After the Congress, Mao went back to Hunan to organize the labor movement and to expand the CCP organization. The period from 1921 to 1923 saw Mao working vigorously according to the official line. One probable reason why Mao did not deviate at this time from the official line was that Mao cherished the illusion that Marxism-Leninism was an effective tactical vehicle capable of helping him realize his personal and nationalistic goals. Later events would lead him to become quickly disillusioned with Marxism even as a tactical vehicle.

Following the Third Congress of the CCP in 1923 which reached the decision of entering into cooperation with the Kuomintang, Mao worked in Shanghai with some prominent Kuomintang members, such as Wang Jingwei and Hu Hanmin. Mao's job was to organize the CCP's cooperation with the Kuomintang. This job was not a happy experience for Mao. Because of his obscure background, Mao was not treated with respect by his Kuomintang colleagues and superiors.⁶

⁵ Chen Gongbo. Quoted in Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956, p. 58. Chen Gongbo was a participant of the First Congress of the CCP.

⁶ See Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China*. First Revised and Enlarged Ed. New York: Grove Press, 1968, p. 159.

Mao's First Effort at Organizing Peasants

It was noted in Chapter Three that Mao had shown an inclination for a broad revolutionary coalition in his 1919 essay "The Great Union of the Popular Masses". In the summer of 1923 Mao attended the Third Congress of the CCP at Guangzhou. At the Congress he pointed out the importance of the peasant question in the Chinese revolution. He said that in his native province of Hunan the number of workers was very small but there were peasants everywhere. He concluded that the peasant question was the most important question for all revolutions. As proof for his conclusion, he cited the fact that in all rebellions and revolutions in Chinese history peasants were the main force.⁷ For the purpose of the present study Mao's talk at the Third Congress of the CCP was significant for two reasons. One: it showed that Mao did not subscribe to the Marxist-Leninist teaching that workers had to be the main force of the revolution. Two: it revealed that Mao looked into China's past for ideas and inspirations for the revolution at hand.

At the end of 1924, Mao went back to his native village of Shaoshan, ostensibly to convalesce from an illness. He stayed there until the summer of 1925. During his brief stay in Shaoshan, Mao began to put his ideas to practice by organizing the peasant movement. Mao associated with a great number of peasants and got to know their life and their aspirations. There were some peasants who had spontaneously fought against the landlord militia guard. Mao sought them out and taught them organization skills so that they became

⁷ See *Mao Zedong Zhuan 1893-1949 (A Biography of Mao Zedong 1893-1949)*. Ed. Jin Chongji. Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1996, p. 108.

peasant leaders.⁸ During his stay in Shaoshan, Mao "formed more than twenty peasant unions".⁹

While a young boy Mao yearned for life in the big city, Changsha, and clearly showed a dislike for the life in the countryside. At that time he was looking for the intellectual excitement of the city. In the city he was looked down upon for his poor clothes. Was there disillusionment with the city? Judging from his rather vindictive memory of his bad experiences in the city, the answer to this question should be yes. Working as an assistant librarian in Beijing, Mao tried to discuss political and cultural subjects with the professors and students that came to the library to read, but "[m]y office was so low that people avoided me." "They had no time to listen to an assistant librarian speaking a southern dialect."¹⁰ The bad experience with intellectuals in the city probably developed in Mao a dislike for both the city and intellectuals. Did Li Dazhao's eulogy of the countryside strike an empathetic chord in Mao? The fact that Li, as one of the most prominent early promoters of Marxism in China, attached so much positive value to the countryside may have caused Mao to revise the role that Marx relegated to the peasants in the revolution.

By organizing the peasants, Mao deviated from Marxism-Leninism. He was uniquely qualified to work with the peasantry. As was indicated before, Mao came from a peasant family. He grew up among peasants in the countryside. He understood their frustrations and aspirations. Even when he was attending school in the city of Changsha, Mao made use of summer vacations to travel around the countryside in order to better understand the Chinese peasantry and

⁸ See Li Rui, *The Early Revolutionary Activities of Comrade Mao Tse-tung*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1977, p. 281.

⁹ See Jerome Chen, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 96.

¹⁰ Mao Zedong, in Edgar Snow, *op cit.*, p. 151.

the Chinese countryside. Now that he began organizing peasants, his endeavor was greatly facilitated by his intimate knowledge of them.

Director of the Peasant Movement Training Institute

In 1925, Mao's work among the peasants aroused the wrath of landlords. The governor of Hunan, Zhao Hengti, sent troops to arrest him. Mao was thus obliged to flee to Guangzhou. In Guangzhou, he was appointed, due to his successful work with the peasants, director of the Peasant Movement Training Institute. The institute was a joint effort of the CCP and the Kuomintang. At the institute, Mao assumed some teaching responsibilities. The subjects he taught were "The Problems of the Chinese Peasants" and "Village Education."¹¹

Mao was a very capable teacher. He first of all talked about the reality of the Chinese peasants' conditions which students knew and then elevated discussion of the concrete reality to the theoretical level. Mao also solicited students' input. He asked students (most of whom came from villages) to talk about "the conditions in the villages under which everyone lived, the conditions of the inhabitants and the land, the mode of life, the people's origins, how so-and-so got rich, how so-and-so became poor, how much official (public) land there was in the village, who managed it, who worked it, the rent...."¹² Mao thus enriched his own knowledge of the Chinese peasantry and the Chinese countryside by interacting with his peasant students. At the time when Mao was teaching at the Peasant Movement Training Institute, the peasant movement led by Peng Pai at Haifeng was in full swing. Mao organized the entire student body of the training institute which was 327 strong to go to Haifeng to observe and practice. "After the students had embraced the various theories, they personally entered the revolutionary peasant mass,

¹¹ See Jerome Chen, *op cit.*, p. 101.

¹² Li Rui, *op cit.*, p. 284.

investigated its organization and witnessed its life with their own eyes, all of which had an enormous influence on their determination to work for the peasant movement."¹³

By organizing the peasant movement and by studying and teaching on the peasant problem, Mao became an expert on the Chinese peasantry. Gradually he acquired a reputation as such an expert. In 1926, Mao was in Hunan to inspect the peasant movement. On December 1, 1926 the All-Hunan Peasants' Congress and All-Hunan Workers' Congress were convened. Due to his extensive and successful work in Hunan's peasant movement, Mao enjoyed great prestige among the delegates of the Congresses. Upon learning that Mao was in Hunan, the organizers of the Congresses invited him to attend. The announcement of Mao's attendance read as follows:

Mr. Mao Tse-tung has gained preeminent merit in his work in the revolution. He has put particular emphasis on the peasant movement. Last year he returned to Hunan and in the area of Shao-shan, Hsiang-t'an, was active in the peasant movement. Except for the Yueh-pei Peasants' Association, this was the first peasant movement in the Province. ... and last month Mr. Mao went to the Yangtze River area to investigate the status of the peasant movement for the purpose of developing the nationwide peasant movement and establishing a revolutionary base. When the Congress convened it sent a telegram asking Mr. Mao to return to Hunan to exercise leadership over everything.¹⁴

On the afternoon of December 20 the Congresses jointly welcomed Mao. Mao delivered a speech in which he said that the central

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Quoted in Li Rui., op cit., p. 297.

problem of the national revolution was the problem of the peasants. "No matter whether it was bringing down imperialism, the warlords, the local bullies and evil gentry, or whether it was wanting to develop industry and commerce, all these necessarily depended on the solution of the peasant question."¹⁵ On December 28 the All-Hunan Peasants' and Workers' Congresses held a joint closing ceremony and again asked Mao to talk about the Chinese revolution. In his talk, Mao pointed out that on the counterrevolutionary side there was already an international, nationwide and provincewide united front organization, and that the revolutionary side should have the same kind of united front with which to oppose them. He severely denounced criticism of the peasant movement.¹⁶ In his talk, Mao was essentially justifying and defending the peasant movement in China.

As was noted in Chapter Three, Mao's view regarding the revolutionary role of the peasantry was unlike that of Marx who considered the peasants passive and the countryside a place of idiocy. Mao saw in the peasants the "closest friends" of the revolution. He argued that the peasantry possessed revolutionary potential as well, saying that they "need a revolution to change the existing state of affairs."¹⁷

Mao's expertise on the peasantry stands in sharp contrast to his lack of knowledge on the industrial proletariat class. Note what he said about the industrial proletariat:

The first reason why the industrial workers hold this position [of primary importance in the revolution] is their concentration. No other section of the people is so

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See Li Rui, *op cit.*, p. 297.

¹⁷ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Vol. I. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964, pp. 18-19.

concentrated. The second reason is their low economic status. They have been deprived of all means of production, have nothing left but their hands, have no hope of ever becoming rich and, moreover, are subjected to the most ruthless treatment by the imperialists, the warlords and the bourgeoisie.¹⁸

Compare the above passage to his analysis of the Chinese peasantry:

How about the middle peasants? Theirs is a vacillating attitude. They think that the revolution will not bring them much good. They have rice cooking in their pots and creditors knocking on their doors at midnight. They, too, judging a thing by whether it ever existed before, knit their brows and think to themselves, "Can the peasant association really last?" "Can the Three People's Principles prevail?" Their conclusion is, "Afraid not!" They imagine it all depends on the will of Heaven and think, "A peasant association? Who knows if Heaven wills it or not?" In the first period, people from the association would call on a middle peasant, register in hand, and say, "Will you please join the peasant association?" The middle peasant would reply, "There is no hurry!" It was not until the second period, when the peasant associations were already exercising great power, that the middle peasants came in. They show up better in the associations than the rich peasants but are not as yet very enthusiastic; they still want to wait and see. It is essential for the peasant associations to get the middle peasants to join and to do a good deal more explanatory work among them.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 31-32.

In the above two passages, Mao was talking about the same topic, that is, the revolutionary potential of a group of people. On the industrial proletariat, Mao basically copied Marxist categories without providing examples or evidence. But on the peasants, Mao was specific and vivid.

Mao's Peasant Mentality

Mao's expert knowledge and understanding of the Chinese peasantry and the Chinese countryside was to prove indispensable to him when he later led the Chinese revolution which was essentially a peasant revolution waged in the countryside. The downside of Mao's expert knowledge of the countryside was his ignorance of the city. Although he lived from September 1911 to 1918 in Changsha and worked from June 1923 to December 1924 in Shanghai, Mao probably did not make use of these opportunities to study the cities. In Changsha, he spent most of his time in school. He took advantage of the summer vacations to tour and to study the countryside rather than to investigate the city. Mao's activities in Shanghai were obscure. But it is probable that Mao was so preoccupied with work that he did not have time to study the social and economic life of the city.

In China, because of the lack of communication and transportation facilities, the gap between the city and the countryside was much larger than that in a typical Western country, particularly in the first half of the 20th century. While big cities such as Shanghai were rapidly becoming Westernized, the bulk of the Chinese countryside were still very traditional. Mao's ignorance of the city was part and parcel of his traditionalism. This ignorance later proved to be one of the major causes for Mao's failures in his post-1949 efforts to build China's economy.

In China's lengthy history, the Chinese peasantry had never experienced large-scale economic production prior to 1949. Each

family was the production unit. This mode of production together with the lack of technical progress gave birth to a mentality among the peasants, which is called the peasant mentality. One of the characteristics of this mentality is the distrust of the unknown. Working in the same fields in which their ancestors had worked, using the same farming tools their ancestors had used,²⁰ and living in the same village where their ancestors had lived, the Chinese peasants acquired a frame of reference in which there was almost nothing unfamiliar. The result was that when they encountered something new and unknown, they would shun it. Because of his intimate psychological, emotional, and intellectual affinity with peasants, Mao had this mentality.

In pre-1949 China, large-scale economic production could be found only in the few large coastal cities. Associated with large-scale economic production in these large cities was some measure of technical progress. For Mao, working and living among workers in these cities could have served as an antidote to his peasant mentality. But Mao had practically no experience working and living among workers except his brief sojourn among the Hunan coal miners after 1921. Most Hunan coal miners were of peasant origin. Besides, the Hunan coal mines were not operated in the manner of large-scale production. Technical progress was extremely slow at these mines. Consequently, these Hunan coal miners were essentially peasants in terms of their mentality. By having virtually no experience among workers and with large-scale economic production, Mao severely limited his frame of reference.

²⁰ Dwight H. Perkins noted that "[o]n the north China plain, most tools used in the 20th century were well known as early as the Northern Wei Dynasty [fifth century AD] and perhaps the Han" [the third century AD]. see his *Agricultural Development in China, 1368-1968*. Chicago: Aldine, 1969, p. 56.

The Jinggangshan Mountains

In April 1927, Chiang Kai-shek began his bloody purge against the communists, thus effectively ending the uncertain CCP-Kuomintang cooperation. The Central Committee of the CCP decided to fight back. Mao was sent to Hunan to organize what was called the Autumn Harvest Uprising. In organizing the Autumn Harvest Uprising, Mao strongly opposed the policy of the Hunan Provincial Committee of the CCP to launch an assault on the city of Changsha. Mao contended that the peasants should be armed and have their own rural bases instead of attacking cities. As a result of this disagreement, the forces of Mao carrying out the Autumn Harvest Uprising did not have any reinforcements or support and the Autumn Harvest Uprising ended in defeat.

Mao led the remnants of his army in retreat to Jinggangshan, a mountainous area far away from the strong Kuomintang forces. Jinggangshan at this point was occupied by a group of bandits numbering about 160 people. Mao persuaded the bandits to join forces with him and thus secured a foothold in Jinggangshan.

The defeat of the Autumn Harvest Uprising made Mao question all the more the Comintern's urban revolutionary strategy. It was in Jingganshan that Mao, by using his intimate knowledge of the Chinese peasantry and the Chinese countryside, formulated his strategy of setting up, expanding agrarian bases and using these agrarian bases to encircle urban centers and to eventually conquer them. He reasoned that the urban centers harbored strong enemy forces and that consequently it was difficult for the revolution to succeed there. The countryside was a weak link in the enemy government and could be exploited for revolutionary purposes.

In Jinggangshan, Mao built up a guerrilla army and used it as the principal fighting force. In so doing, Mao deviated from the Comintern tactic of using the masses to storm the enemy barracks. In Mao's scheme, the masses were not a fighting force. They served, to use Mao's analogy, as a friendly ocean in which the fish of the guerrilla army swam. The masses were essential to the survival of the guerrilla army, but they were not supposed to do the fighting themselves. Mao's guerrilla army in Jinggangshan were forcefully reminiscent of his fictional heroes of Liangshanbo and other peasant rebels in China's past. Recall Mao's student days when he said that in order to save China he would act like the heroes of Liangshanbo. In climbing up Jinggangshan and building his guerrilla army, Mao did what he had said. Now he and his army were exactly like the heroes of Liangshanbo, residing in the remoteness of the mountains and warring against the unjust regime.

The retreat into Jinggangshan by Mao and his forces marked a turning point in the history of the CCP. From an urban-based party the CCP henceforth became a rural-based one. In the twenty plus years from 1927 to the founding of the PRC in 1949, the CCP operated mainly in the countryside. This shift from the city to the countryside suited Mao very well. Nobody in the CCP hierarchy was better equipped than Mao to lead the revolution in the Chinese countryside. It has already been noted that because of his origin, upbringing, and intellectual interests Mao had a profound knowledge of and a strong affinity with the Chinese countryside and the Chinese peasantry. As was indicated by his "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan", Mao early realized the revolutionary potential of the peasantry. Mao's knowledge of the peasantry gave him a definite advantage in organizing peasant activities in the countryside. By comparison, other leaders of the CCP such as Wang Ming and Bo Gu lacked knowledge and understanding of the peasantry and the countryside. Furthermore, indoctrinated by

Marxist-Leninist dogma in Moscow, they looked down upon the peasantry for supposedly lacking revolutionary potential.

When Mao first retreated to Jinggangshan, the Central Committee of the CCP was still in Shanghai, forced by the Kuomintang persecution to lead an underground existence. In spite of its underground existence and the remoteness of Jinggangshan, the CCP Central Committee still tried to control the activities of Mao and his army. For instance, in July 1928, the CCP Central Committee sent two emissaries to Jinggangshan. They carried the orders that Mao's army immediately abandon Jinggangshan and launch a military operation in South Hunan. "How can there be Marxism in the mountains of Chinggangshan?" they said.²¹ Mao fought against the CCP Central Committee, arguing that to abandon the Jinggangshan base would be suicidal. In spite of repeated policy interventions from the CCP Central Committee, Mao decided to keep the Jinggangshan base which in time survived and expanded. In 1928, the first soviet was established by Mao and Zhu De. In the soviet, Mao attempted his first land reform. By distributing land to the peasants, the land reform proved to be very successful in enlisting the support of the peasantry for the CCP. At this time the Jinggangshan base was the only real power base of the CCP.

At the Jinggangshan base, Mao continued his study of the peasant conditions. As his then orderly Chen Changfeng described,

Political Commissar Mao would go himself, on horseback often, because of the long distances, to carry out investigations. He would come to a place, and sit down with the peasants, and throw off his cap, and start to talk with them. And they forgot who he was, so debonair he was, and

²¹ Quoted in Han Suyin, *The Morning Deluge: Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Revolution 1893-1954*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972, p. 201.

so concerned with them. And they told him everything. He would stay for hours with them.²²

In 1932, the CCP Central Committee was moved from Shanghai to Mao's Jinggangshan base for protection. This fact indicates in one way the success of Mao's rural revolutionary strategy. From 1928 to 1932, Mao succeeded in organizing five peasant soviets and 15 revolutionary bases scattered over 74 counties.²³

Out of Jinggangshan

Chiang Kai-shek launched repeated encirclement and annihilation campaigns against the Jinggangshan base, intending to wipe out the Red Army. In the struggle against Chiang's first four campaigns, the Red Army defeated Chiang's troops by using Mao's guerrilla warfare. The first campaign started in October 1930 with a force of 100,000 men. In the decisive battles of December 27, 1930, and January 1, 1931, Chiang's troops were lured deep into the Jinggangshan area. Chiang lost more than 15,000 of his men. A top general was taken prisoner. Mao's forces also captured more than 12,000 guns. The Red Army numbered about 40,000 men.²⁴

The second campaign, begun in May 1931, was under the command of He Yingqin, Chiang's defense minister and chief of staff, with 200,000 men. Mao's army, numbering 30,000 men, again routed Chiang's forces, killing 30,000. They captured about 20,000 guns and many other military supplies.²⁵

²² Quoted in Han Suyin, *op cit.*, p. 229.

²³ See Kau Ying-mao, "Urban and Rural Strategies of the Chinese Communists". In *Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution in Asia*. Ed. John Wilson Lewis. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974, p. 260.

²⁴ See *Mao Zedong Zhuan 1893-1949*. Ed. Jin Chongji. Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1996, p. 246.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 256

The third campaign followed immediately upon the second. It was led by Chiang Kai-shek in person, with 300,000 men, in July 1931. Chiang used German and Japanese military advisers. Mao's army, numbering about 30,000 men, maneuvered ably, gliding between the armies, cutting off Chiang's forces from the rear in lightning actions, covering by night unexpected distances to appear suddenly when least expected on a flank or behind Chiang's forces. 20,000 firearms were captured, and over 18,000 men were captured. More than 30,000 were killed.²⁶

The fourth campaign, begun in June 1932, was again led by Chiang Kai-shek himself. Using 500,000 men, he initially scored a few small victories against the Red Army. These small victories by Chiang provided the 28 Bolsheviks with a pretext to attack Mao's military strategy.²⁷ They argued that Mao's guerilla tactics were outmoded and that positional warfare was the correct Marxist strategy. In August 1932, Mao was deprived of control over the Red Army. Despite this, Mao's military strategy continued to guide the Red Army. Zhou Enlai and Zhu De, who were in the front lines to direct the military operations, resisted pressure from the 28 Bolsheviks to change Mao's strategy and thwarted Chiang's fourth campaign.²⁸

Chiang's fifth campaign began in August 1933. He devoted to it vast funds, a new loan from the United States and Britain, a million troops, tanks, airplanes, and German military experts. But in the fight against Chiang's fifth campaign, the 28 Bolsheviks, following the Comintern's directives, insisted on fighting positional warfare with the numerically far superior and better equipped enemy. The result was disastrous. The Red Army was forced to abandon the

²⁶ Ibid., p. 264.

²⁷ Mao later showed his bitterness with the attack by the 28 Bolsheviks on his military strategy. See his *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967, pp. 112-113.

²⁸ See *Mao Zedong Chuan 1893-1949*. p. 303.

Jinggangshan base and to begin in October 1934 the legendary retreat called in the annals of the CCP history the Long March.²⁹

In the first stage of the Long March, from October 16, 1934 when the Red Army first started the march, to January 1935, when the Zunyi Conference of the CCP was held, the Red Army sustained heavy losses. In this stage the Red Army was reduced from about 86,000 to about 30,000.³⁰ The heavy losses were largely due to the military blunders of Li De who was in charge of the first stage of the Long March. Li De was the alias of Otto Braun, a German sent to China by the Comintern. Knowing little about military science, he ordered the Red Army to march in a lengthy straight line in the wrong direction. The lengthy straight line made the Red Army vulnerable to enemy attacks; the direction of the march caused the Red Army to encounter strong enemy forces head-on. The Red Army also carried much unnecessary baggage such as furniture and machines, which made it difficult for them to march and maneuver. Constantly harassed by enemy forces from the air and on the ground, the Red Army were deprived of much necessary rest and sleep. The Red Army also did not have adequate food supplies. Sometimes they were forced to eat the boiled leather of harness thongs and shoes. Malnutrition was widespread. The first stage of the Long March was exceedingly difficult. The Red Army was on the brink of total collapse and extermination by the end of 1934.

The Zunyi Conference of the CCP in January 1935 reorganized the leadership of the CCP and the Red Army. It put Mao in effective control of the CCP and the Red Army. After the Zunyi conference, Mao made military decisions which ensured the survival of the Red Army. First of all, Mao ordered the Red Army to march westward to Guizhou instead of eastward so as to avoid the attack of strong

²⁹ Ibid., p. 319.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 335.

enemy forces. Secondly, Mao ordered the Red Army to get rid of unnecessary baggage so that they were in a better position to march and fight. Thirdly, Mao implemented his strategy of guerilla warfare. He advocated concentrating superior forces, selecting the enemy's weaknesses, and using mobile warfare or guerilla warfare to destroy a part of the enemy's strength.

Under Mao's leadership, the Red Army continued its march. After much fighting and hardship, the Red Army reached Yanan in northwestern China in the fall of 1935. The arrival in Yanan marked the end of the Long March. The Long March was highly significant for Mao's revolutionary career. It provided Mao with an opportunity to demonstrate his extraordinary leadership skills and his unparalleled military prowess. Ross Terrill said: "The Long March had 'made' Mao as a man who joined ideas with action. It had put him on the brink of being China's most promising political leader."³¹

Mao's Military Expertise and Chinese Traditional Art of War

Mao's success in leading the Red Army from the brink of extermination to the relative safety in Yanan was partly due to his prowess in strategic and tactical warfare. Mao wrote prodigally on warfare. An examination of these writings would reveal the close ties between Mao's military expertise and Chinese traditional art of war. A full textual comparison between Mao's military writings and Chinese traditional art of war as enunciated by Sun Tzu will not be attempted here. But the following partial examination of Mao's military writings should indicate with some degree of adequacy Mao's indebtedness to Sun Tzu on the one hand and his extensive knowledge of Chinese military history on the other.

³¹ Ross Terrill, *Mao: A Biography*. New York: Harper & Row, 1980, p. 138.

When discussing the merits of strategic retreat, Mao used an example from his favorite novel *The Water Margin* to make his point:

In the novel *Shui Hu Chuan* [*The Water Margin*], the drill master Hung, challenging Lin Chung to a fight on Chai Chin's estate, shouts, "Come on! Come on! Come on!" In the end it is the retreating Lin Chung who spots Hung's weak point and floors him with one blow.³²

When illustrating the principles of strategic defence, Mao used the following example:

During the Spring and Autumn Era, when the states of Lu and Chi were at war, Duke Chuang of Lu wanted to attack before the Chi troops had tired themselves out, but Tsao Kuei prevented him. When instead he adopted the tactic of "the enemy tires, we attack" he defeated the Chi army. This is a classic example from China's military history of a weak force defeating a strong force.³³

³² Mao Zedong, *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967, p. 109.

³³ Ibid. Concerning this example, Mao cited in his work the exact account given by the ancient historian Zuo Qiuming: "In the spring the Chi troops invaded us. The Duke was about to fight. Tsao Kuei requested an audience. His neighbours said, 'This is the business of meat-eating officials, why meddle with it?' Tsao replied, 'Meat-eaters are fools, they cannot plan ahead.' So he saw the Duke. And he asked, 'What will you rely on when you fight?' The Duke answered, 'I never dare to keep all my food and clothing for my own enjoyment, but always share them with others.' Tsao said, 'Such paltry charity cannot reach all. The people will not follow you.' The Duke said, 'I never offer to the gods less sacrificial beasts, jade or silk than are due to them. I keep good faith.' Tsao said, 'Such paltry faith wins no trust. The gods will not bless you.' The Duke said, 'Though unable personally to attend to the details of all trials, big and small, I always demand the facts.' Tsao said, 'That shows your devotion to your people. You can give battle. When you do so, I beg to follow you.' The Duke and he rode in the same chariot. The battle was joined at Changshao. When the Duke was about to sound the drum for attack, Tsao said, 'Not yet.' When the men of Chi had drummed thrice, Tsao said, 'Now we can drum.' The army of Chi was routed. The Duke wanted to pursue. Again Tsao said, 'Not yet.' He got down from the chariot to examine the enemy's wheel-tracks, then

Mao listed more examples from China's military history to illustrate the principles of strategic defence:

China's military history contains numerous instances of victories won on these principles [of strategic defence]. In such famous battles as the Battle of Chengkao between the states of Chu and Han, the Battle of Kunyang between the states of Hsin and Han, the Battle of Kuantu between Yuan Shao and Tsao Tsao, the Battle of Chihpi between the states of Wu and Wei, the Battle of Yiling between the states of Wu and Shu, and the Battle of Feishui between the states of Chin and Tsin, in each case the contending sides were unequal, and the weaker side, yielding some ground at first, gained mastery by striking only after the enemy had struck and so defeated the stronger side.³⁴

Mao so frequently and so adeptly used examples from China's military history to illustrate his ideas that one inevitably comes to the conclusion that Mao's military frame of reference consisted mostly of Chinese military history. There is evidence in Mao's military writings to show that some, if not most, of Mao's military ideas were inspired by specific instances in China's military history. Note the following passage by Mao:

mounted the arm-rest of the chariot to look afar. He said, 'Now we can pursue!' So began the pursuit of the Chi troops. After the victory the Duke asked Tsao why he had given such advice. Tsao replied, 'A battle depends upon courage. At the first drum courage is aroused, at the second it flags, and with the third it runs out. When the enemy's courage ran out, ours was still high and so we won. It is difficult to fathom the moves of a great state, and I feared an ambush. But when I examined the enemy's wheel-tracks and found them criss-crossing and looked afar and saw his banners dropping, I advised pursuit.' Zuo Qiuming, quoted in Mao Zedong, *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*. pp. 109-110.

³⁴ Mao Zedong, *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*. pp. 110-111.

Should the enemy stay put in our base area, we may reverse the tactics, namely, leave some of our forces in the base area to invest the enemy while employing the main force to attack the region whence he has come and to step up our activities there, in order to induce him to withdraw and attack our main force; that is the tactic of "relieving the state of Chao by besieging the state of Wei".³⁵

The story behind the tactic of "relieving the state of Chao by besieging the state of Wei" is as follows: In 353 B.C. the state of Wei laid siege to Handan, capital of the state of Chao. The king of the state of Qi, an ally of Chao, ordered his generals Tien Qi and Sun Pin to aid Chao with their troops. Knowing that the crack troops of Wei had entered Chao and left their own territory weakly garrisoned, General Sun Pin attacked the state of Wei whose troops withdrew to defend their own country. Taking advantage of their exhaustion, the troops of Qi engaged and routed them at Kueiling. The siege of Handan was thus lifted. It is clear that Mao was inspired by this particular war in China's military history when he expounded on the aforementioned tactic.

Of all military strategists Mao almost exclusively cited Sun Tzu in his military writings. The following is just one of many examples of Mao citing Sun Tzu:

When Sun Wu Tzu [Sun Tzu] said, "Avoid the enemy when he is full of vigour, strike when he is fatigued and withdraws", he was referring to tiring and demoralizing the enemy so as to reduce his superiority.³⁶

³⁵ Ibid., p. 178.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 115. Refer to pages 116 and 238 in *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung* for more examples of Mao citing Sun Tzu to express his military ideas.

Not only did he cite Sun Tzu directly, Mao also absorbed Sun Tzu's discourse on war into his own writings. Note the following passage by Mao on deception and preparedness in war:

... it is often possible by various ruses to succeed in leading the enemy into a morass of wrong judgements and actions so that he loses his superiority and the initiative. The saying, "There can never be too much deception in war", means precisely this. What does "being caught unawares" mean? It means being unprepared. Without preparedness superiority is not real superiority and there can be no initiative either.³⁷

Compare the above passage with what Sun Tzu said on the same topic:

Thus, when able, they appear unable.
When employed, they appear useless.
When close, they appear distant.
When distant, they appear close.

They lure through advantages,
And take control through confusion.

...

They attack when the opponent is unprepared
And appear where least expected.³⁸

Mao was not only a theoretician of warfare but also a practitioner. In actual warfare Mao practised what Sun Tzu and he himself expounded. It was mentioned before that Mao used guerilla warfare to bring back the Red Army from the brink of extermination. Mao's

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 239-240.

³⁸ Sun Tzu, *The Art of Strategy*. New York: Doubleday, 1988, p. 24.

strategy of guerilla warfare closely resembles Sun Tzu's teaching on war. Note the following passage by Sun Tzu:

Thus, when the opponent is positioned, we must appear
without position.

As a result, we may focus while the opponent must divide.

Focused we may act as one, while the opponent must divide
by ten.

Therefore, we are one-united and the opponent is one
tenth.

As a result, we are numerous and the opponent is few.³⁹

In many instances of actual warfare, Mao adeptly used the various tactics expounded by Sun Tzu. In 1935 during the Long March, Mao directed the Red Army to enter Szechuan by pretending not to enter it. He made the regiments wheel and circle. No one could guess where their meandering course would lead them next. For fifteen weeks the Red Army twisted and turned and wound back on their tracks. Mao turned sharp west, crossed the Red river and went south to Yunnan; suddenly rushed east, crossed the Red river again, attacking and capturing the famous Loushan pass in one swoop. Han Suyin, noting this tour de force by Mao, said: "It was another of these deceptive, feint-and-dart, sudden pounces which Mao learned from Sun Tze's [Sun Tzu's] *Art of War* and developed extensively throughout his war-strewn years."⁴⁰ Li Zhisui, who served as Mao's doctor for more than 20 years, also noted that Mao's strategic brilliance came from Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, from Chinese history, and from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., p. 83.

⁴⁰ Han Suyin, op cit., p. 285.

⁴¹ Li Zhisui, *Mao Zedong Siren Yisheng Huiyilu (The Private Life of Mao Zedong)*. Taipei, China Times Publishing Company, 1994, p. 79.

Conclusion

From 1927 to the end of the Civil War in 1949, the CCP operations were almost exclusively confined to the countryside. The phenomenal growth of the CCP accordingly occurred in the countryside. The rural feature of the CCP had many unfavorable consequences. For one thing, the CCP cadres and the rank and file of the Red Army were predominantly recruited from among the peasantry. They had little formal education and almost no contact with the modern way of life in the cities. Their frame of reference was rural and traditional.

Mao began his revolutionary activities among the peasants in 1924. From 1924 to 1949, Mao spent more than two decades of his life in the Chinese countryside. This experience further aggravated his already limited frame of reference. During this extended period of time, his knowledge of the peasantry was likely to have increased whereas his ignorance of the city and of all the factors associated with the city was likely to have worsened. All the successes he had in the countryside validated his own conviction in his limited frame of reference. Years later in 1964, Mao referred to this period of time as his "university of the greenwoods",⁴² which indicates that Mao considered this period of time to be of great educational importance to him.

The effects of Mao's rural experiences on his frame of reference can be seen in an examination of his economic activities. All of Mao's

⁴² Mao Zedong, *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed: Talks and Letters 1956-71*. Ed. Stuart Schram. Tr. John Chinnery and Tieyun. Penguin Books, 1974, p. 213. "Greenwoods" is translated from "*lulin*". "*Lulin*" means the Robin Hood type of banditry. That Mao referred to his years in the countryside as his "university of the greenwoods" also allows us to see that he identified his revolutionary activities with those of his Liangshanbo heroes in *The Water Margin*. That he did not refer to this period as his Marxist-Leninist university indicates his lack of identification with Marxism-Leninism.

writings on economic matters prior to 1949 were concerned with agrarian economy, particularly land reform. This is so because the economy in the CCP-controlled areas was almost exclusively agrarian. Mao got to know much about the agrarian economy but little about urban or industrial economy.

In the Yanan years, the Kuomintang imposed an effective blockade on the CCP-controlled areas in spite of the military alliance between the Kuomintang and the CCP at the time. Forced to produce enough food to feed the CCP forces, Mao ordered some of his forces to cultivate land in Nanniwan. These forces succeeded in turning the formerly wild and desolate Nanniwan into a grain reservoir.

The Nanniwan venture was undertaken in a campaign style. After 1949 in the Great Leap Forward, Mao again resorted to this style in an effort to boost China's economy. He exhorted the nation to build backyard furnaces to produce iron. The result was catastrophic. This was due to his limited frame of reference. Had he expanded his frame of reference by experiencing the industrial sector of the economy, Mao would probably have acted differently during the Great Leap Forward.

Mao's rural strategy enabled him to defeat the Kuomintang and to found the PRC. But his consequent years in the Chinese countryside limited the growth of his frame of reference. This limited frame of reference would prove to be a liability for Mao and for China after 1949.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAO'S POST-1949 ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

This chapter is concerned about Mao's post-1949 economic activities. It examines how Mao used his limited frame of reference to make economic policies, particularly in the period of the Great Leap Forward. It makes the point that Mao made his economic policies largely by drawing upon his extensive military experiences and knowledge of Chinese history. Documenting the results of his economic policies, this chapter contends that Mao was not capable of leading China's economic reconstruction largely because of his limited and traditional frame of reference.

Economic Rehabilitation

On October 1, 1949, Mao proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China. The attention of the CCP turned from fighting to building. The Chinese economy was in a devastated condition, damaged by long years of war and by corruption of the Kuomintang. To build the economy was a new and formidable task facing Mao and his regime, a task he was ill-equipped for.

As was noted earlier, Mao was not familiar with the workings of the modern economy.¹ His experience with economy was only in the Chinese traditional small-scale agrarian economy. From 1927 to 1949, the CCP was operating predominantly in the countryside. The

¹ Mao himself admitted that his knowledge of industry was slight. See Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*. Vol. 2, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, p. 88.

recruiting and training of the CCP cadres were consequently done mainly in the countryside. As a result, most CCP cadres knew little about the economy, particularly the modern large-scale economy. Although many of the CCP cadres had had previous administrative experience in the CCP-controlled areas, they were novices in administrative work in the cities. Many problems in the cities needed to be addressed immediately. If unemployment and inflation were not quickly checked, the CCP would lose its credibility among the city-dwellers. Mao was very much aware of the problems that cities posed for the new regime. He declared in 1949 that the CCP would direct its main attention to the cities:

From 1927 to the present the center of gravity of our work has been in the villages.... The period for this method of work has now ended.... The center of gravity of the Party's work has shifted from the village to the city.... Attention must be given to both city and village and it is necessary to link closely urban and rural work, workers and peasants, industry and agriculture. Under no circumstances should the village be ignored and only the city given attention; such thinking is entirely wrong. Nevertheless, the center of gravity of the work of the Party and the army must be in the cities; we must do our utmost to learn how to administer and build the cities.²

From the above passage we can sense Mao's reluctant attitude toward switching the center of gravity of the CCP's work to the cities. Mao had a deep feeling of distrust toward the cities. He shared Li Dazhao's view that the cities are morally "dirty" while the villages are "clean". In 1969 he made this view very clear when he said: "If we hadn't entered the cities Chiang Kai-shek would be occupying

² Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Vol. 4. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967, p. 363.

them. *But it is also a bad thing because it caused our Party to deteriorate.*"³ It seems as though in Mao's mind the CCP entered the cities out of military necessity rather than anything else.

The Chinese economy of 1949 was by and large "capitalistic". After assuming power, Mao did not immediately set out to substitute a socialist for a capitalist economy. Instead, many capitalist elements in the economy were retained. Private ownership of businesses and of land remained. Except for the confiscation of the property of a small number of "bureaucratic monopoly capitalists" and "feudal landlords", private ownership of property largely continued. This policy had a twofold purpose: one was to enlist as much political support as possible for the new regime; the other was to utilize the expertise of capitalists to manage the economy. Mao said:

In view of China's economic backwardness, even after the country-wide victory of the revolution, it will still be necessary to permit the existence for a long time of a petty bourgeoisie and middle bourgeoisie.... This capitalist sector will still be an indispensable part of the whole national economy.⁴

It seemed as though Mao at this point in time had a judicious understanding of the Chinese economy. But Mao probably made this policy because of his understanding of Chinese politics more than the Chinese economy. Mao had always showed a very acute sense of political judgment. But in economic matters, especially in modern economic matters, Mao was severely handicapped by his limited frame of reference. His political judgment that his new regime needed political support from as wide a spectrum of people as

³ Mao Zedong, *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed: Talks and Letters 1956-71*. Ed. Stuart Schram. Tr. John Chinnery and Tieyun. Penguin Books, 1974, p. 288. Italics added.

⁴ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Vol. 4. p. 363.

possible conformed well with China's economic reality. Another factor which probably went into Mao's decision-making at this point was that Mao was not yet confident enough to introduce drastic economic policies.

Mao's diffidence at this stage, or his sense of vulnerability, was also manifested in his effort to solicit Soviet economic assistance. It should be noted that the relations between Mao and the Soviet Union had been marked by difficulties. The Soviet Union had wished to have a friendly neighbor on its southern border. Prior to the founding of the PRC in 1949, the real power-holder in China was the Kuomintang. In comparison to the Kuomintang, the CCP was only a guerilla force in the Chinese wilderness having little chance of defeating the Kuomintang. The difference between the Kuomintang and the CCP in terms of sheer strength meant that the Soviet Union courted the friendship of the former. The Soviet Union regarded the CCP as a political pawn to be manipulated according to Soviet interests and to be sacrificed if necessary. In the 1920s, the Soviet Union urged the cooperation between the CCP and the Kuomintang. The terms for the cooperation, negotiated between the Soviet Union and the Kuomintang, were unfavorable to the CCP. This ill-conceived and unequal cooperation came to an end when Chiang Kai-shek launched a bloody purge against the CCP. The CCP suffered great losses.

During World War II, "the Soviet Union had granted the Nationalist government three loans totalling \$250,000,000 to buy arms and ammunition, all of which went to the central government [the Kuomintang government] alone."⁵ In August 1945, immediately after World War II, Stalin concluded a treaty of friendship and alliance with Chiang Kai-shek, assuming that China would be controlled by

⁵ Tang Tsou, *America's Failure in China 1941-50*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963, p. 183.

the latter. A civil war ensued between the CCP and the Kuomintang. After the Kuomintang forces were pushed to the southern side of the Yangtze River, Stalin advised Mao to stop the war and urged him to keep the status quo of the CCP controlling northern China and the Kuomintang southern China. Stalin either assumed that the CCP was not powerful enough to break through the Kuomintang fortifications that they had built on the Yangtze or thought that it would be to the disadvantage of the Soviet Union to have a unified China on its southern border. As always, Mao brushed aside Stalin's advice and continued the war against the Kuomintang. In April 1949 during the civil war between the CCP and the Kuomintang, the CCP forces captured Nanjing, the capital of the Kuomintang government. The Kuomintang government was forced to retreat to Canton. Even in these circumstances, Stalin still cast his bet on Chiang Kai-shek. The Soviet ambassador was the only foreign diplomatic representative to accompany the nationalist government to Canton.⁶

Mao was well aware of the Soviet realpolitik power game. Unlike the 28 Bolsheviks, Mao was not blinded by the Soviet beacon of Marxism-Leninism or awed by Stalin's stature in the international communist movement. Mao thought of himself as being at least on an equal footing with Stalin. Once Mao complained about the unequal treatment Chinese artists rendered him. "The Chinese people had got so used to being slaves that they seemed to want to go on. When Chinese artists painted pictures of me together with Stalin, they always made me a little bit shorter, thus blindly knuckling under to the moral pressure exerted by the Soviet Union...."⁷

Following his own understanding of Chinese politics, Mao for his part played a masterful realpolitik power game with the Soviet Union as well. It was documented in Chapter Three that Mao's relationship

⁶ Ibid., p. 502.

⁷ Mao Zedong, *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed*. p. 99.

with the Comintern was marked by difficulties. This difficult relationship was a manifestation of Mao's defiance against the Soviet Union. Mao had been quite explicit in voicing his defiance at the Soviet Union. In 1936, Mao told Edgar Snow: "We are certainly not fighting for an emancipated China in order to turn the country over to Moscow!"⁸ In 1958, Mao refused Khrushchev's request that a Soviet radio station be built on Chinese territory to permit communication with Soviet nuclear-powered submarines operating in the Pacific. In refusing the request, Mao alleged that it was an insult to China's national sovereignty.⁹

On the eve of the founding of the PRC, Mao even attempted to solicit the friendship and assistance of the United States in spite of the vast "ideological differences". It could be argued that there were actually no real ideological differences between Mao and the United States. Being a master of the realpolitik game, Mao was ideologically vacuous. On August 23, 1944, Mao was interviewed by John Service, a U.S. diplomat. In the interview, Mao said that the CCP wanted to seek assistance from the U.S.. He explained that China's primary task after World War II was to build China's economy and to provide Chinese people with the basic necessities of life. He argued that the Soviet Union had suffered tremendous losses in the war and would "have their hands full with their own job of rebuilding." As a result, China could not expect the Soviet Union's help and would seek help from the United States. When Service suggested that the name "Communist" might not be reassuring to some American businessmen, Mao said that the name was misleading and that they (the CCP leaders) had thought of changing the name!¹⁰

⁸ Mao Zedong, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*. Ed. Stuart Schram. Revised and enlarged edition. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969, p. 419.

⁹ See *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*. London: Deutsch, 1974, p. 258.

¹⁰ See John S. Service, *Lost Chance in China: The World War II Dispatches of John S. Service*. Ed. Joseph W. Esherick. New York: Random House, 1974, p. 306.

Mao's overtures to the United States for friendship and assistance were not heeded by the U.S. government. He was thus forced to seek Soviet assistance despite his deeply-held antagonism for Stalin and the Soviet Union. In December 1949, two months after the founding of his new regime, Mao, who had hitherto never been abroad, personally went to the Soviet Union to seek assistance. After lengthy and laborious negotiations with Stalin, Mao "was able to obtain only partial satisfaction for the interests of his country."¹¹

The three years between 1949 and 1952 were called the "Rehabilitation Period". During this period, Mao aimed at restoring the war-damaged national economy. By 1952, the recovery was completed, with "production in all major sectors and industries restored to past peak levels of performance" and "the gross value of industrial output... grown to two and a half times that of 1949."¹² In 1953 the First Five-Year Plan was inaugurated. It was a plan modeled upon the Soviet experience. It placed "preponderant stress... on very large-scale and capital-intensive producer goods industries."¹³ Other aspects of the First Five-Year Plan were consistent with the Soviet development approach as well, such as "a highly centralized mode of command planning, a hierarchical 'one-man management' system, and a highly articulated structure of individual material incentives in industry."¹⁴

Development of heavy industry suited China's needs well in the early 1950s. The inherited industrial structure was highly tilted toward consumer goods production. Consumer goods production depends on fuel, power, metallurgical, machine-building, and chemical industries. Without the development of these heavy industries the development

¹¹ Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966, p. 235.

¹² Carl Riskin, *China's Political Economy: The Quest for Development Since 1949*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 53.

¹³ Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁴ Ibid.

of consumer goods industries could not go very far. The development of heavy industries was also beneficial to the development of agriculture. Plagued by the U.S. containment policy, China needed the development of heavy industries to satisfy its large military demand as well. Centralized planning was a rational choice in this period, too. After decades of war-induced chaos and stagnation, the Chinese economy needed the guidance of central planning.

In the countryside, the First Five-Year Plan initiated the transformation of "mutual-aid teams" to "semi-socialist" agricultural producers' cooperatives. The agricultural producers' cooperative was semi-socialist because the income of the cooperative was distributed among its members partly on the basis of the amount of land and capital which they had contributed at the time of its formation, and not merely according to their labor. This program was carried out in this period with considerable caution. "As late as July 1955 only some 15 percent of the peasant families in China belonged to such cooperatives."¹⁵

Mao's lack of the experience in the field of economy and more importantly, his sense of vulnerability, compelled him to look up to the Soviet Union for an economic model in these very early years of his regime. Coincidentally the Soviet model suited China's economic needs well at this point. By developing the Chinese economy after the Soviet model, Mao for the moment parted with his own economic frame of reference. Parting with his economic frame of reference did Chinese economy a service. In the period of 1953 to 1957 China saw healthy economic growth. The average annual growth rate of the gross domestic product was 11.3% in this period.¹⁶

¹⁵ Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*. p. 257.

¹⁶ See Zhang Fengbo, *Zhongguo Hongguan Jingji yu Zhengce* (*China's Macro-Economic Structure and Policy*). Beijing: Zhongguo Caizheng Jingji Chubanshe, 1988, p. 89. Translation mine.

China's economic progress between 1949 and 1959 should not be taken as evidence that Mao was an effective leader of economic reconstruction at this period. It could be argued that China's economic progress at this time would have been made even if Mao was not the leader. All that the war-shattered economy needed to rebound was some degree of social and political stability. The founding of the PRC provided the economy with this stability. Therefore, it would be quite inappropriate to attribute China's economic progress between 1949 to 1958 to Mao's leadership. Mao's contribution at this period, if any, was the fact he did not put his personal stamp on the country's economic policy due to his sense of vulnerability.

The Great Leap Forward

Acceleration of the Economy

Mao liked to be in total control. Parting with his frame of reference in economic policy-making meant for Mao some loss of control. It was therefore never to his real liking. As his new regime became more stabilized,¹⁷ Mao's sense of insecurity and vulnerability gradually diminished. As a result, he began to reassert his own frame of reference in making economic policies; his cautious attitude with regard to economic matters gave way to an impatient desire to reap fast results.

One of Mao's ideals was egalitarianism. Egalitarianism is frequently associated with Marxism as though Marx were its sole generator and

¹⁷ By 1955, Mao's regime had established a firm grip on the country. Land reform and the campaign against counter-revolutionaries in 1951-1952 had effectively destroyed the old Kuomintang power structure and enabled Mao's regime to extend its power to villages throughout the land. The thought reform and five-anti campaigns had established CCP dominance over the urban intelligentsia and bourgeoisie by the end of 1952. By this time, economic recovery from years of war had largely been achieved as well.

proprietor. The fact that Mao had the ideal of egalitarianism does not necessarily mean that it was transmitted to him via Marxism. His egalitarianism was likely the result of his early experiences. In his student days he was poor. He was ridiculed and looked down upon for his poverty. In China's recent past, egalitarianism was influential as well. In the mid-19th century, the Taiping peasant uprising was infused with egalitarianism. Being an avid reader and close observer of Chinese history, Mao probably knew much about the Taiping peasant uprising. It was therefore likely that Mao was influenced by the egalitarian philosophy of the Taiping uprising. The fact that the leader of the Taiping uprising Hong Xiuquan was a Christian does not invalidate the point that Mao's likely sources of egalitarianism were his personal experiences and the Taiping peasant uprising. After the establishment of the Taiping Heavenly Dynasty, a land law was made by the Taiping rebels. The land law stipulates:

No matter whether man or woman, everyone over sixteen years of age shall receive land. If there is any left, those who are fifteen and under shall receive a half share.

...

Every family in the empire shall have five hens and two sows, without exception. At the harvest the platoon-chief shall supervise the section-chief in storing away the amount of new grain needed for the twenty-five families and surrendering the rest to the public storehouse. The same applies to wheat, beans, nettle-hemp, cloth, silk, chickens, dogs and so on; it applies to money also. For under Heaven all belongs to the great family of the Heavenly Father, Supreme Lord and August God. In the empire none shall have any private property, and everything belongs to God, so that God may dispose of it. In

the great family of Heaven every place is equal, and everyone has plenty.¹⁸

It is ironic that Mao, who had the ideal of egalitarianism and wanted to apply this ideal to practice, did not practise egalitarianism when it came to how he himself lived his life. Li Zhisui depicted a Mao Zedong who lived and acted like an emperor.

In 1955, Mao began to put his ideal of egalitarianism to practice in the Chinese economy. In July, Mao made a speech calling for accelerated collectivization in the countryside. He proposed "a 100 per cent increase in the number of Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives (APC) by October 1956 as compared with an increase of about 55 per cent planned by the CC's Rural Work Department."¹⁹ Mao was concerned that continued private farming would result in a gap between the rich and the poor.

What exists in the countryside today is capitalist ownership by the rich peasants and a vast sea of ownership by individual peasants. As is clear to everyone, the spontaneous forces of capitalism have been steadily growing in the countryside in recent years, with new rich peasants have springing up everywhere and many well-to-do middle peasants striving to become rich peasants. On the other hand, many poor peasants are still living in poverty for shortage of the means of production, with some getting into debt and others selling or renting out their land. If this tendency goes unchecked, it is inevitable

¹⁸ J.C. Cheng, *Chinese Sources for the Taiping Rebellion 1850-1864*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1963, p. 40.

¹⁹ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*. Vol. 1. New York: Columbia University Press, 1974, p. 15.

that polarization in the countryside will get worse day by day.²⁰

In the cities, the same accelerated change was taking place as well. By 1956 most private enterprises had been transformed into joint state-private ventures.²¹ Joint state-private ventures meant that the former capitalists would relinquish their enterprises to the state but remain as managerial staff. They would also receive fixed interest payments for giving up ownership of their enterprises.²²

Mao's policy of accelerated change in the economic system had many unintended consequences. In the countryside there was the reduction of peasant incentives to produce. Many peasants sold or slaughtered a large number of their livestock and reduced their investment in production.²³ In the cities, "[s]upply, production, and marketing were dislocated; tried and tested managerial techniques were discarded overnight; the variety of products was reduced; business hours were cut without regard to customers' convenience."²⁴

Many leaders in Mao's regime were opposed to Mao's policy. In describing the state of uncertainty in the country that had followed the introduction of Mao's policy, Liu Shaoqi was clearly displeased:

Right now many of the capitalists are feeling disquieted, and so are the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry. More than 500 million of the 600 million people in China are in a

²⁰ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung*. Vol. V. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977, pp. 201-202.

²¹ Carl Riskin, *op cit.*, p. 95.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁴ Roderick MacFarquhar, *op cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 24.

state of disquietude and unrest. They do not know what to do and are unable to chart their own destinies.²⁵

Chen Yun, China's preeminent economist and the first-ranking of the government's vice-premiers, explicitly criticized the accelerated change taking place in the economy:

[A]s a result of so quick a change, many departments and many areas had no time to accumulate experience of bringing the enterprises of whole trades under joint state-private operation. Consequently, in the days when cymbals and drums were struck to celebrate the transformation, quite a few factories, handicraft shops, stores and transport establishments in many places were merged one after another. Among these, there were some that should not have merged, and some that could be merged but became too big in their combined size.²⁶

Zhou Enlai, China's premier, was also against accelerated change:

[W]e should, in accordance with needs and possibilities, set a reasonable rate for the growth of the national economy and place the Plan [the second Five-Year Plan] on a forward-looking and completely sound basis, to ensure a fairly balanced development for the national economy... We should set the long-term targets in a comparatively realistic way and leave it for the annual plans to make the necessary adjustments.²⁷

²⁵ Liu Shaoqi. Quoted in MacFarquhar, *ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁶ Chen Yun. Quoted in MacFarquhar, *ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁷ Zhou Enlai. In *Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1956, p. 272.

The Leap

At the same time when the accelerated collectivization took place, Sino-Soviet relations were deteriorating. After Stalin's death Mao intensified his efforts in obtaining the leadership role in the communist movement of developing countries.²⁸ In 1957 Mao went to Moscow to "gain acceptance as Khrushchev's partner in determining the world Communist political line."²⁹ But Khrushchev was determined to maintain Soviet hegemony in the world Communist movement. Mao, on the other hand, was determined to challenge this hegemony. He accused Khrushchev of following a revisionist line and dismissed him as a renegade of communism.

The deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations effectively stopped the Soviet Union in offering economic assistance to China. Soviet experts were withdrawn from China. Projects involving Soviet capital and

²⁸ Even before Stalin's death, Mao challenged his leadership position in the communist movement of developing countries. In 1946, Liu Shaoqi told Anna Louise Strong: "Mao Tse-tung's great accomplishment has been to change Marxism from a European to an Asiatic form.... China is a semi-feudal, semi-colonial country in which vast numbers of people live at the edge of starvation, tilling small bits of soil.... In attempting the transition to a more industrialized economy, China faces... the pressures... of advanced industrial lands. ... There are similar conditions in other lands of southeast Asia. The courses chosen by China will influence them all." (Quoted in Anna Louise Strong, "The Thought of Mao Tse-tung," *Amerasia*, XI, No. 6, June 1947, p. 161.) One month after the founding of the PRC, Liu Shaoqi went even further in saying: "The way which has been followed by the Chinese people... is the way which should be followed by the peoples of many colonial and semi-colonial countries in their struggle for national independence and people's democracy." (Quoted in *New China Monthly*, Vol. I, No. 2, pp. 440-441.)

²⁹ Franz Michael, "Ideology and the Cult of Mao." In *Communist China 1949-1969: A Twenty-Year Appraisal*. Ed. Frank N. Trager and William Henderson. New York: New York University Press, 1970, p. 35. Li Zhisui noted that in 1958 Mao insulted Khrushchev by receiving him by the side of his swimming pool, clad only in his swimming trunks and on top of that by inviting Khrushchev, who could not swim, to join him in the swimming pool. While Mao was swimming, Khrushchev was on a life preserver. See Li Zhisui, *Mao Zedong Siren Yisheng Huiyilu (The Private Life of Chairman Mao)*. Taipei: China Times Publishing Company, 1994, p. 251.

know-how were terminated. The deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations served as a strong catalyst to the unfolding of the Great Leap Forward. It made Mao all the more eager to challenge the Soviet hegemony. In order to effectively challenge Soviet hegemony China would have to be able to compete with the Soviet Union in economic and social development. But how to raise China to a position where she could compete with the Soviet Union? In trying to find an answer to this question, Mao went back to his own frame of reference.

In Mao's frame of reference, great things could be accomplished through military-style campaigns. It should be remembered that Mao had just spent most of the last three decades of his life in military campaigns. In this lengthy period of military campaigns Mao was enormously successful. In Yanan Mao also successfully used campaigns in economic production. The success of these campaigns gave Mao a deep conviction in the effectiveness of campaign as a work method. Now in order to achieve success in developing China's economy, Mao again resorted to the method of campaign.

In 1958 Mao launched the campaign of the Great Leap Forward despite explicit and implicit opposition from many of China's leaders. The campaign contained many irrational and illogical elements. For instance, Mao exhorted the nation to "go all out, aim high and achieve faster, better, and more economical results." The slogan was commonly known as the General Line. There was an inherent contradiction in the General Line. Trying to achieve "more and quicker" results was inconsistent with seeking "better and more economical" ones, because emphasis on quantity and speed was likely to lead to waste and inattention to quality. Using the illogical General Line as a starting point, Mao ensured the failure of the Great Leap Forward.

It was documented in Chapter Three that Mao considered the political factor to be more important than the economic factor. Mao's Great Leap Forward was a concrete expression of this thinking. In the Great Leap Forward, Mao did not seem to have paid any significant attention to the economic reality of China, which was shown in the unrealistic goals he set for the Chinese economy to achieve. For instance, Mao wanted the Chinese economy to "surpass British industrial production within fifteen years."³⁰ He also called for raising levels of production throughout the economy by 100 percent during a single year.³¹ In the area of steel production, Mao wanted China to equal or overtake the United States by 1962.³² In an effort to achieve these unrealistic goals, Mao relied on politics. More specifically, he relied on the political mobilization of the masses. Mao had achieved great and improbable military victories through the political mobilization of the masses. Now he approached the problems of peacetime economic construction in the manner and spirit in which he had undertaken military campaigns. The whole nation were mobilized in the Great Leap Forward.

In order to increase the output of iron and steel, Mao called on the nation to build backyard iron- and steel-casting furnaces. Answering Mao's call, China largely turned into an iron-steel industry. For a time, it seemed as though every family was a small iron-steel mill. In the first nine months of the Great Leap Forward "no fewer than 7.5 million new factories and workshops were set up."³³ This number may serve to indicate the smallness of scale of these enterprises.

³⁰ Michael Gasster, *China's Struggle to Modernize*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972, p. 115.

³¹ See *An Economic Profile of Mainland China*. By Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968, p. x.

³² See MacFarquhar, op cit., Vol. 2, p. 90.

³³ Carl Riskin, op cit., p. 125.

The backyard furnace campaign had many adverse consequences. Since most of the backyard furnaces were built crudely and used crude technology, they "have produced iron and steel that were often inadequate for industrial purposes."³⁴ This meant tremendous waste of not only manpower but also precious raw materials. The backyard furnace campaign also clogged China's overburdened transportation system. The focus on producing iron and steel led to the neglect of other sectors of the economy. For instance, the mobilization of a large number of rural population to engage in the iron and steel movement resulted in the neglecting of harvesting work in 1958, so that "the autumn crop was not entirely brought in."³⁵ The following is an account by Albert Belhomme, an American working in a Chinese factory during the Great Leap Forward. His account throws some light on the irrationality of the Great Leap Forward.

We [factory workers] were told at a meeting in our factory in September 1958 that a country without steel was like a man without bones. So, to become strong, we must produce more steel. With that, we were ordered to build small ovens in which we would make iron that would be sent to bigger plants to be refined into steel.

This not only meant that we had to cut back on manufacturing paper at our mill, but as far as I could see, it put a terrible strain on the whole economy. Trains, trucks, and even hand-drawn carts were diverted to transporting bricks, coal, and iron ore for the campaign. People were taken off their jobs and put to work at the ovens. My wife and other women were given the task of cracking coal and ore with a cast-iron hammer, working twelve hours a day. About five hundred peasants were

³⁴ Michael Gasster, *op cit.*, p. 120.

³⁵ Carl Riskin, *op cit.*, p. 126.

brought into our factory to help handle the furnaces. Many burned themselves badly. Besides, they should have been repairing dikes and irrigation ditches out in the country, as peasants do between harvests. I think that the floods that came later could have been avoided if the dikes hadn't been neglected.³⁶

The account by the editors of *Beijing Review* of their experiences in attempting to produce steel reveals the flippant disregard for technology of the Great Leap Forward.

In response to the government's call for a nationwide effort to push forward steel production, we too turned to making steel in our own courtyard. Everybody lent a hand. In no time, some brought in broken pans, pots and kettles, others contributed old bricks and limestone, still others turned in all sorts of odds and ends. In a matter of hours a reverberatory puddling furnace, Chinese style, was built and trial production started within a day. The only person in the group who could claim some technical knowhow was a young man who had visited several office-run furnaces before our furnace went into operation.³⁷

The backyard furnace campaign was a good illustration of Mao's anachronism in using his traditional and limited frame of reference to cope with the modern economic construction.

In the countryside Mao pushed for the forming of communes. Among other things, the commune experiment was Mao's way of showing the Soviet Union that China had a new weapon as powerful as the Soviet satellite. This can be seen from the name of Mao's pilot

³⁶ Quoted in Stanley Karnow, *Mao and China: From Revolution to Revolution*. New York: The Viking Press, 1972, p. 102.

³⁷ *Beijing Review*. No. 34, 1958, p. 3.

commune--- the Sputnik Federated Cooperative.³⁸ The forming of communes in the countryside seemed to be a giant step away from the Chinese traditional family-oriented rural economy, but for Mao the idea of commune was deeply rooted in Chinese history. In 1958 Mao said:

During the period of the Three Kingdoms, there was a person named Zhang Lu. He provided free food to people. All people could eat in restaurants without payment. ... He did this for thirty years. People were all happy with this system. This system was a socialist system. Judging by this, socialism existed in China long ago.

...

The popular medical movement practised by Zhang Lu was somewhat like the free medical care that our communes provide to people. ... But Zhang Lu's free food in restaurants was the most interesting. It was the precedent of our communes' public canteen. Zhang Lu's practice was about sixteen hundred years ago, but the mode of production, consumption, and mentality of the poor peasants and lower-middle peasants are still more or less the same.³⁹

The above passage again clearly showed Mao's traditional frame of reference. It showed that Mao's understanding of communism was in terms of China's past practice of philanthropy. The above passage also revealed how outmoded his sense of the zeitgeist was. He seemed to assume that since the mode of production, consumption,

³⁸ In 1959, the Tiananmen Square was enlarged, which was probably Mao's attempt to compete with the Soviet Union to build the biggest square on earth. See Li Zhisui, *op cit.*, p. 213.

³⁹ Mao Zedong. Quoted in Xiao Yenzhong, "Mao Zedong Wannian Zhengzhi Lunliguan Shumiao (A Sketch of Mao Zedong's Outlook of Political Ethics in his Later Years)." In *Wannian Mao Zedong (Mao Zedong in his Later Years)*. Ed. Xiao Yenzhong. Beijing: Chunqiu Chubanshe, 1989, pp. 261. Translation mine.

and mentality of the Chinese poor and lower-middle peasants in the twentieth century remained the same as those of the eighth century what they needed remained the same. He did not seem to have realized that change in the outside world would change what the twentieth-century peasants needed. The fact is that in the twentieth-century China there were both scarcity of resources and overpopulation. These two factors would not allow any experiment with communism, for communism is based, according to Marx, partly on the abundance of resources.⁴⁰ Also the twentieth-century economy became highly interdependent. It was no longer self-contained, as it was in Zhang Lu's time.

The commune experiment, which was a form of communism in rural China, for a time deprived the peasants of nearly all private property. Everything belonged to the commune. Many communes even practised the principle of distribution in a higher phase of communist society--- from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs. This practice was out of touch with reality. Many peasants were reluctant to contribute to the commune their abilities, but eager to satisfy their needs. Because of the scarcity of resources in rural China, those communes practising the principle of from whom according to his ability and to whom according to his needs soon went bankrupt. Only days after the introduction of this

⁴⁰ Marx said: "In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly -- only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" *Essential Writings of Karl Marx*. Selected by David Caute. New York: Collier Books, 1967, p. 234. When Mao talked about Zhang Lu's experiment with communism, he clearly had in mind the higher phase of communist society in which the distribution principle of "To each according to his needs" was observed.

distribution practice, shops owned by the communes did not have a single item of merchandise left.⁴¹

Under the commune system, peasants were mobilized between harvests to work on water conservation projects. This practice had its precedent in Chinese history. Chinese peasants have from time immemorial been mobilized for irrigation and flood control purposes. But during the Great Leap Forward, too many unnecessary projects were undertaken and too many reservoirs and irrigation ditches were shoddily constructed. There was great waste of manpower. Many of the shoddily constructed reservoirs and irrigation ditches later proved to be disastrous when floods came.⁴²

The irrationality of the Great Leap Forward can also be seen from the campaigns for close planting and deep plowing. The amount of available land could not be greatly increased, but if two stalks of grain could be raised where one grew before, then grain production could be doubled. Obviously close planting did not work. On the contrary, it led to crop failures. The idea behind deep plowing was that it would bring up the supposedly richer soils which had not been deprived of their nutrients by centuries of cultivation. The usual result was to turn under the topsoil on which the peasant had expended his fertilizer and to turn up infertile subsoils.⁴³

Mao's mobilization of mass labour in the Great Leap Forward was accompanied by his denunciation of experts. Mao based his denunciation of experts on his theory of the uselessness of learning:

⁴¹ The above account is based on the description by the author's father of the commune experiment in Yichang prefecture, Hubei Province. The author's father worked as a government official in rural Hubei in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

⁴² See Stanley Karnow, *op cit.*, pp. 96-97.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

In Chinese history none of those who came first in the highest imperial examinations were of any good use. Li Bai and Du Fu were neither successful in the imperial examinations nor members of the Imperial Academy. Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan were only partly successful in the imperial examinations. Wang Shifu, Guan Hanqing, Luo Guanzhong, Pu Songlin, and Cao Xueqin were neither successful in the imperial examinations nor members of the Imperial Academy. Only two emperors in the Ming Dynasty had some achievements. They were Ming Taizu and Ming Chengzu. Ming Taizu was illiterate; Ming Chengzu was barely literate. After the intellectuals came to power in the reign of Jia Qing, the country was not governed well. Intellectuals could not make good emperors. ... Zhu Chongzhi did not attend primary school or high school or university. Confucius came from a poor peasant's family. He herded goats and never went to university.⁴⁴

Mao's denunciation of experts effectively excluded them from making constructive suggestions concerning the Great Leap Forward. Their exclusion contributed to the irrationality of many activities during the Great Leap Forward. In line with Mao's denunciation of experts, party cadres, many of whom knew relatively little about industry or agriculture, largely took over the responsibilities which had been discharged by experts. Those experts who still remained on the job were compelled by political pressure to alter scientific standards and criteria. Party cadres told statisticians that it was their political duty to produce figures which would encourage the masses and spur them on to greater efforts. Consequently, statistical figures during the Great Leap Forward were mostly bloated.

⁴⁴ Mao Zedong. Quoted in Xiao Yenzhong, *op cit.*, pp. 257-258. Translation mine.

The adverse economic consequences of the Great Leap Forward soon made themselves felt. By spring 1959 China began to experience food shortages.⁴⁵ The structural imbalances caused by the Great Leap Forward, together with bad weather, resulted in bad harvests for three years in a row from 1959 to 1961. "Official statistics put the harvests for the three years 1959-61 at 170, 143.5, and 147.5 million metric tons respectively. The 1960 figure is only 72 per cent of that of 1958 (200 million metric tons)."⁴⁶ The three years' consecutive bad harvests caused a severe famine throughout China. Malnutrition was widespread; millions of people starved to death.⁴⁷ The famine was only one aspect of the fiasco of the Great Leap Forward. Another serious consequence was that the Great Leap Forward "cost China almost a decade of economic growth."⁴⁸ The growth rate of the GNP in 1960 and 1961 were respectively -33.5% and -10.0%.⁴⁹

With his traditional frame of reference, Mao considered his power to be absolute and his decisions not to be challenged. This concept of power was partially responsible for the Great Leap Forward. Before Mao launched the Great Leap Forward the Chinese economic bureaucracy had been considering the second Five-Year Plan. As early as September 1956, Liu Shaoqi, in an address before the Eighth Congress of the CCP, had described the plan in general terms. It envisioned the continued development of heavy industry, relatively

⁴⁵ See Carl Riskin, op cit., p. 126.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 127.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 128. Jasper Becker, who is the Beijing bureau chief of *The South China Morning Post*, recently published *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine*, detailing the horrors of the Great Leap Forward. "At the larger, horrific center of Mr. Becker's account is the widespread resort among the Chinese people to that most sickening form of desperation: cannibalism, the selling of human flesh in the market, the swapping of children so people could use them for food without committing the additional sin of eating their own." See Richard Bernstein, "Horrors of a Hidden Chinese Famine." *The New York Times*, February 5, 1997, B9.

⁴⁸ Carl Riskin, op cit., p. 133.

⁴⁹ Zhang Fengbo, op cit., p. 67.

high development of light industry, and increases over the five-year period of one-quarter or more in wages and in the income of the peasant population.⁵⁰ In other words, relatively more consumer goods were to be made available, and standards of living were to be raised substantially. The congress was also addressed by Chen Yun. "We must be prudent and practical," he said, "go forward slowly, gather experiences, push ahead gradually."⁵¹ But Mao brushed aside the second Five-Year Plan and the dissenting views of other leaders and pushed forward with his Great Leap Forward. Had he had a different frame of reference and had he been willing to share power with others, Mao would probably have listened to the opinions of other leaders and the Great Leap Forward would probably have been averted.

Mao's arbitrary decision-making style was clearly reminiscent of that of China's past emperors. Marshal He Long recognized Mao's resemblance to China's past emperors when he sarcastically voiced his displeasure at the Great Leap Forward: "Hunan is the home of our emperor. It won't do to bungle things here."⁵²

Conclusion

The transition from waging war to economic construction was a big test for Mao. All indicators show that he failed this test. Mao himself admitted his failure in his talk with Britain's Field Marshal Montgomery: "We had plenty of experiences in war, but no experience in industrial and agricultural construction. Consequently we made a lot of mistakes."⁵³ The reason for his failure lay in his

⁵⁰ See O. Edmund Clubb, *Twentieth-Century China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964, pp. 353-354.

⁵¹ Quoted in Edward E. Rice, *Mao's Way*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972, p. 160.

⁵² He Long. Quoted in John Gittings, "Reversing PLA Verdicts." *Far Eastern Economic Review*. LXI, July 25, 1968, p. 193.

⁵³ Mao Zedong. Quoted in Li Zhisui, *op cit.*, p. 374.

limited frame of reference. Deeply immersed in Chinese tradition and without knowledge of the modern economic life Mao was not competent enough to tackle the formidable problem of building China's economy. In his impatient efforts to solve this problem Mao reached to his own past experiences as well as to China's past experiences for inspiration and reference for his economic policies. The fact of the matter is that neither in his own experiences nor in China's past experiences could he find a good solution to this problem. In trying to build China's economy Mao was reminiscent of Don Quixote, battling something of which he did not have a clear sense.

CHAPTER SIX

MAO'S POWER STRUGGLE

This chapter looks at Mao's power struggle against Peng Dehuai and Liu Shaoqi. It documents how Mao persecuted the two prominent communist leaders. In so doing, the chapter makes the point that his inability to share power and his intolerance of challenges to his authority were in line with the Chinese traditional notion of absolute power for the ruler. It also points out that Mao's ruthless effectiveness in persecuting Peng and Liu was partly due to his extensive knowledge of court intrigues in Chinese history and partly due to his identification with cruel emperors of China's past such as the First Emperor Qin Shi Huang. By examining Mao's power struggles, the chapter reveals Mao's traditional frame of reference from another angle.

A Monk Under the Umbrella

One unusual method of expression by the Chinese is a two-part allegorical saying, of which the first part, always stated, is descriptive, while the second part, frequently unstated, carries the message. Mao once used this method to describe himself. On December 10, 1970, while receiving Edgar Snow, Mao said that he was "*hesang dasan*". "*Hesang dasan*" is the first part of the two-part saying "*hesang dasan, wufa wutian*". Literally translated, the saying means "monk under the umbrella, no hair and no heaven". Since "*fa*", the Chinese character for "hair", is pronounced the same as "law", the allegorical saying should be translated as "monk under the umbrella,

no law and no heaven".¹ By saying that he was a "monk under the umbrella", Mao was stating his view that he was not restricted by anything and that he enjoyed absolute power. But Snow did not get Mao's unstated message. As a result, he misinterpreted what Mao said. Snow thought that Mao was saying that he was "not a complicated man, but really very simple."²

It is important to understand what Mao said of himself here, for it throws insight on Mao's notion of power and on how he handled people who challenged his power. As the allegorical saying made clear, Mao considered his power to be absolute and not to be challenged. This notion of absolute power was in line with the Chinese traditional concept of imperial power. Pye noted that "[i]n Chinese culture authority was presumed to be monolithic...."³ Mao's notion of absolute power was also expressed when he identified himself with prominent emperors in China's past. He once told Andre Malraux, a French writer and statesman, that he considered himself to be the heir of the last great emperors of the sixteenth century.⁴ On other occasions, he compared himself to Qin Shi Huang and to Tang Taizong.⁵

Dismantling Peng Dehuai's Challenge

Considering himself an emperor and believing that his power was absolute, Mao did not tolerate those who posed even the slightest challenge to his power and authority. Marshal Peng Dehuai was an

¹ This is the standard translation of the allegorical saying.

² Edgar Snow, *The Long Revolution*. New York: Random House, 1972, p. 175.

³ Lucian W. Pye, *Mao Tse-tung: The Man in the Leader*. New York: Basic Books, 1976, p. 79.

⁴ See Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978, p. 558.

⁵ See Lucian Pye, op cit., p. 63. Also see Li Zhisui, *Mao Zedong Siren Yisheng Huiyilu (The Private Life of Chairman Mao)*. Taipei: China Times Publishing Company, 1994, p. 64.

outspoken man. His outspokenness got him in trouble with Mao. In 1957, he questioned Mao's decision to have a song-and-dance ensemble at Zhongnanhai, the compound where Mao lived. He compared the ensemble to a harem and accused Mao of behaving like an emperor indulging in pleasure.⁶ During the Great Leap Forward, Peng made various trips to the Chinese countryside to inspect the living conditions of the peasants. What he saw was the deteriorating living conditions of the peasants. He saw serious food shortages, hungry babies and children, and even starvation.⁷ He was determined to voice his concern to Mao about people's plight and about the Great Leap Forward, as can be seen in the following poem of his:

Grain scattered on the ground, and potato leaves withered;
Strong young people have left to make steel.
Only children and old women reap the crops,
How can they pass the coming year?
Allow me to raise my voice for the people!⁸

Peng raised his voice for the people at the Lushan conference of July 1959. The conference was the enlarged conference of the CCP Politburo. It opened with an address from Mao. In his address, Mao positively evaluated the Great Leap Forward, proclaiming that it had achieved great success. He also pointed out that there were a few problems. The main message of the address was that there should not be any doubt about the great achievements of the Great Leap Forward.⁹ Peng either did not get or ignored Mao's message, for Peng subsequently criticized the Great Leap Forward:

⁶ Li Zhisui, op cit., p. 90.

⁷ See Jurgen Domes, *Peng Te-huai: The Man and the Image*. London: C. Hurst & Company, 1985, p. 86.

⁸ Peng Dehuai, quoted in Jurgen Domes, *ibid.*, p. 83.

⁹ See Li Zhisui, op cit., p. 296.

The commune of Chairman Mao's native village increased production last year, but its figures of increase, in fact, were not as high as reported. I went there to find out the truth, which was only an increase of 16 per cent. I also asked comrade Chou Hsiao-chou. He told me that this commune had increased its production only by 14 per cent, with much assistance and loans from the state. The Chairman has also visited this commune. I asked the Chairman what was his finding. He said he had not talked about the matter. In my opinion, he had.¹⁰

Peng thus countered Mao's claim that the Great Leap Forward had achieved great successes. Besides, he was implying that Mao had lied to him. With regard to the question of who was responsible for the fiasco of the Great Leap Forward, Peng again pointed his finger at Mao. "Everybody is responsible for the mistakes committed during the campaign. Everybody had a share of the responsibility, including Comrade Mao Tse-tung."¹¹ Although Peng was saying that everybody was responsible, the brunt of his attack was at Mao. The Chinese like this roundabout way of pointing out the guilty party, particularly when the guilty party was somebody in high position.

Faced with such criticism, Mao again addressed the conference on July 10. In his address, he emphasized the need for party unity and for the uniformity of thinking. He reiterated his view that the Great Leap Forward had achieved great success and that mistakes, when compared to success, were only miniscule.¹² Mao's address was clearly a warning for those who criticized him and his Great Leap Forward. His message was loud and clear: he wanted criticism of the Great Leap Forward to stop.

¹⁰ Peng Dehuai, quoted in Jurgen Domes, *op cit.*, pp. 89-90.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹² Li Zhisui, *op cit.*, p. 300.

But straightforward as he was, Peng continued his criticism. On July 14, Peng had a letter delivered to Mao. The letter was later known throughout the country as "the ten-thousand-word letter". Peng's letter was a systematic statement of his views about the Great Leap forward. In the letter, Peng offered a negative assessment of the Great Leap Forward which, it should be reminded, was the opposite of Mao's assessment in the opening address of the Lushan conference. Peng wrote:

We have not sufficiently understood the socialist laws of planned and proportionate development, nor have we implemented the policy of walking on two legs in practical work in a number of fields. We have not handled the problems of economic construction in so successful a way as we dealt with the political problems of shelling Chinmen [Jinmen], and of quelling the Tibetan revolt. On the other hand, the objective situation is that our country is poor and blank (there are still a number of people who do not have enough to eat. Last year, there was an average of only 18 feet of cotton cloth per person, enough for a shirt and two pairs of pants). The people urgently demand a change of the present condition.¹³

It should be pointed out that the successes of shelling Jinmen and quelling the Tibetan revolt cited above by Peng were achieved directly under his leadership as the Minister of Defence. By juxtaposing his own successes with Mao's failure in economic construction, Peng intentionally or unintentionally portrayed himself to be better than Mao. With his keen sensitivity, Mao probably grasped this comparison between himself and Peng, which he probably took as an affront to his imperial authority.

¹³ Peng Dehuai, quoted in Jurgen Domes, *op cit.*, p. 92.

In the letter, Peng directly criticized the slogan advanced by Mao:

In the view of some comrades, putting politics in command could be a substitute for everything.... Putting politics in command is no substitute for economic principles, much less for concrete measures in economic work. Equal importance must be attached to putting politics in command and to effective measures in economic work; neither should be overstressed or neglected.¹⁴

However truthful Peng's letter was, Mao did not take it well. He quickly struck back at Peng. On July 17, Mao distributed copies of the letter to all conference participants and asked them to discuss the letter. The distribution of Peng's letter meant that Mao was not willing to discuss the letter with Peng privately. More significantly, as far as Peng was concerned, the distribution of the letter meant that Mao was going to use the letter to punish him. Mao liked to follow what is called the mass line to dislodge his enemy from power. Peng apparently realized the serious situation he was in, for he went to Mao and said: "The letter was for you only. Why did you distribute it to all conference participants?" In reply, Mao quibbled: "You did not tell me not to distribute it to all conference participants."¹⁵ Mao's reply was indicative of Mao's devious character. Instead of answering Peng in an open and aboveboard manner, Mao resorted to a trivial matter of technicality. Mao clearly knew that Peng's letter was intended for his reading only and that there was no need for Peng to explicitly indicate this. By publicizing a private letter without prior consultation with Peng, Mao violated the most basic principle of letter exchange, that is, trust.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁵ See Li Zhisui, *op cit.*, p. 303. Translation mine.

From July 17th on, the Lushan conference centered on Peng's letter. On July 23, Mao again addressed the plenum of the conference. This time Mao was not merely giving warnings. He was giving threats:

[S]ome people who will not give up their point of view, so they just procrastinate - one year, two years, three years, five years. It won't do if you can't listen to strange ideas. One should get into the habit of listening. I say we should toughen our scalps and listen. At the worst they will curse three generations of your ancestors. ... If people don't attack me, I won't attack them. If people attack me, I will certainly attack them. They attack me first, I attack them later. This principle I have never abandoned down to the present time. Now I have learnt to listen, toughen my scalp and listen for one or two weeks and then counter-attack.¹⁶

Mao even threatened to have a civil war if criticism of him continued:

But if we do ten things and nine are bad, and they are all published in the press, then we will certainly perish, and will deserve to perish. In that case, I will go to the countryside to lead the peasants to overthrow the government. If those of you in the Liberation Army won't follow me, then I will go and find a Red Army, and organize another Liberation Army. But I think the Liberation Army would follow me.¹⁷

After Mao's speech, the conference participants began to attack Peng and his letter. Peng was accused at the conference of following the

¹⁶ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong Unrehearsed: Talks and Letters 1956-71*. Ed. Stuart Schram. Tr. John Chinnery and Tieyun. Penguin Books, 1974, p. 137.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

rightist line.¹⁸ This accusation should not be taken lightly. Following the rightist line was a serious crime. Being charged with this crime usually meant not only the end of one's political career but also imprisonment and possible death.

On August 2, 1959, only three days after the Lushan conference, the Eighth Plenum of the Eighth CCP Central Committee was convened. The Central Committee was, on paper at least, the highest political institution in the PRC. Any official verdict on Peng had to pass the Central Committee. The Eighth Plenum of the Eighth CCP Central Committee was convened to pass a verdict on Peng. It was only a formal exercise. Peng's verdict was at the discretion of Mao.

Mao opened the plenum with a speech. In the speech he set a tone for the plenum and passed a general verdict on Peng:

At the Lushan conference, it was not a matter of combatting the leftist line; it was rather a matter of fighting the rightist line. There were right opportunists waging fierce attacks on the Party, on the leading organs of the Party, on the cause of the people, and on the dynamic socialist cause of 600 million people.¹⁹

On August 16, Mao commented on a document circulating in the plenum: "The struggle at Lushan was a class struggle. It was the continuation of the life-and-death struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat that had been going on in the past ten years of socialist revolution."²⁰

Mao thus condemned Peng to the enemy status. Four days later, the plenum passed a resolution on Peng. It condemned the anti-Party

¹⁸ See Li Zhisui, *op cit.*, p. 303.

¹⁹ Mao Zedong, quoted in Li Zhisui, *ibid.*, p. 305. Translation mine.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 307. Translation mine.

clique headed by Peng and called for his removal from his position as Minister of Defence and First Vice-Chairman of the CCP Central Committee's Military Commission. Peng was then exiled, separated from his wife and family, put into prison, and struggled against by the masses. He died in 1974.

Persecuting Liu Shaoqi

Liu's Invaluable Service to Mao

While Mao swiftly dismantled what he perceived to be a challenge to his authority from Peng, it took him considerably longer time to dislodge Liu Shaoqi from power. When the PRC was founded in 1949, Liu was made the second ranking vice-chairman of the new government. Partly because of his extraordinary ability to organize the CCP and partly because of his good relationship with Mao during the first few years of the PRC, Liu's prestige and power in the government, particularly in the CCP hierarchy, rose rapidly. The First National People's Congress in September 1954 elected Liu chairman of the Standing Committee of the Congress. When the Fourth Plenum of the Seventh Central Committee of the CCP was convened on February 6, 1954, Mao was on vacation. It was Liu that served as Mao's representative and delivered the politburo's report.

It is probable that Mao trusted Liu during the first few years of the PRC, believing him to be loyal to him. Mao had reason to trust him. Liu rendered "invaluable service to Mao" during the Yanan years when Mao was engaged in a struggle for power and for ideological supremacy with Wang Ming.²¹ Mao's lack of training in Marxism-Leninism was made up by Liu, who had received formal ideological training in Moscow. Partly because of Liu's help, Mao emerged from

²¹ See Li Tien-min, *Mao's First Heir-Apparent Liu Shao-chi*. Taipei: Institute of International Relations, 1975, pp. 91-92.

the power and ideological struggle victorious. The Seventh Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee of the CCP, held in April 1945 in Yanan, officially validated Mao's victory. The resolution of "On Certain Historical Problems", adopted by the plenum, contained the following words:

In the process of its struggles the party has produced its own leader Comrade Mao Tse-tung. Representing the proletariat and the people of China, Comrade Mao Tse-tung has creatively applied the supreme wisdom of mankind --- the scientific theories of Marxism-Leninism --- to China, a big semi-colonial country with the peasantry as its major masses, having opposition to imperialism and feudalism as its direct mission.²²

In the Seventh Congress of the CCP, held three days after the Seventh Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee, Liu gave a report on the revision of the party constitution. Part of the report is as follows:

... our party is now a party in possession of its own great leader. This leader is the organizer of our party and of the modern Chinese revolution --- Comrade Mao Tse-tung. Our Comrade Mao Tse-tung is the representative of our courageous proletariat and the outstanding representative of the superior tradition of our great nation. He is a greatly talented and creative Marxist. He has combined the highest form of human thought --- Marxism --- with the concrete implementation of the Chinese revolution....

Our Comrade Mao Tse-tung is not only the greatest revolutionary and politician in the history of China but also the greatest theoretician and scientist in the history of China. He has not only the courage to lead the party and all the people to take up a

²² Quoted in Li Tien-min, *ibid.*, p. 93.

world-shaking battle but also the profoundest understanding of theory and the greatest courage in matters of theory. In theoretical matters he boldly creates and has discarded those individual principles and individual conclusions in Marxism that are out-dated or unsuitable for the concrete environment of China, replacing them with new principles and new conclusions suitable to the historical environment that is new and Chinese.²³

For Mao, who lacked training in Marxist theory as compared to his rival Wang Ming, what Liu said was probably music to his ear. The Party Constitution, adopted at the Seventh Congress, officially enshrined "the Thought of Mao Tse-tung" as the guiding principles of the Party's work:

The CCP takes as the guiding principles of all its work the integrated thought of Marxist theories and the practical experience of the Chinese revolution --- the Thought of Mao Tse-tung.²⁴

The inclusion of "the Thought of Mao Tse-tung" in the CCP Constitution firmly established Mao's supreme power and position in the CCP. Liu was instrumental in securing "the Thought of Mao Tse-tung" in the Party Constitution. Liu's "invaluable service" earned him Mao's trust, which was part of the reason why Liu Shaoqi's political fortune was so good in the first few years of the PRC. But by 1956, Mao's trust of Liu seemed to be shaken, for in February of the same year the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was convened, in which Khrushchev gave a report denouncing Stalin. Long viewed as the Stalin of China, Mao was prompted by this event to question Liu's loyalty to him.²⁵

²³ Liu Shaoqi. Quoted in Li Tien-min, *ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

²⁵ Refer to Li Zhisui, *op cit.*, p. 172.

Testing Liu's Loyalty

To find out if Liu was loyal to him, Mao played a political trick on Liu. In the summer of 1956, Mao mentioned to a few top leaders that he wanted to resign from the position of president of China and asked them to discuss the matter.²⁶ On September 15, 1956, the Eighth Congress of the CCP was convened. Prior to the Congress, Mao asked Liu and Deng Xiaoping to handle the preparatory work.²⁷ In the meantime, Mao stayed in the resort town of Beidaihe, which made it difficult for Liu and Deng to consult him on the details of their preparatory work. In the congress, Liu delivered the political report. In the report, he emphasized the importance of collective leadership, economic development, opposition to personality cult, and being practical and realistic. He had the following to say about collective leadership:

In order to bring the Party's role of leadership as much in line as possible with objective realities, to facilitate the summing up of the experience and opinions of the masses and reduce the possibility of making mistakes, Party organizations at all levels must without exception adhere to the Party's principle of collective leadership and broaden democratic life within the Party. All important questions must be thoroughly discussed by the proper collective bodies before decisions are taken, and argument and debate on diverse viewpoints must be allowed without restraint.... Every leader must be good at listening patiently to and taking into careful consideration opinions contrary to his own, and resolutely approve opposite views if reasonable, or whatever is reasonable in them; he must continue to work amicably with and never turn his back

²⁶ Ibid., p. 171.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 172.

on any comrade who, prompted by the correct motives and following normal procedure, may have put forward an opinion contrary to his own.²⁸

In the congress, Deng Xiaoping delivered a report on the revision of the CCP Constitution. The new constitution adopted by the Eighth Congress omitted the reference to the Thought of Mao Zedong being the guiding principles of all the work of the CCP. This omission was significant, for it indicated either an actual decline of Mao's authority in the CCP or an attempt by Liu and Deng to erode Mao's authority in the CCP. Whatever it was, it seemed to have confirmed the suspicion in Mao's mind that Liu and Deng were disloyal to him.

Mao was angry with Liu and Deng. A few days after the Eighth Congress, Mao vented his anger by severely scolding Luo Ruiqing and Wang Dongxing who were in charge of Mao's security. Mao blamed them for reporting every detail of Mao's security to Liu Shaoqi.²⁹ Mao was apparently on guard against Liu. He did not want Liu to know too much about what he did and where he went.

It should be noted that in the Eighth Congress of the CCP Liu Shaoqi also took the position that class contradiction and class struggle had been basically resolved in China. In his political report, Liu said:

That tool of foreign imperialism --- the bureaucrat-comprador bourgeoisie --- has been eliminated as a class on the mainland of China.

Except in a few localities, the feudal landlords have also been eliminated as a class. The rich peasants are also being

²⁸ Liu Shaoqi, "Political Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China". in *Communist China 1955-1959: Policy Documents with Analysis*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962, p. 200.

²⁹ Li Zhisui, op cit., p. 175.

eliminated as a class. Landlords and rich peasants who used to exploit the peasants are being reformed; they are making a fresh start in life and becoming people who live by their own work.

The national bourgeois elements are in the process of being transformed from exploiters into working people."³⁰

Regarding to international conditions, Liu held the view that the world was characterized by peace:

... since the Second World War the forces of socialism, national independence, democracy and peace have grown to an unprecedented extent, whereas the policy pursued by the imperialist aggressive bloc for active expansion, for opposing peaceful co-existence and for preparing a new world war, has become increasingly unpopular. In these conditions, the world situation cannot but lead to a relaxation of tension; lasting world peace is beginning to become a possibility.³¹

Liu's views concerning collective leadership, personality cult, class conflict, and international peace were similar to those of Khrushchev as enunciated at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Even some of the terminology were the same. In the 1950s, Mao was regarded as the Stalin of China. In spite of the many misgivings Mao personally had about Stalin, Mao was against Khrushchev's attacks on Stalin at the 20th Congress. If Stalin could be attacked, so could he.³² Now that Liu echoed Khrushchev at the Eighth Congress of the CCP, Mao probably felt that Liu was attacking him, just as Khrushchev attacked Stalin.

³⁰ Liu Shaoqi, "Political Report". op cit., p. 165.

³¹ Ibid., p. 193.

³² Li Zhisui, op cit., p. 111.

The First Battle Against Liu

To combat Liu, Mao decided to launch a rectification campaign in 1957 within the CCP hierarchy where Liu's prestige and authority were high. Ostensibly, the focus of the campaign was subjectivism, sectarianism, and bureaucratism. Mao tended to use these esoteric -isms as a disguise to fight something or somebody more concrete. This roundabout style was in line with the Chinese tradition of avoiding direct confrontation.

On February 27, 1957, Mao convened a meeting of the Supreme State Conference. In the meeting he gave a speech entitled "On Correctly Handling Contradictions Among the People". The fundamental position Mao took in this speech was that class contradictions and class struggle do continue to exist. This position put Mao in virtual opposition to Liu's views as expressed in his political report at the Eighth Congress of the CCP. This speech was Mao's signal to the participants of the rectification campaign that Liu, by expressing the views that class contradictions and class struggle had ended, committed the error of subjectivism and that he should be the target of the rectification campaign. Mao made clear his difference from Liu by saying:

Some people say that China's bourgeoisie today no longer has two sides to its character, that it has only one side. Is this a fact? No, it is not. On the one hand, bourgeois elements have already become administrative personnel in the joint state-private enterprises and are in a process of transformation in which they are changing from exploiters into laborers who live by their own labor. On the other hand, they still receive fixed interest in the joint state-private enterprises. That is to say, they have not yet cut themselves loose from their roots of exploitation.

Between them and the working class there is still a fairly wide distance in terms of ideas, sentiments, and habits of life. How can it be said that they no longer have two sides to their character?³³

To make sure that people understood who was the real target of the campaign, Mao asked them to examine documents:

The method for the current rectification campaign is the same as the one we used in the rectification campaign during the War of Resistance Against Japan. That is to say, we are first to study a number of documents; then, based on the studying of the documents, each person is to examine his or her own thinking and work and to unfold criticism and self-criticism so that shortcomings and mistakes can be exposed and what is good and right can be promoted.³⁴

Mao did not specify what documents to study. But it is probable that he was pointing his finger at Liu's political report at the recent Eighth Congress of the CCP.

In the Rectification Campaign, Mao also called on ordinary people to criticize the CCP hierarchy. In the National Conference on Propaganda Work of March, 1957, he specifically encouraged intellectuals to do so:

Two alternative methods of leading our country, or in other words two alternative policies, can be adopted -- to "open wide" or to "restrict". To "open wide" means to let all people express their opinions freely, so that they dare to speak, dare to criticize and dare to debate; it means not

³³ Mao Zedong, *The Writings of Mao Zedong 1949-1976*. Vol. II. Ed. John K. Leung and Michael Y.M. Kau. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992, p. 326.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 382.

being afraid of wrong views or anything poisonous; it means to encourage argument and criticism among people holding different views, allowing freedom both for criticism and for counter-criticism; it means not coercing people with wrong views into submission but convincing them by reasoning. To "restrict" means to forbid people to air differing opinions and express wrong ideas, and to "finish them off with a single blow" if they do so. ... To "open wide", or to "restrict"? We must choose one or the other of these two policies. We choose the former....³⁵

To drive home his point, he used the idiom: "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools contend."³⁶ But this strategy, designed to combat Liu Shaoqi, backfired. Some of the criticisms Mao unleashed were directed at himself, which was not what Mao had expected. Since 1949, Mao had been surrounded by sycophants, which gave him a false notion of how he was perceived by the people. He did not expect that intellectuals could attack him.³⁷ But Mao fought back immediately. On May 15, 1957, Mao wrote "The Situation is Changing". This article inaugurated the Anti-Rightist Campaign and marked the temporary demise of Mao's campaign against Liu Shaoqi. In the article, Mao did not reveal that he had not expected criticism of him to occur. On the contrary, he pretended that he had expected it all along. He attempted to conceal the real objective of his "Let a hundred flowers bloom and let a hundred schools contend" policy by saying that it was designed "to allow the people to become acquainted with these poisonous weeds and gases [intellectuals who criticized him] in order to dig them up and to eliminate them."³⁸

³⁵ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung*. Vol. V. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977, p. 432.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 433.

³⁷ Li Zhisui, op cit., p. 188.

³⁸ Mao Zedong, *The Writings of Mao Zedong 1949-1976*. Vol. II. Ed. John K. Leung and Michael Y.M. Kau. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992, pp. 551-552.

On December 10, 1958, the Enlarged Sixth Plenum of the Central Committee of the CCP was convened in Wuhan. It adopted Mao's recommendation not to nominate him for another term as president. On April 28, 1959, the Second National People's Congress elected Liu Shaoqi as president. After he became president, Liu took measures to expand his influence in the central government. He sometimes took action without consultation with Mao.³⁹ These events seemed to suggest that Mao lost the first round in his power struggle with Liu. But Mao's loss should not be exaggerated. He still held the powerful positions of the CCP Chairman and of Chairman of the Military Commission. In China, there has been a tradition of attending to state affairs from behind the scenes, which makes official positions not as meaningful as in the West.

Between 1958 and 1966, Mao was preoccupied with the Great Leap Forward and its consequences, including the Peng Dehui incident and the nationwide shortage of food. His power struggle with Liu Shaoqi was consequently put on the back burner for the moment. By 1966, the worst ramifications of the Great Leap Forward had faded away. It was at this time that Mao again picked up his fight against Liu Shaoqi.

The Second Battle: the Cultural Revolution

In 1966, Mao enjoyed the worship of most Chinese people, in spite of his disastrous Great Leap Forward. He had successfully defended his policy of the Great Leap Forward by blaming its adverse consequences on low-level cadres' bad execution and on real and contrived "natural disasters". Mao's prestige in the Party apparatus, by comparison, was not as high. Edgar Snow noted that "by 1964 Mao had lost effective control over much of the Party hierarchy set up by

³⁹ Li Zhisui, *op cit.*, p. 286.

his "successors," and over the state administrative apparatus also."⁴⁰ The "successors" Snow mentioned referred to Liu Shaoqi and his followers.

Mao used his enormous prestige among the Chinese people as a weapon in his power struggle against Liu Shaoqi. He mobilized the ordinary people to attack the CCP hierarchy and Liu Shaoqi. This strategy was highly effective. Who dared to fight against the people? One of the myths in China at the time was that people were always correct. It should be noted that back in 1957 when Mao tried to use intellectuals to fight against Liu Shaoqi, he himself was criticized. This time, he used the ordinary people and, more specifically, those young and less than thoughtful students.

In April, 1966, Mao formed the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group.⁴¹ The responsibility of the Small Group was to launch and direct the Cultural Revolution. The Small Group began its work at Beijing University. It instigated a group of people from the Department of Philosophy to rebel against Lu Ping the Party Secretary of the University. On May 25, 1966, a big-character poster appeared on the front wall of the university cafeteria. The poster severely criticized Lu Ping and the CCP Committee of Beijing University. It proclaimed that the people "must raise high the great banner of Mao Zedong Thought, be united around the Central Committee and Chairman Mao, smash all revisionist controls and conspiracies, resolutely, thoroughly, cleanly, and totally wipe out all enemies and all revisionists like Khrushchev, and carry the socialist

⁴⁰ Edgar Snow, *The Long Revolution*. p. 15.

⁴¹ Unless indicated otherwise, details of the Cultural Revolution in this chapter were drawn from Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi, *Wenge Shinian Shi 1966-1976 (The Ten-Year History of the Cultural Revolution 1966-1976)*. Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 1986. This book is by far the most comprehensive and revealing writing on the Cultural Revolution.

revolution to the end."⁴² By referring to Khrushchev, the poster targeted Liu Shaoqi.

Mao soon obtained a copy of the poster. Apparently he liked it, for on May 31, he ordered that the poster be made public to all of China. At 8:00 am on June 1, the poster was read on air by all radio stations in China. Thus the Cultural Revolution was launched all over the country. In Beijing, all the other universities tried to outdo Beijing University by criticizing and rebelling against their university Party committee. Big character posters replaced textbooks as students' reading materials. Education was disrupted. The situation in Beijing was chaotic.

Now that the Party committees of universities in Beijing were attacked, with the approval of Mao, by students, they lost their power. Work teams were sent by the municipal government of Beijing to universities to perform the functions formerly performed by the Party committees.

At this time, Mao was in Hangzhou, a city in southern China. Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping were in charge of the daily work of the central government in Beijing. Faced with the chaotic situation in Beijing, they were not sure about how to handle it. The whole chaotic situation was after all initiated by Mao. Liu and Deng probably did not want to do something that would displease Mao. As a result, Liu and Deng flew to Hangzhou and asked Mao to return to Beijing to take charge of the work in the central government. If Mao returned to Beijing to take charge, Liu and Deng would be relieved of the responsibility of handling the chaotic situation. But Mao told them that he was not going to return to Beijing yet. He also asked them to handle the situation in Beijing as they saw fit. In so doing, Mao shifted the responsibility of handling the situation in Beijing right

⁴² Quoted in Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi, *ibid.*, p. 20. Translation mine.

back to Liu and Deng. Later events would indicate that Mao was setting a perfect political trap for Liu and Deng. Regardless of how they would handle the situation in Beijing, Mao could find fault with it and charge them with wrongdoing.

Liu and Deng hurried back to Beijing and convened an enlarged meeting of the standing committee of the Politburo to discuss how to handle the chaos in Beijing. Most people at the meeting were of the opinion that sending work teams to the universities was a good idea. After the meeting, Liu sent a telegram to Mao, informing him of the meeting's decision to send work teams to the universities in Beijing. Mao gave his approval in reply.

To prevent the chaotic situation on campus from affecting the society at large, Liu, Deng and other leaders in Beijing issued a number of directives. These directives include: "Prevent big-character posters from getting out of campus." "Meetings should be held on campus and not off campus." "Do not hold demonstrations." The work teams basically did their work according to these directives. But the students in Beijing viewed these directives as restricting their revolution. Soon students began to oppose the work teams who were enforcing these directives.

On June 20, a poster appeared in the First Middle School of Beijing Normal University denouncing work teams. It should be noted that Liu's daughter was attending this school. Addressing the work teams, the poster said:

Mao Zedong Thought is the only principle guiding all our actions. We will ferret out and smash to pieces those who dare to oppose Mao Zedong Thought, Chairman Mao, the central government, socialism, and dictatorship of the proletariat, regardless of who he is, what background he

has, how far his evil claws have reached, and how well disguised he is.⁴³

Again, this poster's target was Liu Shaoqi.

Liu's wife Wang Guangmei was a member of the work team sent to Qinghua University. The work team came into sharp conflict with a group of students. On July 3, *Renmin ribao* (*The People's Daily*) reprinted an editorial of *Hong Qi* (*Red Flag*) magazine entitled "*Xiangxing Qunzhong, Yikao Qunzhong*" ("Trust the Masses and Rely on the Masses"). Both *The People's Daily* and *Red Flag* were under the direct control of Chen Boda, head of the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group. Since the Small Group was Mao's group, *Renmin Ribao* and *Hong Qi* were Mao's mouthpieces. The editorial "*Xiangxing Qunzhong, Yikao Qunzhong*" reflected Mao's views on how to handle the conflict between students and work teams. It was for students' rebellion against the Party committees and against the work teams.

On July 18, Mao suddenly returned to Beijing. On learning this, Liu immediately went to Mao's residence, hoping to report to Mao his recent work. But Liu was not able to see Mao. Mao's security guard told Liu that Mao was tired and had gone to bed. But Liu saw a few cars parked in front of Mao's residence, and inside the residence light was not turned off. Apparently Mao was having a meeting, from which Liu was excluded.

The next day, Mao received Liu. Mao told Liu that it had been a mistake to send work teams to the universities. Mao also said: Students' movement have been suppressed. Who else in Chinese history suppressed students' movement? Only the Northern

⁴³ Quoted in Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi, *ibid.*, p. 27. Translation mine.

Warlords. Whoever suppress students' movement will certainly come to no good end.⁴⁴

To send work teams to the universities was a measure taken by Liu according to the traditional way of handling similar situations in the history of the CCP. Work teams were used during the land reform movement; work teams were also used during the "Four Clean-ups Movement". To follow the traditional way of doing things seemed to be the safest measure. Liu seemed unaware that Mao was intent on trapping him. We can argue that if Liu had not sent work teams to the universities and consequently let the chaotic situation continue, Mao could have accused Liu of creating chaos. As the Chinese saying goes, if you are to condemn somebody, you can always trump up a charge.

Between August 1 and 12, the Eleventh Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee of the CCP was convened in Beijing. On August 5, Mao wrote his own big-character poster and put it up at Zhongnanhai. Entitled "*Paoda Silingpu*" ("Bombard the Headquarters"), Mao's poster partly read as follows:

So well written were the first Marxist-Leninist big-character poster of our country and the commentary of *The People's Daily*. I ask all comrades to read them again. But in the past 50 days or so, there were certain leading comrades, both in the central and local governments, who were opposed to the poster and the commentary. They took

⁴⁴ See Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi, *ibid.*, p. 31. On another occasion, Mao said: "None of those who repressed student movements has ended well. The Manchu government repressed them; how did it end? The Northern warlords did the same. How did they end? Chiang Kai-shek repressed them; how did he end? Lu Ping of Peking University and Chiang Nan-hsiang of Tsinghua University did exactly the same; how did they end? The work teams sent out later also repressed them. Now they have met their doom. Of course, we must add that the blame goes to those who sent them." *Mao Papers: Anthology and Bibliography*. Ed. Jerome Chen. London: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 129.

the reactionary bourgeois position, carried out the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and suppressed the dynamic Cultural Revolution. They confused truth and falsehood and suppressed the revolutionaries as well as dissenting views. They carried out white terror and were truly evil.⁴⁵

By putting up the poster during the Eleventh Plenum, Mao revealed to the public the purpose of the plenum. Using this unusual method, Mao proclaimed to the nation: the headquarters he wanted to bombard was Liu Shaoqi.

On August 12, the Eleventh Plenum passed a communique which secured Mao's position as the supreme leader of China. Part of the communique read as follows:

Comrade Mao Tse-tung is the greatest Marxist-Leninist of our era. Comrade Mao Tse-tung has inherited, defended and developed Marxism-Leninism with genius, creatively and in an all-round way, and has raised Marxism-Leninism to a completely new stage. Mao Tse-tung's thought ... is the guiding principle in all the work of our Party and country.⁴⁶

The communique was an attempt to make up what the Party Constitution omitted in the Eighth Congress of the CCP of 1956. It was also a slap in Liu Shaoqi's face, for it was under Liu's auspices that the Party Constitution omitted the phrase of Mao Zedong Thought being the guiding principle of the Party's work.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi, *ibid.*, p. 36. Translation mine.

⁴⁶ Mao Zedong. In *The People's Republic of China 1949-1979: A Documentary Survey*. Vol. 3. Ed. Harold C. Hinton. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1980, p. 1572.

After the Eleventh Plenum, Liu's name was dropped from the second position to the eighth position in journalistic reports, which indicated Liu's descent in real power. But until then, Liu was not yet publicly or explicitly attacked, in spite of many innuendoes. On August 22, attacks on Liu became public, for on this day a big-character poster appeared on the campus of Qinghua University denouncing Liu by name and accusing him of opposing Mao Zedong Thought.

On October 9, Mao convened a Central Work Conference. All top leaders on the provincial level attended the conference. Lin Piao gave a speech at the conference. In his speech, Lin Piao explicitly and severely criticized Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping:

... there are some leadership comrades in the Central Committee -- said to be Comrades Liu Shao-chi and Teng Hsiao-ping -- who have been engaged in another line that is contrary to Chairman Mao's line. The Liu-Teng line, as has been said in Chairman Mao's wall poster, takes the reactionary bourgeois stand and implements bourgeois dictatorship.⁴⁷

In December, 1966, Mao's wife Jiang Qing went to Qinghua University where Liu Shaoqi's daughter Liu Tao was a student. Speaking on behalf of the Central Government and Mao, Jiang urged Liu Tao and her brother Liu Chongzhen to make a clean break with their father and to actively expose their father. Under heavy pressure, Liu Tao and Liu Chongzhen wrote a big-character poster entitled "*Kan Liu Shaoqi de Choue Linghun*" ("Look at the Evil Soul of Liu Shaoqi") and put it up at Qinghua University and at Zhongnanhai. By turning Liu's daughter and son against Liu himself, Mao was meting out truly cruel and unusual punishment.

⁴⁷ Lin Piao, "Talk at the Central Work Conference". In *The Lin Piao Affair: Power Politics and Military Coup*. Ed. Michael Y.M. Kau. New York: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1975, p. 385.

At this time, Liu still kept the formal title of president of China. But his life had become a living hell. With the tacit approval of Mao, people kept harassing Liu and his family. At 6:00 am on January 1, 1967, two people pounded on the door of Liu's residence, asking Liu's family to open the door. After the door was opened, the two entered into Liu's residence and put up many posters, some of which read "Down with the Chinese Khrushchev Liu Shaoqi" and "Whoever opposes Mao Zedong Thought will come to no good end". In the evening of January 3, a group of 20 to 30 people forced their way into Liu's residence and ordered Liu and his wife to stand in the corridor to receive their denunciations. They also ordered Liu and his wife to recite Mao's quotations. In the evening of January 6, Liu's wife received a phone call from somebody who claimed that their daughter Ping Ping had had a traffic accident and needed amputation. Liu and his wife went to the hospital and found that their daughter had not had a traffic accident but had been taken hostage. The whole thing was a trick designed, under the instigation of Mao's wife Jiang Qing, by the students of Qinghua University to get Liu and his wife out of Zhongnanhai to receive students' denunciation. On another occasion, Liu and his wife were forced to stand on a rickety table (which was a leg short) to receive denunciations. This was designed to humiliate them and to strip them of their dignity. Their telephone service was stopped, which effectively cut them off from the outside world. Their son Liu Chongruo was arrested by the Ministry of Public Security.

Liu had written a small book entitled *Lun Gongchantangyuan de Xiuyang* (*On the Education of a Communist Party Member*). It had been used in the 1950s and 1960s as a textbook for all CCP members. But during the Cultural Revolution, this book was labeled as "a great poisonous weed". Commenting on the book, Mao said: Liu's book was a bunch of lies. Based on subjectivism, it was anti-Marxist. Since it was not concerned with class struggle but with the education of

individuals, even Chiang Kai-shek could accept the book's message.⁴⁸ It had been mentioned that Liu was a better Marxist theoretician than Mao. Mao was probably resentful and jealous of Liu's superiority. Mao's attacks on Liu's erstwhile influential book was indicative of his resentment and jealousy. When Liu was in his heyday of influence among the rank and file of the CCP prior to the Cultural Revolution, Mao reportedly said something to the effect that if a person stopped learning for three days he could not catch up with Liu Shaoqi. There was sarcasm in what Mao said. One can detect from it a sense of jealousy on Mao's part as well.

Realizing that his political fortune had completely gone, Liu Shaoqi only wished that he could keep his family out of harm's way. On January 13, upon Liu's request, Mao granted him an audience in the Great Hall of the People. Liu offered to resign from the position of presidency and asked that he and his family be allowed return to Yanan or to his hometown to be peasants. But even such a simple request Mao ruthlessly denied. Consequently, Liu and his family had to suffer from more attacks and torture, both physical and mental.

In the evening of July 18, 1967, Liu's residence was ransacked. Red Guards confiscated Liu's diaries in an attempt to find in them evidence for Liu's "crimes". Liu and his wife were forced to the cafeteria of Zhongnanhai to face denunciations. At the meeting of denunciation, Liu, who was almost 70 years old at the time, was forced to stand in a kowtow position for more than two hours. The physical suffering was so much that his face became pale and he was sweating profusely. When he took out a handkerchief to wipe away the sweat, the handkerchief was knocked to the ground.

August 5, 1967 was the first anniversary of Mao's poster "*Paoda Silingpu*". On this day, Liu was again forced to a meeting of

⁴⁸ See Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi, op cit., p. 156.

denunciation. Again he and his wife were forced to stand in a kowtow position for more than two hours. Red Guards physically abused Liu. They slapped him in the face with Mao's little red book. After the meeting, Liu was badly battered. Both his legs and arms were injured. Because of the injured arms, it later took him one to two hours to put on his clothes. He could hardly walk. It was about 30 meters from where he was imprisoned to the cafeteria. But it usually took him about 30 minutes to complete the trip. Prison guards were told not to help him. The food Liu got was of bad quality. Frequently he had to eat leftovers which had gone bad. As a result, he often suffered from diarrhoea. Sometimes people spat into his food.

After September 13, 1967, Liu's family was forcefully separated from one another. He could not even see his wife or children, for his children were exiled from Zhongnanhai and his wife was put into prison.

One evening in the summer of 1968, Liu suddenly had a high fever. But he did not get timely and appropriate treatment. As a result, he got pneumonia. He was on the verge of death. Learning of this, Mao's wife Jiang Qing said: "A meeting is to be held soon to deal with Liu's crimes. Don't let him die yet. He should live to see himself being expelled from the Party."⁴⁹

Between October 13 and 30, the Twelfth Plenum of the Central Committee of the CCP was convened in Beijing. The communique issued by the Plenum contained the official verdict on Liu Shaoqi:

The number one capitalist roader is Liu Shaoqi. He is a traitor, an enemy spy, and a scab. He is the lackey of imperialism, revisionism and the Kuomintang

⁴⁹ Quoted in Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi, *op cit.*, p. 178. Translation mine.

reactionaries. During the Cultural Revolution, the Party and the revolutionary masses has exposed Liu's reactionary identity, which is a great victory for Mao Zedong Thought. The Plenum has shown revolutionary indignation for Liu's reactionary crimes. The Plenum has unanimously passed the resolution to permanently expel Liu Shaoqi from the Party, to strip him of all positions both in and out of the Party, and to continue to expose and criticize Liu and his clique's crimes of betraying the country and the Party.⁵⁰

About a year later, on November 12, Liu died of persecution-induced illness.

The official explanation of the Cultural Revolution is that it was a struggle between two lines: the correct Mao line and the revisionist line upheld by "China's Khrushchev", the "number one power holder in the Party taking the capitalist road", president Liu Shaoqi. The Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the CCP passed a resolution called "the Sixteen-Point Program of the Cultural Revolution". The resolution states: "At present, our objective is to struggle against and crush those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road, to criticize and repudiate the reactionary bourgeois academic 'authorities' and the ideology of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes and to transform education, literature, and art and all other parts of the superstructure that do not correspond to the socialist economic base, so as to facilitate the consolidation and development of the socialist system."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Quoted in Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi, op cit., p. 180. Translation mine.

⁵¹ "Resolutions of the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the CCP--The Sixteen-Point Program of the Cultural Revolution, 1966." In Edgar Snow, *The Long Revolution*. p. 239.

Many scholars apparently took the official explanation of the Cultural Revolution at face value and used it to explain Mao's motive in launching the Cultural Revolution. Stuart Schram said:

Assuming that leadership in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution belongs largely to the trio Mao Tse-tung-- Lin Piao-- Chiang Ching, why did they decide to launch this movement? Fairly obviously, it was in order to deal with opposition within the Chinese Communist Party toward the radical policies they favor. ...

What was the intraparty debate about? We may assume that the central issues were those which have remained unresolved in China since 1958: mass action versus bureaucracy, political zeal versus technical competence, men versus weapons, and men versus machines.⁵²

Schram gave Mao too much credit, which was typical among a circle of Western scholars in the 1950s and 1960s. These scholars, operating from their liberal perspective, found, mistakenly, in Mao the concrete manifestation of their romantic and naive view of socialism. Limited by their own ideology, they were not willing or able to recognize the seamy side of Mao. They never asked themselves the question of why Mao had to persecute Liu Shaoqi in such a ruthless manner. Mao did not have to brutally persecute Liu to resolve their conflict over the "two lines". The brutality with which Liu was persecuted and the humiliation Mao put Liu through indicated that something more personal was involved.

As noted by Roderick MacFarquhar, Mao and Liu did not have much difference in ideology and in policy orientation. "[A] careful examination of the evidence suggests that neither Mao nor Liu was

⁵² Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966, p. 306.

consistent [in upholding a certain line]; that Mao and Liu were not always opponents; that many men who survived the cultural revolution, notably Premier Chou En-lai, had opposed Mao on crucial issues when Liu had stood by the Chairman; that some of Liu's supposed supporters, notably Teng Hsiao-ping, the party's General Secretary, had been more often on Mao's side than Liu's."⁵³

John Bryan Starr's comment on the manner in which Mao's theory of continuing the revolution was put together throws some light on Mao's motive in launching the Cultural Revolution:

Mao's theory of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat was never set out as a series of integrated arguments in essay form. Rather, it was first alluded to in the closing stages of the Cultural Revolution, at which time a compendium of quotations from his earlier writings was published which, taken collectively, was said to comprise this theory.⁵⁴

The selective manner in which Mao's theory of continuing the revolution was put together indicates that Mao did not give coherent thought to continuing the revolution. The fact that the compendium of quotations was published only in the final stages of the Cultural Revolution indicates that Mao did not have the theory in hand when he launched the Cultural Revolution. All these in turn strongly suggests that the theory of continuing the revolution was trumped up to lend legitimacy to a personal vendetta.

⁵³ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*. Vol. I. New York: Columbia University Press, 1974, p. 2.

⁵⁴ John Bryan Starr, *Continuing the Revolution: The Political Thought of Mao*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 300.

Conclusion

The way Mao fought and persecuted Peng Dehuai and Liu Shaoqi showed him to be amoral, cunning, and ruthless. All these qualities made him highly effective in fighting his power rivals, which is rather ironic when one considers how ineffective he was in building China's economy. Mao was effective in his power struggles because he had rich knowledge of the power struggles and court intrigues that filled China's lengthy history.⁵⁵ Li Zhisui commented: "Immersed as he was in Chinese history, and thus in the power struggles and political intrigues that were part of every court, Mao expected political intrigue within his own imperial court. He himself was a master in the art of power struggle and political intrigue."⁵⁶

It has been mentioned that Mao identified himself with the prominent emperors in China's past. It should be further noted that Mao's "greatest admiration was reserved for the most ruthless and cruel of our country's tyrants" such as Emperor Zhou of the Shang Dynasty, the First Emperor Qin Shi Huang of the Qin Dynasty, Sui Yangdi of the Sui Dynasty, and Empress Wu Zetian of the Tang Dynasty.⁵⁷ The first Emperor Qin Shi Huang was notorious in Chinese history as a ruthless ruler who "burned the books and buried alive Confucian scholars". But Mao had no problem with Qin Shi Huang's ruthlessness. On one occasion, Mao even boasted that he surpassed the First Emperor Qin Shi Huang in being ruthless. Mao said: "What

⁵⁵ Both Mao's and Joseph Stalin's ruthless effectiveness in their power struggles seems to point to a common denominator, that is, Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism. While Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism justifies ruthless power struggles in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat, one cannot say that Mao's power struggles were inspired and guided by this ideology. As is argued throughout the chapter, Mao's power struggles were motivated by a personal vendetta and guided by his knowledge of the court intrigues in China's past.

⁵⁶ Li Zhisui, *op cit.*, p. 285. Translation mine.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

did he [Qin Shi Huang] amount to? He only buried alive 460 scholars, while we buried 46,000.... I once debated with the democratic people: You accuse us of acting like Chin Shih Huang-ti [Qin Shi Huang], but you are wrong; we surpass him by a hundred times. You berate us for imitating Chin Shih Huang-ti in enforcing dictatorship. We admit it fully."⁵⁸ It is reasonable to argue that "the most ruthless and cruel of our country's tyrants" were in Mao's frame of reference and that when he was engaged in power struggle and court intrigue, Mao looked up to these tyrants for inspiration and reference.

⁵⁸ Mao Zedong, *Miscellany of Mao Tse-tung Thought, 1949 - 68*. Vol. I. Arlington, Virginia: Joint Publications Research Service, n.d., p. 98.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Mao Zedong can be best explained in terms of his traditionalism, despite some of his seemingly revolutionary activities. Table 7.1, which sums up the major points in Mao's life, indicates that Mao is predominantly a traditionalist rather than a Marxist-Leninist.

Mao was born into a traditional family. Both his parents were highly reverent of tradition, be it in the form of Confucianism or Buddhism. From an early age he learned to use the traditional authority-figure Confucius as a weapon in his disputes with his father.¹ In the first 16 years of his life, Mao was living in his remote and isolated village of Shaoshan. There he was exposed almost exclusively to Chinese traditional culture. The few books available in Shaoshan were either Confucian classics or traditional novels such as *The Water Margin* and *The Three Kingdoms*.² Mao was an avid reader of these books. They influenced Mao to such an extent that his early notion of revolution was borrowed from *The Water Margin*³ and his later military strategy was derived in large measure from *The Three Kingdoms*.⁴ Chinese traditional culture was almost the sole source of Mao's political socialization in the first 16 years of his life. This is significant, for it laid a solid traditional basis for Mao's intellectual frame of reference.

¹ See Chapter Two, p. 6.

² Ibid., p. 5.

³ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴ See Chapter Four, p. 32.

Table 7.1. Mao's Socialization and Activities

Socialization and Activities	Traditionalism	Marxist-Leninist
I. Socialization Agents (1893-1918)		
1. Native village	Traditional	No
2. Parents	Traditional	No
3. Education	Traditional	No
4. Teacher (Yang Changji)	Traditional	No
II. Activities (1893-1918)		
5. Readings consisted mainly of Confucian classics and Chinese romances	Traditional	No
6. Rebellion against father	Non-traditional	Not applicable (NA)
7. Interest in Chinese history	Traditional	No
8. Joining the army	Non-traditional	NA
9. Self-teaching	Non-traditional	NA
10. Touring the countryside	Traditional	No
11. Joining the <i>Xinmin Xuehui</i>	Traditional	No

Socialization and Activities	Traditionalism	Marxist-Leninist
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III. Activities (1919-1949)

12. Not going to Europe	Traditional	No
13. Knowing Li Dazhao	Non-traditional	No
14. Editor for <i>Xiangjiang Pinglun</i>	Non-traditional	NA
15. Joining the CCP	Non-traditional	Yes
16. Turning to the peasants	Traditional	No
17. Going to Jinggangshan	Traditional	No
18. Establishing rural bases	Traditional	No
19. Guiding the Long March	Traditional	No
20. Guerrilla warfare	Traditional	No
21. Cooperation with the Kuomintang	Non-traditional	No
22. Defining the mass line	Non-traditional	No
23. the Nanniwan experience	Traditional	No
24. Resistance against Japan	Traditional	NA
25. Civil war with Kuomintang	Traditional	Maybe

Socialization and Activities	Traditionalism	Marxist-Leninist
IV. Activities (1949-1976)		
26. the Great Leap Forward	Non-traditional	No
27. Purging Peng Dehuai	Traditional	No
38. Purging Liu Shaoqi	Traditional	No
29. Readings consisted mainly of Chinese history	Traditional	No

Mao's first schools were the old-style *Sishu*. The curricula of these schools were one-sided in that students' readings were almost exclusively in Confucianism. They were either Confucian classics or popular readings in Confucianism. After he left Shaoshan to attend schools other than *Sishu*, Mao developed his intellectual interest in Chinese history, which lasted throughout his life. This interest was so strong and dominating that he neglected other more modern fields of study such as English and fine arts.⁵ It is easy to see why Mao's intellectual interest lay in Chinese history. His two favorite novels were about China's past. *The Three Kingdoms* was based on actual events in Chinese history. Mao's intellectual interest in Chinese history led him to pursue and obtain a one-sided, traditional education.

From 1910 when he left Shaoshan to 1918 when he graduated from the Hunan Normal School, Mao's political socialization, largely due to his intellectual interest in Chinese history and the influence of the Confucian professor Yang Changji, continued to be a traditional one. Although he sporadically came into contact with certain aspects of Western culture during this period, it neither interested nor influenced him in any significant way. Compared to his Shaoshan days, however, the intensity of traditional influence on Mao was probably diluted to some extent. Changsha was after all the capital city of Hunan Province, and the 1911 Revolution brought diverse ideas to the city.

When he graduated from the Hunan Normal School in 1918, Mao was already 25 years old. In these 25 years, Mao's largely traditional socialization contributed to his acquiring a traditional frame of reference.

⁵ See Chapter Two, p. 18.

In 1918, Mao had the opportunity to be exposed to a drastically different source of socialization, that is, European society and culture. But he decided not to take advantage of this opportunity. He wanted to stay in China to study Chinese society rather than to go to Europe. It can be argued that had he decided to go to Europe in 1918, Mao's traditional frame of reference could have been mitigated to some extent.

Instead of going to Europe, Mao went to Beijing. There he came into contact with Marxism. This was another opportunity for a breakthrough in Mao's political socialization process. But the breakthrough was not materialised, for his contact with Marxism was superficial and did not significantly alter his traditional frame of reference. Mao claimed that by the summer of 1920 he had become a Marxist.⁶ But evidence shows that his Marxist credentials were far from adequate. First of all, Li Dazhao, who was Mao's primary source of Marxism, did not adequately understand Marxism.⁷ Secondly, Mao's understanding of Marxist concepts were frequently in terms of Chinese traditional philosophy. His "On Practice" was supposed to be on Marxism. But it was really a treatise on the Chinese philosophical problem of the relation between knowing and doing. Thirdly, Mao revised Marxism to fit into his traditional frame of reference. On a number of important points Mao differed significantly from Marx and Lenin. If he was not a Marxist in 1920, why did Mao claim himself to be one? It should be remembered that Mao attended the meeting in 1921 in which the CCP was founded. By saying that he was already a Marxist in 1920, Mao could strengthen his legitimacy as the leader of the CCP.

Marxism-Leninism as a source of political socialization did not leave much imprint on Mao's frame of reference. An examination of his

⁶ See Chapter Three, p. 12.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 4-6.

writings and activities, both of which were manifestations of his frame of reference, reveals that Mao continued to be guided by a largely traditional frame of reference rather than by Marxism-Leninism. His revolutionary activities, for example, were in line with Chinese traditional practices rather than with Marxist-Leninist prescription. Instead of relying on the industrial proletariat to wage the revolution, Mao used the peasantry; instead of storming the urban centers, Mao led his forces to the countryside; instead of fighting the enemy with positional warfare, Mao chose guerilla warfare. His revolutionary activities had parallels in Chinese history. They resemble the many peasant uprisings in China's past. Mao drew ideas from the peasant uprisings and applied them to his revolution. He once talked about acting like the heroes of Liangshanbo.⁸ Mao's military success can be attributed directly to his knowledge of Sun Tzu. Besides quoting Sun Tzu extensively in his military writings, Mao used Sun Tzu's art of war in actual warfare. Not only did he trek his own Chinese-style revolutionary road, Mao also rigorously combatted the Comintern which was regarded as the representative of Marxism-Leninism.

From 1927 to 1949, Mao spent more than two decades of his life in the Chinese countryside, leading a peasant-based revolution. In these years, his socialization was highlighted by his battles with the Comintern-appointed men. Throughout this period, Mao had to battle constantly with the Comintern-appointed men over revolutionary strategy and policies. Mao saw that when the Chinese revolution followed the policies as dictated by the Comintern, it suffered setbacks. He also saw that when the Chinese revolution followed his policies, it scored victories. Mao's experience with the Comintern and its appointed men was highly negative. Since the Comintern formulated its strategy and policies on the basis of Marxism-Leninism, Mao's negative experience with the Comintern was

⁸ See Chapter Two, p. 23.

extended to Marxism-Leninism. On several occasions Mao explicitly voiced his defiance and hostility toward Marxism-Leninism. It can be argued that Mao led the Chinese revolution to victory in spite of Marxism-Leninism rather than because of it. The triumph of the Chinese revolution under Mao's leadership probably validated in his mind the correctness of his traditional frame of reference on the one hand and the futility of Marxism-Leninism on the other. But in this period, Mao did pay lip service to Marxism-Leninism. This was largely due to the fact that Mao was vulnerable to attacks from the Comintern-appointed men and had to justify his policies in terms of Marxism-Leninism.

With the founding of the PRC in 1949, Mao became the supreme leader of the country. Secure in his leadership position, Mao did not have to constantly rationalize his actions or policies in terms of Marxism-Leninism. Consequently, he turned into a leader who increasingly resembled the prominent emperors in China's past. Intellectually, he was immersed in China's past. His readings after 1949 were mostly Chinese history, as the rector of Mao's personal library indicated.⁹ Li Zhisui also noticed that Mao was reading Chinese history almost every time he saw Mao reading.¹⁰ It was from Chinese history rather than from Marxism that Mao learned how to rule and govern. As Li Zhisui said of Mao: "He used the stories of China's past both to understand and to manipulate the present and saw himself in terms of his own contributions to the country's ongoing history. I am convinced that the intrigues in China's ancient imperial courts were a far more powerful influence on his thought than Marxism-Leninism. ... [H]e turned to the past for instruction on

⁹ See Chapter Three, pp. 32-33.

¹⁰ See Li Zhisui, *Mao Zedong Siren Yisheng Huiyilu (The Private Life of Chairman Mao)*. Taipei: China Times Publishing Company, p. 96, p. 129, p. 215, p. 309, p. 425.

how to rule, for guidance on how to manipulate the conspiracies that plagued those in the highest reaches of power."¹¹

Mao on many occasions compared himself to prominent emperors in China's past such as the First Emperor Qin Shi Huang, Tang Taizong, and Gengis Khan. Mao's concept of power was in line with the Chinese traditional notion of imperial power. Mao did not tolerate any challenge to his absolute power and authority. Mao ruthlessly and cunningly persecuted those whom he considered to have challenged his power. The most prominent of those persecuted were Peng Dehuai and Liu Shaoqi.

Mao's private life style was in line with that of China's past emperors as well. He was rather promiscuous. Peng Dehuai once accused him of keeping a harem at Zhongnanhai.¹² Mao justified his womanizing by making reference to Emperor Zheng De of the Ming Dynasty. He said that Emperor Zheng De's womanizing was no big deal when considered in the context of his enormous responsibilities.¹³

In Chinese traditional culture it was believed that the emperor was the Son of Heaven, that the Son of Heaven, being blessed by Heaven, could evade death. When Mao told Edgar Snow about the fact that death had evaded him, Mao was probably thinking that he was the Son of Heaven: "At dinner Mao had mentioned that both his brothers had been killed. His first wife had also been executed during the revolution (1930) and their son had been killed during the Korean War. Now, he said that it was odd that death had so far passed him by. He had been prepared for it many times but death just did not seem to want him. What could he do? On several occasions it had seemed that he would die. His bodyguard was killed while he was

¹¹ Ibid., p. 119.

¹² Chapter Six, p. 3.

¹³ See Li Zhisui, *op cit.*, p. 462.

standing right beside him. Once he was splashed all over with the blood of another soldier but the bomb had not touched him."¹⁴

Mao lived in the past. He was out of step with the times. Some of his personal habits indicate his anachronism. He did not have the habit of brushing his teeth, instead he used tea to rinse them.¹⁵ He refused to use the sit-down toilet, instead he used the squat-style privy.¹⁶ Mao's anachronism was not only confined to his personal habits. More importantly, it also characterizes his post-1949 leadership. It adversely affected his ability to lead China's economic construction. As Li Zhisui noted: "The problem was that he [Mao] had no modern education and no idea of what the modern world was or how China might join it. The twentieth century was marching forward and Mao was stuck in the nineteenth, unable to lead his country."¹⁷ Not knowing and not caring to learn the experiences of Western industrialization, Mao attempted to speed up China's industrialization by exhorting the Chinese masses to make steel in their backyard furnaces. This comical attempt by Mao had tragic consequences. The steel coming out of the backyard furnaces were mostly unusable. Moreover, the concentration of farming hands in steel-making led to the neglect of harvests. Millions of people died of starvation as a result. Mao's Great Leap Forward was a giant leap backward.

Mao's traditionalism or traditional frame of reference was both a blessing and a curse for China. Before 1949, Mao's traditional frame of reference enabled Mao to understand the Chinese society, to wage a rural revolution, and to found the PRC. But after 1949, Mao's traditional frame of reference was for the most part incompatible with China's needs. Stemming from his traditional frame of reference,

¹⁴ Edgar Snow, *The Long Revolution*. New York: Random House, 1972, p. 220.

¹⁵ See Li Zhisui, *op cit.*, p. 95.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

Mao's Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution were wrong-headed and brought onto China great sufferings.

Mao's death marked the end of the Mao Dynasty. His wife, his nephew, and his other close followers were arrested and imprisoned. The new leadership of China, as represented by Deng Xiaoping, have exhibited a way of thinking that is more in keeping with the times. While Mao never liked modernization,¹⁸ the new leadership took it as their motto. They have showed a strong commitment to building China's economy. In building China's economy, they resort to rational and scientific methods, avoiding Mao's mistakes. They follow the open-door policy, realizing that China can no longer afford to be isolated. They have created a social atmosphere in which expertise and knowledge are respected. The economic reform program, which began two years after Mao's death, has so far brought unprecedented material well-being to most Chinese people.

Mao will always be remembered for his greatest achievement, that is, the founding of the PRC. Hopefully, his post-1949 mistakes will be remembered as well, for the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution are good lessons about what not to do.

As arguably the most influential figure in the 20th-century China, Mao deserves more thorough understanding. The present study is an effort in that direction. While nearly all current literature on Mao considers him a Marxist-Leninist, the present study has argued that he is primarily a traditionalist. This argument has been supported by an examination of Mao's political socialization process. Through such an examination, the study has found that Mao's political socialization was marked by traditionalism. Throughout his life, Mao was mostly exposed to and influenced by China's past. It was the most dominating and enduring influence of his life. His encounter with

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 129.

Marxism-Leninism was superficial and did not significantly alter his traditional frame of reference. Marxism-Leninism did give Mao a new face, but his essential identity remained that of a Chinese traditionalist. Marxism-Leninism was frequently used by Mao as a convenient rationalization for his actions, but his actions were guided by his traditional frame of reference more than by Marxism-Leninism. In short, what defined Mao was not Marxism-Leninism, but traditionalism.

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GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

BAI JIA XING 百家姓

"BUERSHIWEIKE ZHUYI DE SHENGLI" 布尔什维克主义的胜利

BO GU 博古

CHANGSHA 长沙

CAO XUEQIN 曹雪芹

CHEN BODA 陈伯达

CHEN DUXIU 陈独秀

CHEN GONGBO 陈公博

CHEN YUN 陈云

CHIANG KAI-SHEK 蒋介石

CHUANG TZU 庄子

DENG XIAOPING 邓小平

DOWAGER CI XI 慈禧

DU FU 杜甫

DU SHI FANG YU JI YAO 读史方輿记要

DUAN QIRUI 段其瑞

ERSHISI SHI 二十四史

FAN TANG 反唐

FENG YOU LAN 冯友兰

GANG JIAN YI ZHI LU 纲鉴易知录

GAO GAO 高皋

GE LAO HUI 哥老会

GONG YU ZHI 龚育之

GU ZUYU 顾祖禹

GUAN HAN QING 关汉卿

GUANGZHOU 广州

HAIFENG 海丰

HAN CHANGLI QUAN JI 韩昌黎全集

HANGZHOU 杭州

HE LONG 贺龙

"HESANG DASAN, WUFA WUTIAN" 和尚打伞, 无发无天

HONG QI 红旗

HU HANMIN 胡汉民

JIANG NANXIANG 蒋南祥
JIANG QING 江青
"JIA QING" 嘉庆
JINAN 济南
JIMEN 金门
JINGGANGSHAN 井冈山
"JUNZI" 君子
"KAI LIU SHAOQI DE CHOU LINGHUN" 看刘少奇的丑恶灵魂
KUOMINTANG 国民党

LAO TZU 老子
LI DAZHAO 李大钊
LI LISAN 李立三
LI RUI 李锐
LI ZEHOU 李泽厚
LI ZHISUI 李志绥
LIANGSHANBO, LIANG SHAN-PO 梁山泊
LIN PIAO 林彪
LIN KE 林克
LIU SHAOQI 刘少奇
LIU TAO 刘涛
LIU ZONGYUAN 柳宗元
LU PING 陆平
LUN GONGCHANTANGYUAN DE XIUYANG 论共产党员的修养
LUO GUANZHONG 罗贯中
LUO RUIQING 罗瑞卿
LUSHAN 庐山
LUN YU 论语

MAO RUNZHI 毛润之
MAO ZEDONG 毛泽东
MIN LI BAO, MIN-LI-PAO 民力报
MING CHENGZU 明成祖
MING TAIZU 明太祖

PANG XIANZHI 逢先知
"PAODA SILINGPU" 炮打司令部
PENG DEHUI 彭德怀
PENG PAI 彭湃
"PINGYIN" 拼音
PU SONGLING 蒲松龄

QIAN LONG, CHIEN LUNG 乾龙
"QINGNIAN YU NONGCUN" 青年与农村
"QINGONG JIANXUE" 勤工俭学
QU QIUBAI 瞿秋白

"REN DING SHENG TIAN" 人定胜天
RENMIN RIBAO 人民日报

SAN GUO, SAN KUO 三国
SAN ZI JING 三字经
SHAOSHAN 韶山
SHI JING 诗经
SHUI HU ZHUAN, SHUI HU CHUAN 水浒传
SI BU BEI YAO 四部备要
"SISHU" 私塾
SONG SHI 宋史
SUN TZU 孙子

TAO TE CHING 道德经
"TIYU ZHI YANJIU" 体育之研究
TONG JIAN JI SHI BEN MO 通鉴記事本末

WANG DONGXING 汪东兴
WANG GUANGMEI 王光美
WANG JINGWEI 汪精卫
WANG MING 王明
WANG SHIFU 王实甫
WANG SHUBAI 汪树白
"WENREN" 文人
"WENWU SHUANGQUAN" 文武双全
"WO DE MAKESI ZHUYI GUAN" 我的马克思主义观
WU XUJUN 吴旭君
"WUFU" 武夫

XI YOU JI, HSI YU CHI 西游记
XIANGJIANG PINGLUN 湘江评论
XIANGJIANG RIBAO 湘江日报
"XIANGXING QUNZHONG, YIKAO QUNZHONG" 相信群众, 依靠群众
XIAO YANZHONG 萧延中
XIN QING NIAN 新青年
"XIN ZHI LI" 心之力

XINMIN XUEHUI 新民学会

XU TAO 许涛

XU TONG JIAN JI SHI BEN MO 续通鉴记事本末

XU ZI ZHI TONG JIAN 续资治通鉴

"XUE" 雪

YAN JIAQI 严家其

YANAN 延安

YANG CHANGJI 杨昌济

YOU XUE QIONG LIN 幼学琼林

YUAN SHI 元史

"YUGONG YISHAN" 愚公移山

YU PI TONG JIAN, YU-PI TUNG-CHIEN 御批通鉴

YUE FEI ZHUAN, YO FEI CHUAN 岳飞传

ZENG GUANG XIAN WEN 增广贤文

ZENG GUOFAN 曾国藩

ZHANG JINGYAO 张敬尧

ZHANG LU 张鲁

ZHANG ZHIDONG 张之洞

ZHAO HENGTI 赵恒惕

ZHAO MING WEN XUAN 昭明文选

ZHONGNANHAI 中南海

"ZHONGXUE WEITI, XIXUE WEIYONG" 中学为体, 西学为用

ZHOU ENLAI 周恩来

ZHU CHONGZHI 朱冲之

ZHU DE, ZHU TEH 朱德

ZI ZHI TONG JIAN 资治通鉴

ZUNYI 遵义

ZUO ZONGTANG 左宗棠

VITA

Caimu Cui was born in Hubei, China on March 5, 1963. He graduated from Ganxi High School in July, 1980. He entered Huazhong Normal University in September, 1980 where in July, 1984 he received the Bachelor of Arts degree in English. In September, 1984, he entered Nankai University where he received the Master of Arts degree in English and American Literature in July, 1987. From August, 1987 to August, 1989 he taught English at Beijing Languages Institute. In September, 1989 he came to the United States to study Political Science. In July, 1992 he received the Master of Arts degree in Political Science at Mankato State University, Minnesota. In August, 1992 he entered the doctoral program in Political Science at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville where he received the Doctor of Philosophy degree in May, 1997.