SOME PARAMETERS OF THE CHINESE REVOLUTION AND
THE NATURE OF MAO TSE-TUNG'S POLITICAL PARADIGM

Mao Tse-tung was above all a practical revolutionary. His success in political activities and his resulting prominence as a leader of China have prompted intensive studies of various aspects of his career and his writings. As a result, a rich portrayal of Mao's biography, his ideas, and the intellectual influences on his thinking has emerged.

My purpose in this paper is in part to add to the composite description, but more importantly, it is to return the portrayal of Mao's thought to the practical revolutionary context in which it developed. This effort is not intellectual history in the sense of the study of the transmission of ideas; rather, it is a study of the origin of ideas in their historical context. The compass of the paper is limited to Mao's pre-1949 career, although I feel that the same mode of analysis could be extended to his post-Liberation politics.

The parameters whose effects on Mao's thought are central to this paper are twofold: China's relatively compressed intellectual modernization, and her protracted modern revolutionary experience. By calling them parameters, I mean to suggest that they are important aspects of the Chinese revolutionary context which are absent from most other revolutionary environments. These two parameters are not unrelated, but their effects are distinguishable. They are certainly not the only parameters which could be
studied. Peculiarities of China's political economy (for instance, "semi-colonialism" and "semi-feudalism") and political culture are also important contextual constraints. On the more individual level, there is obviously some interaction between Mao's political role (strong/vulnerable, subordinate/leader) and his writings. The two parameters which I will explore were selected for the importance of their contributions to Mao's pragmatic revolutionary style and to the content of his political paradigm. They set two different types of context for Mao's thought: an environmental context, a sort of Zeitgeist of shared orientations and standards, and an experiential context of the interaction of revolutionary politics and society. The influence of the first is reflected in the nature of Mao's endeavor, and therefore is clearest at the beginning of his political career. The influence of the second is registered in the development of Mao's politics throughout his career.

These parameters are implicitly compared with the Western experience of modernization and revolution. China's intellectual experience from 1880 to 1930 was not simply a foreshortened version of the West's from 1500 to 1930. The difference in temporal dimensions—both in duration and difference in starting points—had a significant effect on the role of intellectual modernity in China. The same can be said for the prolonged revolutionary struggle of the Chinese Communist Party vis-a-vis the Russian and French revolutionary experiences. In China, the principal revolutionary group reached a relatively early con-
solidation of ideology and authority and then underwent a variety of experiences in which failures changed policies and personnel, and successes developed proven policies and correct leaders. In this regard, the most striking difference between the Chinese revolutionaries and their Western counterparts is the 22 years of governing experience the Chinese accumulated in the base areas before coming to national power. The relationship between the two parameters will be developed in detail below, but my thesis is that in China the relatively synchronic appropriation of the Western experience of modernity necessitated a relatively diachronic process of adaptation.

I use Thomas Kuhn's\(^1\) term "paradigm" to describe what might be referred to as Mao's "ideology" or simply his "political thought" in order to emphasize the central coordinative and cognitive function which his thought began to assume for Chinese Communism from 1936. Analogous to the scientific revolutions described by Kuhn, Mao's political paradigm was inevitably locked in struggle with the CCP's established political approach of dogmatic faithfulness. Since each proceeded from basically different valuational and cognitive structures, the struggle was poorly understood by either side and was resolved not through debate but through events.
China's Compressed Intellectual Modernization

The context of Chinese intellectual development was formed by the forced and shattering transition from the presumed universalism of the Confucian t'ien-hsia to the limits of a national existence disadvantageously situated in a world of sovereignties. As Joseph Levenson noted in a rhapsody on this theme,\(^2\) what once passed as imperial cosmopolitanism was reduced by this change of framework to blind provincialism, and intertwined attitudes of nationalism-cosmopolitanism struggled to give new directions to China's intellectual development. These currents were shaped by their confrontation with the West and by the rate of intellectual change which this collision of cultures demanded and made possible.

In Chinese Marxist terms, the fifty years centered on the turn of the century saw a development from defensive feudalism (the Self-Strengthening Movement), to transitional feudalism (K'ang Yu-wei), to docile native capitalism (early Sun Yat-sen), to national capitalism (the New Culture Movement), to the appearance of proletarian internationalism with the Chinese Communist Party.\(^3\) The description which Li Tse-hou gives of the time of K'ang Yu-wei could encompass the intellectual world of progressive Chinese in this period:

At the time K'ang's ideas were being expressed they [Chinese progressives] were facing an unparalleled upheaval, an age of ten thousand tangled flowers, all falling apart, coming into being, and metamorphising...The complete novelty of the situation was blinding; old things which were previously stable began to be doubted. Instead of individual, occasional questions, complex and weighty fundamental problems
lay in front of people and demanded solutions. The collapse of society, the ruin of family and country forced the gentry, doctors, and intellectuals to free themselves from the now defunct classical ideas of "ruling the country and pacifying the earth" which had so long sealed their minds, once again to use their own brains to investigate freely and independently, and to study all things, old and new, from top to bottom, particularly things from the West. Once again the problems of the whole world and of man's whole life were reflected upon in order to find the truth and seek solutions. Therefore all of the world's large and small problems seemed to be brand new matter, and all awaited their new investigations, evaluations, thoughts and research. [emphasis in original] 4

Two fundamental but polar themes of the period are well expressed here: ecstatic of creation and fear for survival. Amazed at the changes which they themselves were making in Chinese culture, scholars from K'ang Yu-wei to Hu Shih perceived a new historical stage, a Chinese Renaissance, which sharply divided them from the epoch of traditional thought. 5 But behind this new flowering of reason was the Darwinian threat of a fatal obsolescence. Even within the conservative National Essence group, this Janus-headed motivation is evident in the juxtaposition of Teng Shih's hopes for an Asian Renaissance and Huang Chieh's fear of national extinction. The coalescence of rationality and necessity made a most persuasive case for progress: what is rational must become real. 6

The course of China's intellectual modernization has been well described by Levenson in Confucian China and Its Modern Fate and elucidated by numerous monographs on individual thinkers. Although the term "intellectual modernization" now seems presumptuous, it is appropriate for the self-understanding of China's innovators around the turn of the century. The predominant
attitude of emulating the successes of the West produced an external orientation with fundamental consequences for the content of Chinese thought and its relationship to society and politics. What I would like to focus on here are some aspects of this orientation and some structural effects of the rapid pace of change.

The intellectual resources newly available to Chinese thinkers included Western works and hitherto neglected aspects of the Chinese tradition which were considered viable, proto-modern, or critical of the old order. Orientation toward the West lent a crucial importance to the translation-interpretation efforts of Yen Fu.\(^7\) Liang Ch'i-ch'ao was most appreciative of Yen's contribution, saying that the desire of himself, K'ang Yu-wei, and T'an Ssu-t'ung to found a new school of thought which was both Chinese and Western had been frustrated because "the new foreign thought had too shallow and meager a source, which dried up easily once tapped and, not surprisingly, died of exhaustion."\(^8\) The sudden richness of sources made possible a degree of syncretism which would be considered excessive in normal times. As Liang said of himself,

Liang tended to be extensive and this superficial, scarcely reaching to outer limits of [a field of] learning when he began to discuss and expound it...\(^9\) Nevertheless, speaking objectively and taking into account the isolation and moribundity of the intellectual world of twenty years ago [1900], without this crude and wide-ranging approach the pioneer work of opening up new fields would not have been possible.

A syncretic tendency was also evident in the preference of many Chinese for ethically oriented, comprehensive theorists like Samuel Smiles or Friedrich Paulsen over more innovative European contemporaries such as Max Weber or Edmund Husserl. This preference
was quite understandable. Until the task of the appropriation of basic Western ideas was completed, the ongoing Western intellectual process of incremental improvements and innovations particularly suited to "late capitalism" were less useful and less accessible than more popular syncretic works. The connotative specification of ideas by their trains of development which acts as an encumbrance to syncretism within a culture was absent for the Chinese. If one can apply Thornstein Veblen's thesis of "the merits of borrowing and the penalty of taking the lead" to the transfer of ideas, then the appropriation of concepts relatively free from their historical roots could be viewed as an opportunity to use the ideas for their intrinsic value rather than for their connotations. However, the borrowing of concepts involved their abstraction from their concrete referents, and this necessarily entailed the transformation of descriptive Western thought into abstract prescriptive categories for China.

The availability and necessity of new ideas produced a rate of change in Chinese intellectual life which has no parallel in Western experience. Ideas which were at first regarded as too radical were viewed as hopelessly reactionary less than a generation later. The archetypical case was K'ang Yu-wei, whose 1898 politics were a milestone in China's development. Proud of the steadfastness of his convictions, he embarrassed his former disciples when these same formerly progressive ideas led him nineteen years later to support a plot to restore the Manchu emperor. The most important structural effect of the pace of development was that there could be little
significant articulation or institutionalization of specific viewpoints. K'ang Yu-wei, who was called "China's Luther" by his followers in 1898, was attempting a sort of modernizing Confucian Reformation. But there was no time for a Confucian protestantism to institutionalize itself. Institutions are a mode of ideological preservation, and in China intellectual time was measured in fractions of generations. Sometimes, as in the case of Fu Ssu-nien and the National Studies Movement, a founder of a particular current would eventually join its emerging critics. A person steadfast in his convictions could only intersect the course of developments, he could not lead them.

Strangely enough, an effect of the lack of institutional articulation of new ideas was the persistence of traditional ideas of the role of scholarship despite its modern content. Peter Buck's research\(^\text{13}\) has shown that Chinese students of natural science had the same background which had produced generations of Confucian scholars. But the continuity of elite origins is not as interesting for our purposes as the persistence of self-conception. The absence of a purely academic class in China was a correlative of compressed modernization because it did not provide the conditions for sustained ideological pluralism or the introverted sophistication of viewpoints (ideological "puzzle solving" in Kuhn's sense) which intellectual institutionalization usually brings in its train. The new modernizers assumed the mixed intellectual-political role of the traditional literary elite; the distinction between specialists and men of letters was slow to emerge. As a result, nothing could be con-
sidered a "purely academic question." Social utility, political consequences, and feasibility were integral aspects of any issue. The intellectuals of the New Culture Movement justified their orientation toward new ideas by their relevance to correct political commitment. Hu Shih had difficulties establishing the legitimacy of the more circumscribed direct interests of his American empiricism against the wholistic role concept of the Chinese intellectual. To many, Li Ta-chao's counter-affirmation of the necessity of ideological engagement was more persuasive. The need for utilization required the intellectual to formulate his version of "China's problem" and relate his contribution to its solution.

This situation was very encouraging to revolutionary youth. The variety of intellectual stimulation, the emphasis on the rebirth of China, and the exhortations to action combined to give young intellectuals a sense of duty and power. The May Fourth Movement was both a loss of innocence and a confirmation of this self-confidence. The syncretic intellectual milieu did not require a long intellectual apprenticeship: six years after Mao read his first newspaper, he published an article in China's leading progressive journal. Moreover, normal career patterns for educated youth were in chaos, so the progressive milieu's assumption of a political intellectualism could lead more easily into a calling to revolutionary politics.

Despite the absence of a differentiated academic role, the rapid and uneven spread of modern ideas created a natural elitism among progressive intellectuals. The monumental inertia of the country-
side contrasted strongly with the ideological mobility of urban (or urbanized) intellectuals. Sometimes the sense of isolation from the world of one's old village produced a tragic sense of impotence.\textsuperscript{15} Among the more active and optimistic, it produced a tutelary attitude in which the vast power of the new ideas would either transform the national environment (through railroads, industrialization, or education), or enable, through scientific social analysis, a modern political program to be devised on behalf of the whole population. When the modern intelligensia became self-consciously critical of its scholar-gentry roots in the second half of the 1920's, it sought a new legitimacy in a union of its own design with the masses. As Laurence Schneider describes it, "The intellectuals...stiffly embraced the peasantry, but the eschewed the possibility of merging with them, or leading them on to militant social revolution, or patronizing them, as did the scholars of old."\textsuperscript{16} For the Chinese Communist Party, the emphasis of Marxism-Leninism on the urban proletariat confirmed the Party's isolation from the countryside and greatly exacerbated the debacles of 1927-1930. In any case, until 1925 there was little opportunity for responsible interaction between the national policies of the two major parties and rural politics, because until that time they did not control a significant amount of territory. When this situation changed with the conquest of Kwangtung there was an initial flurry of support for peasant mobilization, but enthusiasm waned when peasant politics threatened the rural elitist roots of the urban elite.
Protracted Revolutionary Experience

No one wanted China's revolutionary experience to be a protracted one. The revolutionaries wanted a quick victory, and their opponents would have liked to finally rid China of the Communist menace. Nevertheless, the Chinese Communist Party had an exceptionally long career of active revolution, and its final victory was made possible by the lessons accumulated in this experience. Before exploring the specific effects of this protracted revolutionary experience, it is necessary to analyze the relationship between this parameter and China's compressed modernization.

The basic problem of the cross cultural appropriation of concepts is difficult enough in itself, but the borrowing of political paradigms is rendered even more complex by the disparity of political situations between countries. The borrowing of political paradigms necessarily contains the presumption of practical applicability. Even in the cases where the problem of cultural mediation is minimized—for instance, the direct intervention of the Comintern agent Sneevliet in the affairs of the CCP, and similarly the role of Bukharin in the restructuring and early guidance of the KMT—the presumption of applicability remains to be tested. Since the paradigm is prescriptive for the Chinese polity rather than descriptive, its applicability can be proven only in politics. Hence, the problem of appropriating foreign political paradigms goes beyond the question of accuracy of transmission. Either the
political potential of the borrower corresponds to the borrowed political solution, or significant differences in the political situation will require corresponding adjustments in the paradigm in order for it to remain viable. To put it simply, the original success of the paradigm and its accurate transmission mean nothing if that paradigm is not apt for one's own situation.

From a negative point of view, the process of political application is a contextual critique of ideology. The situational irony of a republican constitution and national parliament during the warlord era did not prove that parliamentary democracy didn't work, but that in China at that time it was at least misapplied, if not inapplicable. On the other hand, misapplication doesn't act as a simple principle of falsification for a paradigm. Extra-neous factors, personal or environmental, can always be held accountable for failure. If a failure is viewed as anomalous, that is, paradigm-challenging, by an individual, he can defect from the organization. If the leadership views a disaster as anomalous, it can reinterpret or adjust the paradigm. If the leadership assumes this responsibility for paradigm adjustment, a more positive role emerges for political experience. It becomes the process of creation of a apt paradigm, the process of modification of borrowed terms and initial understandings by an indigenous set of referents.

The overriding concern with correct orientation among progressive movements in China is reflected in Sun Yat-sen's slogan, "Action is easy but knowledge is difficult," a reversal of a classical saying.
The practical political task was seen by Chinese revolutionaries as one of implementation of a general program rather than the articulation of a peculiarly Chinese paradigm. Hence it was inevitable that insofar as the abstract and alien general party programs were inappropriate or poorly managed in China they would be ineffectual. The compressed intellectual modernization of China led to a precocious development of political paradigms, and these faced continual crises of appropriateness until they were either tailored to Chinese conditions or isolated from political reality. ¹⁹

The effects of China's protracted Communist revolutionary experience can be differentiated into those deriving from Russian experience and expertise, the negative lessons of unexpected disasters, and the more positive specific lessons of policy implementation. As far as the emergence of a peculiarly Chinese paradigm through relatively cumulative experience is concerned, these aspects are not equal. The success of the October Revolution made Bolshevism an important vicarious experience for radical Chinese progressives, but the appropriation of the Soviet paradigm was directly in the train of compressed modernization developments. The second category, lessons from disasters, includes the effects of setbacks in the CCP's political history on the watersheds in its ideological orientation. But disasters did not necessarily lead to rectification, and when they did, the ideological change was toward an already existing but non-official paradigm. The only indisputably positive producer of new ideas from revolutionary experience was practical policy experience which the CCP gained particularly in the government of
the base areas. This least foreign-oriented, most peculiarly Chinese activity was Mao Tse-tung's forte as a Communist leader during the first eight years of base area operations.

Among the available Western revolutionary ideologies, Marxism-Leninism was preferred because of its success in Russia. If one imagines the counter-factual situations of a Russian revolution led by the Socialist Revolutionaries rather than by the Bolsheviks, or of a truly pluralistic Comintern resulting from lasting socialist victories in Hungary and Germany as well as Russia, then the historical underpinning of the Bolshevik ideological appeal is fairly evident. The prominence of Bolshevik success produced an attentive audience among Chinese radicals.

The compliance of both the KMT and the CCP toward their Comintern advisors was a submission to proven expertise. The existence of a Russian model and the active interest of the Soviet Union in the Chinese revolution produced a weighting of ideological alternatives in China. Although every imaginable political outlook probably had some adherents in China, the two Russian-assisted efforts seemed to be in a league by themselves. Particularly in the CCP, the unusual degree of ideological consolidation made possible by subordination to the Comintern allowed a coordinated attention to political tasks which otherwise would have been affected by disputes over ideology and leadership. Party splits and factions didn't become prominent until the disastrous end of the First United Front in 1927.

Of course, the CCP's docile acceptance of Russian leadership
was not an unmixed blessing. The disadvantage of foreign dependence was most obvious when the Russian experts gave the wrong advice. Stalin's consistently bad advice is probably the most prominent individual contribution to the disasters which befell the CCP in 1927. A disadvantage which was somewhat less obvious although just as disastrous was the Russian effect on Chinese leadership until 1935. In order to facilitate Moscow's control over the movement, young, Russian-trained Chinese Stalinists (the "28 Bolsheviks") were promoted as the leaders of the CCP, stifling the emergence of experienced leadership and subjecting base area politics to the inappropriate concerns of the contemporaneous consolidation politics of the Soviet Union.

The most pervasive effect of the Russian model on the CCP was the assumption that what worked in Russia was appropriate to China. This was an ideological power which extended beyond the reach of Russian advice or Russian leadership because it loaded the perception of political alternatives. A very good example of this is the notion of proletarian hegemony, which led to a constant preference for urban working class leadership. Undoubtedly a central concept in Bolshevik theory and experience, the ideal of proletarian hegemony contributed to a series of disasters in Chinese revolutionary politics from the Nanchang Uprising in 1927 to the attack on Changsha in 1930. The existence of a socialist regime in Russia made possible a more consolidated ideological start for radical politics in China, but the CCP's own protracted experience was necessary to wean the Party away from the ideal of recapitulating the Russian model.
The role of political disasters in stimulating paradigm change is comparable to that of anomalies in natural science as described by Kuhn. A political failure, like an unexpected result in normal science, can be treated either as an accident, or as a case requiring the further articulation of the established paradigm, or as evidence of the relative inadequacy of the established paradigm. However, the differences between political failures and anomalies are as significant as their similarities. The most striking difference is that a political failure involves a material loss to the movement. If the disaster leads to the extermination of the movement, then the question of its ideological significance within the paradigm becomes a historical one. Even if the crisis is survived, the practical impact of a major failure changes the political context of the movement's remaining strength, so that policy adjustments have to be made regardless of whether or not the failure is ruled accidental. The theoretical challenge which a failure presents also differs from that of an anomaly. The controlled experimental situation in which the anomaly is observed allows it to challenge the universality of the principle which the paradigm asserts. A political failure challenges the applicability of a revolutionary paradigm to a particular situation. Since political effect is the object of the political paradigm, this is a central challenge; however, it does not necessarily entail a questioning of value and goal commitments.

The list of the CCP's major crisis years is a long one: 1923, 1927, 1930, 1934, 1941. In response to each of these disasters,
policies changed, leadership was reshuffled, and unshaken faith in Marxism-Leninism was proclaimed. The advantage of the revolutionary paradigm view of these developments is that it enables analysis to move beyond the deceptively simple question of continuity and change. Most of the responses to failure were basically the accommodation or extension of the existing paradigm to the new situation. Only in the case of the ideological change prompted by the failure of the Kiangsi Soviet in 1934 was the paradigm which led to disaster juxtaposed to an unofficial but tested paradigm which (it was alleged) would have been successful. A paradigm change of this sort could not have occurred without a protracted period of struggle in which a new paradigm could develop and an old one could be proven mistaken.

The actual process of the development of the new Maoist paradigm occurred at the policy level. Although within a revolutionary paradigm the evaluation of a policy is not simply in terms of its success or failure, it is an important criterion and in many cases the decisive one. In extreme situations where survival rather than revolutionary advance provided the horizon of policy, success was essential. In a number of areas, correct principles of policy formation could only merge after a period of trial and error. In other areas, general directives governing local level work could only be given after the capacity of the local organs had been demonstrated. The Chinese practice of propagating policy through the emulation of models is particularly efficient in these areas. In general, the tendency of policy principles
to emerge from successful practical work provides a source for possible conflict with the established paradigm. The conflict is to some extent within the established paradigm, because it needs successful implementation, and if the principles of success diverge significantly from those sanctioned by the paradigm, it faces an impossible choice.

Mao's Political Thinking and Contextual Parameters

The contextual parameters of compressed modernization and protracted revolutionary experience did not determine Mao Tsetung's political thought. They did however set the environment for the primarily practical process of the origination and adoption of his paradigm for revolutionary politics. The crucial need of the CCP was for a paradigm in which the unity of theory and practice meant attention and flexibility toward the peculiarities of the concrete situation, rather than the imposition of theory on practice. Mao developed an outlook of this sort in his early guerilla days, when survival was the overwhelming interest. Mao's political disposition was eminently suited for this type of practical creativity. From his earliest engagements in politics, Mao invariably oriented his activities toward practical targets and attempted to mobilize the greatest possible support for his programs. In this section I will discuss the specific effects of compressed modernization and protracted revolutionary experience on Mao's political style and on the development of his paradigm.
Mao participated at the forefront of the New Culture and Marxist phases of China's intellectual modernization, but he was a leader in developments only in his native province of Hunan. Mao made trips to Peking and Shanghai shortly before and after the May Fourth Movement, and he used these occasions to become acquainted with the leading figures of the New Culture movement. As Mao noted, the privilege was not mutual.

I tried to begin conversations with them [the leading figures] on political and cultural subjects, but they were very busy men. They had no time to listen to an assistant librarian speaking a southern dialect. Back in Hunan Mao was a major leader of the May Fourth Movement, and his powerful essays attracted some national attention. After Mao was expelled from Hunan in 1923, he assumed a role of presence but not prominence in the CCP and KMT. His tasks were important, but he was not responsible for providing comprehensive leadership. After the CCP-KMT split in 1927, Mao was in general the leader of his base area, but was still subordinate to the Central Committee. He was not responsible for general Party policy until after the Tsunyi Conference of 1935.

The theme of China's intellectual modernization which most deeply affected Mao was the primacy of political commitment over purely intellectual attainment. This moral base of theory was emphasized by Mao's mentor and eventual father-in-law, Yang Ch'ang-chi. Patriotic commitment was the core of the New Citizen's Study Society, a student group which Mao formed before the May Fourth Movement. By running a night school for workers
and becoming involved in the May Fourth Movement, the Society expressed its patriotic commitment in practical, populist activities. After the May Fourth Movement, Mao's continuing interest in intellectual modernization was demonstrated in his efforts to set up a Cultural Book Society, a Marxism Study Group, and the Self-Education University. This last experiment was particularly interesting, because in it Mao tried to combine the more informal, tutorial methods of traditional Chinese teaching with modern Western subjects.

In Mao's early writings the syncretism of his intellectual milieu is reflected as well as his own considerable originality. His most important May Fourth work, "The Great Union of the Popular Masses," first develops his own notion that all political power is based on unions of people, and then discusses methods of struggle by stating his preference for Kropotkin's idea of mutual aid over Marx's of ruthless class struggle. However, Mao does not argue through authorities, and he spends little time identifying or elaborating upon the sources of his ideas. Mao disciplined his ideological curiosity to the practical task at hand more successfully than did many of his colleagues.

During the first six years of his political activism, Mao differed from the natural elitism of his fellow modernized intellectuals in degree but not in kind. Mao's general ideological position in 1919-1925 could be described as populist intellectualism. His sincere dedication to the people was expressed in the May Fourth Movement as a mission of enlightenment, and