THE HISTORICAL SHAPING OF MAO ZEDONG'S
POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Although I am determined by Nature, I am also at the same time a part of Nature. Accordingly Nature can determine my strength, and I also can determine Nature's strength. Although my strength is small, it cannot be said that it is without influence on Nature. Mao Zedong, 1917

Usually it is assumed that what is of lasting value in a person's thought is that part of it which is intended to be universal. In other words, one must reach beyond given historical circumstances in order to attain more than passing significance. This may well be true for professional philosophers. Certainly Hegel's Science of Logic is of greater interest to a contemporary audience than his grocery accounts, and as much as his letters flesh out a picture of Hegel's personality they are no substitute for his philosophy. But the social condition is one of co-determination by history, accident and other persons. From the abstracted perspective of the individual, it is a bonded condition, but this perspective is itself a fiction of consciousness, created to legitimate the struggle against particular bondages. It is illusory insofar as it posits the reality of unbounded individuality.

If social existence is necessarily situational, then what of social truths? Are universals inevitably antisocial, as Plato's analogy of the cave suggests? Is some concrete situation the latent reality behind alleged transcendental, as Feuerbach claimed about religion and Marx about ideology in general? Or are there universal truths about the human condition which provide meaningful generalizations about historical existence?
Far from looking to the thought of Mao Zedong for explicit answers to these questions, this essay examines the case of Mao because it poses the problem of universality and society in a compelling way. To be sure, his example (and his thought) are particularly relevant to the third question. Since Mao's career was the very opposite of Plato's cave, he cared little for the antisocial implications of transcendental philosophy. And despite his Marxism, Mao was far less inclined than his mentor to reduce phenomena of the social superstructure to their foundations in the economic base. Mao was primarily a practical revolutionary, and his theoretical generalizations remain within the concerns of successful political activity. The philosophical character of Mao's theoretical concerns could be challenged because of their immanence and historicity. On the other hand, if rationality has any social role it must be one within history, and it could even be argued that Mao's political success (so far as it was due to his own efforts) is prima facie evidence that his views are worth considering.

It must be stressed at the outset that Mao was not a Faustian hero dedicated to carving his own image on Chinese history. Denying the deifications of Mao which were part of the politics of the Cultural Revolution is now a popular pastime in China as well as in the West, but it has a particular importance for the theme of this essay. Mao's thought and his political effectiveness were always characterized by practical energy and mobilization of collective efforts rather than by individual brilliance or ambition. His consummate political skill—developed through much trial and error—was the accurate perception of the potential of given conditions. If Mao's thought is left in its natural habitat of politics, it does not appear to be a utopian vision thwarted by the exigencies of the moment, but rather it is essentially political, that is, willingly co-determined by external and institutional conditions. This assertion is far more true for Mao's politics before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Beginning in 1957 Mao attempted to utilize his revolutionary experience as an ideological guide for Chinese politics, and as a result his political and value commitments became more explicit and rigid. But even in the last, chaotic period of Mao's rule his pragmatic, situation-oriented style was evident.

If Mao's political thought is essentially a unity of theory and practice, then the historical situation in which he operated is uniquely important for an accurate grasp of his thought. The approach of this essay is to outline major historical parameters of Mao's thought in order to present his political paradigm in context. The aim is not to reduce Mao to being a part of a larger historical phenomenon, but to show that the unity of theory and practice which I view as essential to Mao's thought existed in practice as well as in theory. As the opening quotation of this essay indicates, Mao did not view the relationship of history and will as one way in either direction.

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. These are singled out because of the importance of their contribution to Mao's politics and because of the significance of Mao's politics in resolving the historical problem posed by these parameters. Compressed intellectual modernization and protracted revolution are not unrelated, but their effects are distinguishable. They set two different types of context for Mao's thought: an environmental context, a 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, and is clearest in the pre-1937 phase of his politics when the pace and significance of changes were more marked. Thus the concentration of this essay will be on Mao's early career. The difficult questions of Mao's politics during the post-1949 period will not be addressed.1
The parameters are implicitly compared to 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 (CCP) vis-à-vis the Russian and French revolutionary experiences. In China, the principal revolutionary group reached a relatively early consolidation 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 rapid appropriation of the Western experience of modernity necessitated a relatively protracted process of adaptation.

I use Thomas Kuhn's 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.

The basic question which this essay addresses is the content and significance of Mao's thought for China. But the answer to this question can have a more universal significance for political philosophy because of its emphasis on the situational character of political leadership.

Modern political philosophy from Machiavelli has labored under the premise that the good society is one based on knowledge of general social laws. As a result, the theoretical problem of determining the natural laws of society has been considered the primary task of rational politics. The problem of the actual political execution of schemes of a rational society remained a perennially frustrating one, but—in theory—secondary to the genuinely scientific questions of its structure. Thomas More was most frank about the tenuous relationship of rational politics and real politics when he called his fantasy "Utopia," meaning "No place." But there are utopian elements in any science of society, including such theories as Marxism which claim that historical necessity rather than the philosopher himself will be the architect of the new order.

In contrast to the modern inclination toward a universal science of politics, Mao's political paradigm centered on the concrete problems of political leadership. For him the political process is more than a neutral medium in which rational politics is executed. Mao's approach is a political science of society rather than a natural science of society; it is based on the fluidity of political relationships rather than on general social structures. The distinctiveness of Mao's political paradigm is masked by his commitment to Marxism but it can certainly be located as an integral paradigm in his writings and politics.

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 empire to the limits of a rational existence disadvantageously situated in a world of sovereigntics. As Joseph Levenson noted in a rhapsody on this theme, 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 (Kang Youwei), 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. The description which Li Zehou gives of the time of Kang Youwei could encompass the intellectual world of progressive Chinese in this period:

At the time Kang'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 metamorphosing...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 matters, and all awaited their new investigations, evaluations, thoughts and research. (emphasis in original)

Two fundamental but polar themes of the period are well expressed here: ecstasy of creation and fear for survival. Amazed at the changes which they themselves were making in Chinese culture, scholars from Kang Youwei to Hu Shi perceived a new historical stage, a Chinese Renaissance, which sharply divided them from the epoch of traditional thought. But behind this new flowering of reason was the Darwinian threat of a fatal obsolescence. The coalescence of rationality and necessity made a most persuasive case for progress: what is rational must become real.

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 Yan Fu. Liang Qichao was most appreciative of Yan's contribution, saying that the desire of himself, Kang Youwei, and Tan Sitong 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." 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 thus superficial, scarcely reaching to outer limits of (a field of) learning when he began to discuss and expound it... Nevertheless, speaking objectively and taking into account the isolation and morbidity 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 Thorstein 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 Kang Youwei, 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. Kang, who was called "China's Luther" by his followers in 1898, was attempting a sort of modernizing Confucian Reformation. But there was not 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 Yu Sinian 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. Chinese students of Western 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 correlate 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 considered 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 holistic role concept of the Chinese intellectual. To many, Li Dachao'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 countryside 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. 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 intelligentsia 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 they eschewed the possibility of merging with them, or leading them on to militant social revolution, or patronizing them, as did the scholars of old." 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 Guangdong Province 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.

Protected 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 crosscultural 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. Extraneous 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 an 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.

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 watershed 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 Zedong'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,20 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 copying 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 para-
digm to a particular situation. Since political effect
is the object of the political paradigm, this is a cen-
tral challenge; however, it does not necessarily entail
a question 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 Jiangxi 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 emerge 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, be-

cause 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 modern-
ization and protracted revolutionary experience did not
determine Mao Zedong'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 guerrilla days, when
survival was the overwhelming interest. Mao's politi-
cal 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. This sec-
section 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 Cul-
ture and Marxist phases of China's intellectual modern-
ization, 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 ac-
cquainted 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 cul-
tural 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 prominence but not prominence in the leadership of 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 Chaugji. 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 subject.

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 afterwards in his identification with the CCP, the scientific revolutionary party of the modern proletariat. However, during his long stay in the countryside in 1925, he became aware of the tremendous revolutionary potential of the peasantry which was being ignored because of the great gulf between rural conditions and the interests of the urban revolutionaries. Thereupon one of Mao's major tasks became that of convincing the Party intelligentsia to investigate rural conditions and to form their policies on the basis of the real, rather than presumed, needs of the masses. This attitude differs significantly from his earlier one, and I would call it "populist empiricism." This attitude runs strong in Mao's works from his 1926 articles on the peasant question to his contributions to the rectification campaigns of 1942 and 1943. Mao showed tendencies toward yet another attitude, that of populist anti-intellectualism, from his days in Yenan onwards. The distinction I would draw between populist empiricism and populist anti-intellectualism is that the first strives to maintain the correct direction for China's modernizing movement, whereas the second tends to view intellectuals as a class alien from the people whose skills are useful for the revolution and mass progress. In the first, the intellectuals and the masses should co-determine a popular but modern revolution; in the second, the intellectuals are an instrument of a popular revolution. To some extent, these tendencies correspond to the production/distribution dilemmas of revolutionary political economy.

The experience of the Russian revolution was im-
portant for Mao, although considerably less so than it was for many of his Party colleagues. The first and most basic contribution of the Russian revolution to Mao's thought was its proof that a popular revolution could be successful. This allowed a double optimism in Mao's early writings: China could also be successful in her revolutionary endeavors, and her success would occur within a worldwide movement of popular revolution. After the failure of the May Fourth Movement, Marxism-Leninism helped provide an organizational and conceptual guide to the revolutionary struggle. Party work replaced spontaneous and occasional activities, and class analysis replaced the general appeal for a "great union of the popular masses." But the goal of Mao's politics remained mass revolution, and Marxism-Leninism was adopted as an orienting framework toward that end.

Mao's commitment to Marxism-Leninism after his initial preference for Kropotkin's anarchism was a result of the failure of the May Fourth Movement to produce a transformation of Chinese politics. This was the first of a series of disappointments which induced major changes in Mao's political thinking. Although Mao's disappointments and CCP failures usually occurred simultaneously, the official reaction and Mao's personal lesson were usually different. For instance, the 1927 disaster eventually taught the CCP to value its peasant support highly and to take land policy seriously. But Mao had already reached this conclusion in 1925. His thesis of the centrality of the peasant question to a meaningful national revolution was proven by the problems with the Northern Expedition in 1927. The lesson for Mao in the catastrophe was that the importance of the peasantry for the substance and legitimacy of the revolution did not immediately translate into political power; political power, as he later put it, "grows out of the barrel of a gun." The peasant movement of 1926-1927 which Mao described in the Hunan Report as "a mighty storm, a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back," was not armed and hence was easily crushed. Starting at Jinggangshan, Mao developed the base areas as the military-political foundation for a rural-centered Communist revolution.

The fall of the Jiangxi Soviet in 1934 and the hardships imposed by the Japanese and the KMT in 1941 resulted in personal triumphs for Mao, but they also posed great challenges for Mao's political paradigm. In 1935 Mao assumed a comprehensive leadership role in the CCP because of the failures of the 28 Bolsheviks and his own reputation for success. But the circumstances of the Long March and the struggle against Japan were a new experience for the CCP, and Mao's previously successful policies had to be reexamined from this vantage point. This required a significant paradigm extension in two directions: first, the general analysis of the new situation, and second, the abstraction and codification of paradigmatic principles. From 1935 to 1940, Mao produced numerous analyses of the new situation, concentrating on strategy for the Anti-Japanese War and the principles of the cooperation in the Second United Front with the KMT. But in order to apply his earlier successes to the new situation, Mao had to reflect on their inherent principles. This led to his concern with philosophy in 1937, and his two lectures "On Practice" and "On Contradiction" illustrate this theoretical effort.

In 1941, the KMT attack on the Communist New Fourth Army destroyed the last remaining base of Comintern power in the CCP and together with increased Japanese pressure ushered in a period of isolation and hardship for Yanan. Mao responded to the political opportunity and economic challenge by implementing a fundamental reconstitution of the CCP. This involved, in the ideological rectification campaigns of 1942 and 1943, the intensive struggle against subjectivism, sectarianism, and stereotyped writing, with positive emphasis on the study of concrete conditions. In the political economy of the base area, it led to what Mark Selden calls "the Yanan Way," a leadership style of integration with the masses and popular mobilization campaigns. This fleshing out of Mao's political paradigm by self-conscious, authoritative application made
the uniqueness of Mao's politics within both the Chinese and the Marxist traditions quite striking.

The parameter of protracted revolutionary experience is most significant for the development of Mao's policies through the processes of investigation, trial and error, and re-application. These time-consuming processes allowed specific but relatively cumulative innovations. The richest period of Mao's political development through experience was from the beginning of the Jinggangshan base area in late 1927 to the Second Congress of the Jiangxi Soviet in early 1934. In Mao's later, more theoretical writings, he not only reaffirmed the basic policy innovations which resulted from his experience but he emphasized the primary importance to correct leadership of investigation, flexibility, and a grasp of the significant particularities of one's situation.

Investigation was the chief tool of Mao's policy development. As early as 1926, he suggested that cadres needed a personal interchange with the masses in order to formulate and implement effective policy.

Go to a village you are familiar with or to a strange village, in summer dry out in the hot sun, in winter face the severe cold of the wind and snow, and holding the peasants' hands ask them what they want. From their misery and needs lead them to organize; lead them to struggle with the local tyrants and bad gentry; lead them to cooperate with the workers, students, and middle and small merchants in the cities and set up a united front; lead them to participate in the anti-imperialist and anti-warlord national revolutionary movement. 39

It is evident from this quotation (Mao's earliest "mass line" passage) and from Mao's rural investigations that the object of investigation is not simply to acquire an accurate picture of the present situation, but just as importantly to unite with the masses and to determine for a particular place and time how to elicit maximum active popular support. Nevertheless, investigation was not simply a public relations ploy for the Party. As Mao pursued it, 40 investigation was a relatively open-ended gathering of information about practically all aspects of village society. Although particularly sensitive to Marxist categories such as exploitation and class struggle, the richness and variety of information presented indicates a serious desire to learn a particular situation rather than simply prove an already formed, abstract analysis. 41 The importance of such information-gathering is that it enables leadership to be objective. Instead of relying on orders, or on what seems plausible, or on reports of subordinates, the leader who knows his area knows the object of his policy and can adjust it to secure maximum success.

Therefore Mao at one time adopted the policy of "no investigation, no right to speak," reasoning that "when you have not probed into a problem, into the present facts and into its past history, and know nothing of its essentials, whatever you say about it will undoubtedly be nonsense." 42

Investigation is not only essential for the formulation of appropriate policies, it is a continuing source of information about policy failures, inadequacies, and new environmental developments. It provides the stream of information which enables policy development by trial and error to occur. Of course, in extreme cases where success means survival, the confirmation of results isn't the problem. In one fast-moving sequence in 1928 which almost amounted to a controlled experiment, Mao built up the Jinggangshan base area, an outside emissary took over and it was decimated; Mao built it up again, another emissary took over and it was decimated again. 43 More often, however, the defects of policy and of official personnel were not readily apparent. The effect of unsatisfactory policies and inapt leadership was not to cause protest from the masses but to cause alienation and apathy. The resulting "estrangement from the masses" (toli quanzhong) let slip the regime's most important resource, its capacity for popular mobilization.
Mao's personal lessons from trial and error were of a somewhat different sort, since he ordinarily dealt with subordinates rather than directly with the masses. One of the most interesting and significant sequences in the development of his policy by trial and error occurred in his administration of the Jiangxi Soviet from 1932 to 1934. When the Jiangxi Soviet was rechristened the Central Soviet Area of the Chinese Soviet Republic in late 1931 it was blessed with an imposing set of organic laws, and Mao, as its new chairman, tried to implement them. First he used the hierarchical authority system at his disposal to command that cadres implement the law according to concrete circumstances and avoid estrangement from the masses. Six months later when these commands were evidently ineffective, Mao ordered extensive local elections in order to replace bad officials and to bring in new activists. This was in effect asking incompetent officials to implement an election whose effectiveness would be judged by their own removal, and not surprisingly, it was a total failure. He then tried to stimulate a variety of local campaigns, with mixed results. Finally, in the summer of 1933, Mao initiated the Land Investigation Movement. This was done very carefully. He selected eight countries for special attention and called a large, three-day meeting of their cadres, during which his proposal for the movement was discussed and amended. Simple standards were promulgated for analysing class membership, the most important technical aspect of the movement. The progress of the eight countries received much publicity during the summer, and difficult cases were publicly analysed and decided. Finally, at the end of the summer the experience of the eight countries was summarized and the movement became general. By this process, Mao incorporated the initiative of his subordinates into the campaign and avoided his earlier self-defeating "commandism."

Policy development through reappraisal involves the generalization of previous experience, the analysis of the present situation, and a corresponding adaptation of policy. Examples of this within Mao's policy abound. The technique of the Land Investigation Movement of 1933 was reapplied and developed in various Yanan campaigns in the 1940's. When the CCP returned to a more radical land policy in 1946-1947, Mao's class analyses of 1933 were republished with commentary and amendments. An easily overlooked instance of reappli- cation was the origin of many Yanan policies in the innovations of other anti-Japanese base areas. In general, as a variety of policy experience accumulated, it became useful to reach back to analogs in Party history in developing new campaigns.

The basic principle of policy development which underlies investigation, trial and error, and reappraisal is that of the mass line:

Take the ideas of the masses and concentrate them, then go to the masses, persevere in the ideas and carry them through, so as to form correct ideas of leadership—such is the basic method of leadership.

What is described here is not a proprietary right to be the vanguard of the masses, but a painful leadership process in which integration with the masses makes them the origin and test of policy. Investigation establishes a commonality of perspective, and it is retained through a willingness to correct errors and avoid estrangement from the masses. In the crooked path of revolutionary development, the possibility of using proven policy is a welcome one, but reappraisal is not a mere transfer of policy. Mao's chief epistemological conviction, the primacy of practice and the difficulty and transience of correct conceptual understanding, underscores the importance of the continual dialectic between leaders and masses. Finally, Mao's basic political conviction of the invincible power of the mobilized masses guaranteed success to correct leadership.

Conclusion: Mao's Revolutionary Paradigm.

At this point it is worthwhile to formulate a systematic statement of the essentials of Mao's poli-
tical paradigm, to juxtapose it to the paradigm which it replaced, and finally to evaluate the significance of Mao's contribution within the context of the parameters already described.

The focus of Mao's politics was to effect revolutionary change by providing correct leadership to the masses. Several aspects of this focus are noteworthy, the primary one being its action orientation. Mao's political thinking centered on practical decision points and attempted to supply the theoretical prerequisites of correct leadership: an accurate analysis of the situation and an advocacy of the most practical alternative. Only the new demands of the 1935-1949 period, namely, to supply comprehensive guidance to the CCP and to adapt his experience to new situations, required a more abstract statement of his political thinking. The "Thought of Mao Zedong" emerged from the thinking of Mao Zedong because of the paradigmatic functions which the latter assumed.

A second important aspect of this focus is Mao's conviction that popular mobilization is the ultimate political power. This is Mao's oldest and strongest political conviction. Mao's exhortation to "serve the people" does not stem from a Kantian sense of duty for duty's sake; here morality and political pragmatics are inseparable. Revolutionary change depends on the active participation of the masses for its likelihood of success and for the permanence of its accomplishments.

A third aspect is Mao's emphasis on correctness of leadership rather than the truth of universal principles or the fidelity of leadership. This is not simply a re-reversal of Sun Yat-sen's slogan "Action is easy but knowledge is difficult" but to its classical form. Mao contends that knowledge and action are inseparable—meaning however that correct (useful) knowledge and correct (appropriate) action are inseparable. The problem of both revolutionary theory and revolutionary praxis is that of uniting situational particulars with ideological universals. The epistemological and ontological underpinning of this assertion of the problematic unity of theory and practice is made clear in Mao's essays "On Practice" and "On Contradiction." Mao maintains that theory emerges from practice and proves itself in its application to practice. The interaction of theory and practice is a constant process because not only does the complexity of the objective world make a satisfactory theory difficult to attain, but environmental changes constantly invalidate previously successful understandings. Mao's epistemological position is not the relativistic one of "there is no universal truth;" it is the practical one of "correctness is difficult to achieve and never final." His position does imply that there is no universal correctness, and he supports this view with an ontology which differs significantly from the Engels-Stalin one based on the universality of contradiction. Mao also assumes the dialectical materialism thesis of the universality of contradiction, but he emphasizes (with a hint of his own originality) the particularity of contradiction. This principle, like his epistemological one, stresses the need to make a concrete analysis of each situation in order to determine the principal contradiction, and of each contradiction in order to determine the principal aspect. The flux of categorical identities which is implied by dialectics allows no particular contradictions to be derived from more universal ones without concrete investigations.

Mao states that sometimes relations of production are more important than productive forces, theory more important than practice, and superstructure more important than the economic base. The decisive factor is the actual opportunity for revolutionary action in a particular situation. Mao's approach to dialectical materialism leads him to a small nesting of analytical tools (situation, principal contradiction, process, principal aspect) and one "outsider"--the distinction between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions. It does not allow him to build an ontology out of dialectics, neither a methodological strenge Wissenschaft in the Hegelian-Marxist sense nor an empirical Dialektik der Natur as with Engels and Stalin.
The conflict between Mao's revolutionary paradigm and the one represented by the 28 Bolsheviks fits Kuhn's description of a paradigm clash. The 28 Bolsheviks insisted (seconded in the 1960's and 1970's by the Russians)\(^5\) that they were the faithful Communist leaders who had been replaced by a petty bourgeois peasant. On the other hand, correctness, understood as aptness for survival and popular mobilization, was the standard by which the Stalinist leadership was tried and found wanting. The stepchild of borrowed Marxist-Leninist theory, practical work among the peasantry, eventually provided the base, the paradigm, and the leadership of the CCP. It appeared that faithfulness in ideological transfer yielded to the pragmatism of successful revolutionary experience.

But the dichotomy of faithful internationalists and experienced pragmatists, and the description of the development as "the decay of ideology," can easily be overemphasized. Although Franz Schumann's distinction\(^5\) between the "pure ideology" of Marxism and the "practical ideology" of the thought of Mao Zedong is too simplistic, it is undoubtedly correct in its presumption of a continuing, important role for Marxist-Leninist theory in China. The Chinese formula that Mao creatively applied Marxism-Leninism to Chinese conditions is least inaccurate, but the word "creatively" bears far too heavy a burden of meaning. The chief problem with any of these formulations is not that they are mistaken, but that they fail to grasp the peculiar significance of Mao Zedong's political paradigm for China and for contemporary political theory. Mao not only provided successful leadership for the Chinese revolution, he focused the attention of revolutionaries in China on the practical problems of mass leadership, and provided the judgements of significance, the concepts, and the authoritative directives which shaped the CCP's popular mobilization. In doing this Mao's political paradigm did not replace Marxism in China, although it did mediate its effects on policy. Mao's paradigm did replace the vital but theoretically insignificant Leninist concept of tactics with a populist revolutionary pragmatism. Not surprisingly, this new dimension of revolutionary thinking in China emerged through the lessons of dogmatic failure and practical policy successes, rather than through ideological debates. The parameters of the Chinese revolution set Mao's intellectual milieu and some aspects of his style, and allowed the germination and growth of his paradigm through protracted struggle. Because of this context, Mao's thought is peculiarly Chinese: appropriate for Chinese conditions, and deferring to the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism. But with the understanding of its context, Mao's thought lends itself to an especially benign form of cross-cultural political stimulation, as well as being central to the understanding of the ideological development of contemporary China. Unlike the thesis of the universality of a particular scheme of concepts or contradictions, Mao's stress on the universality of their particularity conveys an attitude of flexible attention toward problems rather than a predisposition...then its dogmatic or hierarchical prerogatives. And the mass line emphasizes policy making through the people rather than on behalf of the people. It might plausibly be argued that to abstract such meta-political principles from Mao's thought is an emasculation of his Marxist revolutionary commitment. However, it seems to me that such an objection rests on a notion of ideological transfer which Mao found too simplistic for his own needs.
FOOTNOTES


5 Liang Qichao's attempt to locate the Chinese Renaissance in the development of Ch'ing thought appears anomalous. See Liang Qichao, Intellectual Trends in the Ch'ing Period, tr. C.Y. Hau (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959). However, the attempt to summarize Qing intellectual developments nine years after the dynasty's collapse already indicates Liang's consciousness of a gulf between the present and the recent past which has already relegated the latter to history.

6 This is a double allusion to Hegel. First, there is a significant parallel between Hegel's view of Germany between the French Revolution and the Restoration and the situation of China at the turn of the century. As Schiomo Avinacci points out in Hegel and the Modern State (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972), Hegel rejoiced in the prospect of an irrational, superannuated Germany being reborn in the spirit of French rationalism. Secondly, Heinrich Heine related that Hegel explained his famous statement that "what is real, is reasonable," by saying that "all that is reasonable, must be." H. Heine, Zur Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland, ed. Wolfgang Harich (Frankfurt: Insel, 1965), p. 210.

7 This is Li Zihou's evaluation in his article, "Lun Yan Fu" (On Yan Fu) in Lishi Yanjiu (Historical Research), 1977:2 (Feb.), p. 67-80.

8 Liang Qichao, Intellectual Trends, p. 113.

9 Ibid., p. 106.

10 As a result: Marxism did not attract great interest until after the Bolshevik Revolution.

11 This notion was used by Veblen to explain the rapid rise of Imperial Germany to industrial prominence from 1870 to 1914. The idea is that the borrower takes only what is useful and at its latest stage of development, whereas the innovator not only bears the innovation costs, but also bears the encumbrance of earlier and increasingly inappropriate social forms and capital investments. See The Portable Veblen (New York: Viking, 1961), p. 349-378.

12 Laurence Schneider, Ku Chieh-kang (Gu Jiegang) and China's New History Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 82.


14 The situation is well described in Ba-Jin's novel, Family (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964).

15 See Lu Xun's short story, "In the Wine Shop," (1924)

16 Laurence Schneider, Ku Chieh-kang, p. 13.

17 To apply Imre Lakatos's typology of falsifications to political paradigms, "dogmatic" and "methodological" falsifications are not easily proven, although his "sophisticated methodological falsification," in which abandonment of an approach requires the presence of a more inclusive alternative, might have some application. See Imre Lakatos, Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programs, in Lakatos and Musgrave, ed., Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) p. 91-196.


19 For instance, in the early 1930's KMT ideology had the tendency to declare itself operative through the adoption of model legislation which was ignored in practice.

20 This example is taken from Tang Tsou, "Mao Tsetung's Thought, the Last Struggle for Succession, and the Post-Mao Era," China Quarterly no. 71 (Sept. 1977).

21 Some apparently successful policies might be "opportunistic," sacrificing the possibility of revolutionary advance for the satisfaction of present wants.


25 Snow, Red Star, p. 143-144.


29 For instance, in a 1920 article Mao refers to the necessity of having a party out of power to balance the party in power, but gives no indication of the source for this unoriginal but non-Chinese thesis. See Angus McDonald's translations in China Quarterly, no. 68 (Dec 1976), p. 766-777, especially "More on the 'Promotion Movement'," p. 772.


31 By empiricism I mean an orientation toward investigation and fact, not the subjectivist error of empiricism condemned by Mao.
This is most evident in the 1920 articles translated by McDonald.


Selected Works, I, 23.

See Selected Works I, II.

Selected Works I, 295-346.

Selected Works III.


Collected Works I, 175.

Mao conducted many extensive rural investigations, particularly in Jiangxi. For an indication of how he went about it, see "Preface and Postscript to Rural Surveys," Selected Works III, 11-16.

I have in mind particularly his "Xingguo Diaocha" (Investigation of Xingguo, Collected Works II, 185-253.


See "Struggle in the Chingkang Mountains," in Selected Works I, 74-78.

This is described in greater detail in Brantly Womack, "The Practical Roots of Mao Tse-tung's Political Thought, 1919-1935," presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in 1976.


Selected Works III, 120.

For age, see "Great Union of the Popular Masses" (1917). For strength, an example from 1946: "Speaking of U.S. imperialism people seem to feel that it is terrifically strong. Chinese reactionaries are using the 'strength' of the United States to frighten the Chinese people. But it will be proved that the U.S. reactionaries like all the reactionaries in history do not have much strength. In the United States there are others who are really strong—the American people." From "Talk with Anna Louise Strong," Selected Works IV, 101.


Selected Works I, 335-336.

See, for example, Critique of Mao Tse-tung's Theoretical Conceptions (Moscow: Progress, 1972).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Editor wishes to thank the following colleagues and staff members for their help in the preparation of the present volume. Special gratitude is due to Ms. Deborah DeChiara-Quenzer and Paul Kidder, my graduate assistants; to Dean Donald J. White of the Graduate School at Boston College for wise counsel and assistance in obtaining a University Subvention; to Rev. Joseph T. Flanagan, S.J., Chairperson of the Philosophy Department at Boston College; to Mr. Fred B. Mills, Director of Policies and Procedures at Boston College and to his capable assistants, Ms. Cheryl Simcoe and Ms. Lisa Fegley-Schmidt of the Word Processing Division; to Miss Mary Raftery and to Mrs. Lorraine C. Cansavan for assisting in the typing of the manuscripts; to Mrs. Juliette D'Andrea and to Mrs. Louise Dietenhofer of the Philosophy Department at Boston College for handling efficiently so many details connected with this project; to my colleagues in the department for reading the manuscripts and offering helpful advice; to Professor Peter Tang of the Department of Political Science for academic help and moral support; and finally to the contributors for their patience and learning and without whose efforts this edition would not have been possible.

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Dedicated to

Rev. JOHN P. ROCK, S.J., Ph.D.

1917 ——— 1980

a brilliant colleague, a loyal son of the Church,
a brother Jesuit, devoted teacher and friend.
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