especially pp. 331–333. It seems ironic that while Li can hardly be considered a Marxist philosopher, his conception of "essence" is heavily influenced by Marxism.


55. This discussion has benefited from conversations with Corinna-Barbara Francis.


57. Senior economist Xue Muqiao is one of those who have advocated reviving the federations of trade and commerce as guild-type organizations to provide indirect management over various trades. See his article "Establish and Develop Non-Governmental Self-Management Organizations in Various Trades," *Renmin ribao*, October 10, 1988, p. 5, trans. FBIS, October 18, 1988, pp. 33–35.

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In search of democracy: public authority and popular power in China

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The zigzag and sometimes tragic search for democracy has been a central theme of modern Chinese politics. Often the searchers have been torn between the intellectual attraction of the modern ideals of democracy, based on foreign ideologies, and the practical necessity of adapting to Chinese conditions. Democracy in China has remained elusive both as an idea and as a reality; at no time in the twentieth century has there been general satisfaction with the prevailing relationship between people and state.

The most successful political leaders of modern China – Sun Yat-sen, Mao Zedong, and Deng Xiaoping – have self-consciously pursued "Chinese paths" that have included limited commitments to popular power. It could be said that the successes of those leaders and the ensuing shape of Chinese politics have been based to some extent on their correct perceptions of the existing possibilities for feasible relationships between public authority and popular power, and their failures have been due to misjudgments of those relationships.

Since the summer of 1989, the post-Mao period has taken an especially tragic turn with regard to democracy. After ten years of unparalleled progress in democratizing reforms, Deng Xiaoping and the party leaders are attempting to reimpose unquestioned and unlimited control over society. Can the party really effect such a dramatic, authoritarian turn? Or will the societal forces already set in motion render such an attempt a very harmful but temporary atavism? The practical contradiction between the current policies of control and repression and the earlier policies of modernization through decontrol and openness has made the question of the relationship between popular power and public authority central to any prognostic analysis of current events.

By Western standards, the relationship between people and state in China has had little to do with democracy. Although the West has been the primary inspiration for Chinese democratic thought, the direct influ-
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cannot be generalized into an abstract standard of democracy. If that were the case, then "the power of the people" would mean no more than "the power of the (Western) people." If culture is a significant variable, and if Chinese democracy implies the power of the Chinese people, then one must expect that it would differ from Western democracy.

The attempt to understand China's self-understanding of its search for democracy has the potential to be far more fruitful for a cosmopolitan political science than would a search for Western democratic traits in Chinese politics. The radically different context of modern Chinese politics skews and frustrates any attempt to find institutional similarities to the West, but at the same time it provides, as Tang Tsou pointed out, a good testing ground for the general significance of Western political science. Precisely because of the vast situational differences between Chinese and Western politics, any generalizations about democracy that can span both of these cultures will mark progress toward a general theory of modern democracy.

The bulk of this chapter will be devoted to an analysis of the development, in theory and in practice, of the role of the people in modern Chinese politics. It begins with a brief consideration of the differences between the institutional heritage of China and that of the West, as well as the role of the people in classical Chinese political thought. The borrowings and adaptations from two Western ideologies are then considered: first, the attraction of the liberal democratic state and its sinification by Sun Yat-sen and the Guomindang (GMD, Nationalist party); second, the attempt to apply Marxism-Leninism in China. The development of a rural, mass-regarding, revolutionary politics by Mao Zedong receives special attention. Several phases of subsequent politics in the People's Republic of China (PRC) are analyzed: the modified Stalinist structure of the 1950s, the "leftist" transformation, the experience with mass movements in the Cultural Revolution, and finally the situation of democratic reform in the post-Mao period.

DEMONCAY AND CHINA'S TRADITIONAL HERITAGE

One could make a plausible argument that China's traditional political heritage is irrelevant to its modern search for democracy. Contemporary Chinese discussions of democracy usually trace the word to its Greek roots. Indeed, although the Chinese word for democracy, minzhu (literally, "people rule"), is found in classical texts, there it has the rather antidemocratic meaning of governance over the people, min zhi zhu ("the ruling of the people"). Minzhu in its modern sense of democracy was first introduced in the 1860s in translations and descriptions of Western politics. Moreover, in the period before Sun Yat-sen, even Chinese re-
formers considered the antimonarchical implications of minzhu too radical for China, and they argued instead for the milder term mingquan ("people's rights"), a notion that could coexist with the hereditary empire. It could be said, therefore, not only that democracy was missing from the Chinese tradition but also that its acceptance in China was delayed because democracy's spearhead was pointed unequivocally at the heart of traditional political institutions. Democracy was emphatically modern, and modernity in China arrayed itself against China's past.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to ignore traditional China in the study of Chinese democracy. Modern China pushed off from traditional China and was guided by alien ideologies, but its initial context was set by its past. Moreover, as the writings of Mao Zedong richly illustrate, traditional China continued to supply a common cultural vocabulary and menu of examples. Most important, between traditional China and modern China there has remained a common ground of basic assumptions about politics. These assumptions are difficult to specify because they were not consciously adopted by reformers, but rather formed their basic schematic for viewing politics. At this depth of continuity, even the condemnation of traditional China and the reorientation toward the West can be related to a continuity in the Chinese view of relationship between people and state.

Subtlety is prized in the study of traditional China because a sense of texture can easily be lost in sweeping generalizations and stark contrasts with the West. Unfortunately, in this essay I can do no more than touch upon some major features of traditional Chinese institutions and thought. So let me warn those unfamiliar with traditional China that what will be said will be thin simplifications of a vastly more complex reality, and let me ask those more knowledgeable to focus their critical attention not on the exceptions to my simplifications but on whether a more accurate simplification could be made.

The relationship between tradition and modernity was fundamentally different in China than in the West. What for the West was a relatively gradual transformation was for China a cataclysm. Chinese civilization was more cohesive, more centralized, and more cumulative, and the forces of modernity suddenly struck China from the outside in the nineteenth century. It was an experience of national humiliation and weakness, and it led to an abrupt repudiation of old China and a reorientation toward the West. The "Chinese renaissance," to use Hu Shi's phrase, was more a baptism of China into a modern and Western world than a rebirth and rediscovery of things Chinese. By contrast, modernity emerged more slowly in the West and from a more disparate backgroup, and it empowered an expanding world hegemony. As traumatic as the modern experience sometimes was in the West, it lacked the additional crisis dimensions of external imposition, defeat, subjugation, and abruptness experienced in China and in many other non-Western countries.

Feudal representative institutions in the West provided a uniquely advantageous context for the emergence of legislative democracy. The German historian Otto Hintze has argued that representative institutions developed in the West because of the confluence of three factors: feudal privilege, the tension between church and state, and international rivalries within Europe. Privilege, a "private law" (lex privata) between sovereigns and subjects, defined the limits of state power. Privileges provided the prototype for rights, and the privileged estates composed the feudal assemblies. The existence of separate hierarchies for church and state also delimited the realm of state power, and the church, as a major privileged group, supported the assemblies. Rivalries among the European states strengthened representative institutions by putting a premium on state effectiveness and by forcing sovereigns to depend on the cooperation of their assembled estates. The modern Western democratic state developed from the weakness of its feudal precursor, rather than from its strength.

The general picture of the European feudal state is one limited by the privileges it had granted and by its competition with its siblings and the church. The institutional structure of imperial China could not have been more different. The Chinese empire was a centralized power unrestricted by privilege, religious power, or rivals of equal stature, and served by a scholar bureaucracy recruited by merit rather than by birth. The longevity, administrative articulation, and efficiency of the empire were wonders of the premodern world. Not only was the empire not burdened by representative assemblies; absent also were territorial constituencies, spheres of immunity from public involvement, and the concept of protection against the sovereign. The state was not externally limited, nor was there an incipient, autonomous civil society.

A Westerner would expect such a society to have been arbitrary and autocratic, because it did not have the institutions that in the West limited the abuse of prerogative. Of course, abuses occurred (as they did in the West), but the discipline of the system was different from that of the West. Instead of the discipline of external delimitation, in which the subjects possessed their bounded rights and the sovereigns possessed their bounded power, the Chinese emperor and his officials were bound by ideology, ritual, and tradition. Confucianism, especially, provided a well-developed ethic of rule, and mastery of that ethic was a major requirement of bureaucratic recruitment. It was an orthodoxy not of revealed truth but of ritual and ethical standards — the soul of a civilized pyramid of virtue. The responsibility of the emperor, as well as the official, was to act according to the ideal, moral obligations of office. So the hard lines
of power in the imperial system were encumbered by a soft but strong web of ethical expectations.

In contrast to the formidably centralized imperial institutions, traditional Chinese political thought shows a very active concern for the welfare of the people, though there is no concept of the people as participants in politics. The concern for popular welfare can be illustrated by a passage from Confucius’s disciple Mencius:

King Hui of Liang said, “I wish quietly to receive your instructions.”

Mencius replied, “Is there any difference between killing a man with a stick and with a sword?” The King said, “There is no difference.”

“Is there any difference between doing it with a sword and with the style of government?” “There is no difference,” was the reply. Mencius then said, “In your kitchen there is fat meat; in your stables there are fat horses. But your people have the look of hunger, and on the wilds there are those who have died of famine... When a prince, being the parent of his people, administers his government so as to be chargeable with leading on beasts to devour men, where is his parental relationship to his people?”

Classical Chinese political thought assumed that the welfare of the people was the root of the prosperous state. The ruler who was a bad shepherd of his people risked losing heaven’s mandate to rule, and in any case he weakened his state. Even military strategists such as Sunzi considered popular support of primary importance. But that did not imply popular participation in government. Rather, the people were more like a natural force influenced by and influencing in turn the behavior of the king.

Undergirding the apparent contradiction between the importance of the people and their lack of political rights was a familial paradigm of society. That paradigm assumed a natural givenness of unequal status relations at the same time as it exhorted everyone to live up to their specific responsibilities. It is quite interesting that in various portraits by Chinese thinkers of the “state of nature” and the origin of government, the Western question of why the rational individual should obey is not raised. Instead, the importance of political order to group survival is stressed. Although a sense of personal moral responsibility is exquisitely developed in classical Chinese thought, the ultimate ground of rational action lies in a naturally structured society, rather than in abstract rational individualism.

By its own standard of communal strength and prosperity, traditional China became a failure in the nineteenth century. As early as the 1860s, according to Mary Wright, the attempts to restore imperial order after the Taiping Rebellion “demonstrated with a rare clarity that even in the most favorable circumstances there is no way in which an effective mod-

ern state can be grafted onto a Confucian society.” The sinocentric cosmopolitanism of the empire gradually became a narrow, empty provincialism, and the new cosmopolitans rejected the dead hand of Confucianism and turned toward the West. To be sure, there were Confucian revivals in the twentieth century. But when Liang Shuming, “the last Confucian,” fulfilled his moral duty of criticizing collectivization at a meeting of the Central People’s Government Council in 1953, he appeared to Mao Zedong as absurdly out of place and reactionary, as if he had worn traditional court robes.

Clearly, however, modern China’s rejection of its past did not change its parentage. I shall mention only a few of the most important continuities. The first is the cluster of political values whereby the moral obligation is to serve the community, and the test of regime legitimacy is the welfare of the people. That was traditional China’s own standard, and in confrontation with the West, China was found wanting. The Western orientation and radicalism of twentieth-century reformers transformed the content of Chinese politics, but those reformers had been pressured to do so by an ethic that dated back to the Zhou dynasty. The Qing dynasty lost its mandate to a new era. Just as Confucianism was not conquered by Buddhism in the later Han dynasty, but rather withdrew into itself because of a sense of its own failure, so the deepest levels of the Confucian ethic could carry and even force a total reorientation toward new principles of wealth and power.

The second continuity is the assumption that the Chinese government should be unitary and centralized, and that disunity means unacceptable chaos and disorder. The four decades of Chinese unity under the PRC make it easy to forget how extraordinary the commitment to unity was during the period of total crisis. Even in the “warring-states period” there was no legitimating ideology of separatism, and that helped to preclude the legitimation of China’s disunity. Oddly enough, that assumption rested rather more lightly on Mao Zedong. At one time he supported independence for the province of Hunan, and after 1927 he was quick to perceive the opportunities of scattered base areas under communist control. By contrast, one of Deng Xiaoping’s most powerful arguments for repression is the threat of chaos from spontaneous societal forces.

A third continuity is the assumption of a governing mission for the intellectuals. Here the particular Chinese heritage of the scholar bureaucracy must be differentiated from more common patterns. As Eric Wolf observes in his general study of modern peasant revolutions, modern professionals in developing countries – teachers, doctors, lawyers – tend to become radicalized by their contacts with developed countries, their professional frustrations, and their exclusion from the traditional power
structure. These "marginal moderns," who have little continuity with traditional culture, then supply the necessary leadership skills for more broad-based popular movements. In China, the tradition of the scholar bureaucracy as the political class incorporated by an orthodoxy provided a special continuity between traditional and modern intellectuals. There was the assumption of a responsibility to govern, an unselfconscious elitism of service. This is in special contrast to the Russian intelligentsia (originally a Russian word), which had a problematic relationship to Russian culture – at times Westernizing, at times romantically Russian – and defined itself against the tsarist system and the aristocracy. It is not implausible that the greater fractionalism of Russian radicals is related to a more critical and individualist intellectual posture. If we consider Lenin and Mao as culturally representative revolutionaries, Lenin was more polemical and radically critical, whereas Mao was more pragmatic and governance-oriented.

A fourth continuity is the assumption that government can be controlled through self-discipline and moral education, rather than through institutions of external control. This is particularly clear in Sun Yat-sen’s idea of a tutelary elite who would guide China to democracy. This continuity created a predisposition toward Leninism, although it tended to shift the basis of authority away from the scientific grasp of doctrine (as with Lenin) to more personal qualities of leadership (e.g., Chen Duxiu before 1927). In any case, the ideas of democratic centralism within the party and indefinite party-state power after the revolution were less of a cultural shock in China than they would have been in England.

Finally, and summarizing the other continuities, the starting point of modern Chinese political thought remains community rationality, rather than the abstract rational individual. The concepts of order and of ethical behavior were founded on a direct relationship to the public good, and that justified the primacy of politics as the most legitimate concern. The orientation toward communal rationality can be seen in the skew of Yan Fu’s transmission of the classics of Western thought, and it reached its most destructive point in the Cultural Revolution’s slogan of “all public and no private” (da gong wu si). This continuity is well illustrated by Joseph Fewsmith’s analysis of gong and si, public and private, in Chapter 1 of this volume. I certainly would not argue, as Etienne Balazs has done, that communist totalitarianism has its roots in traditional totalitarianism. Both are more complicated than that. But the reception and shaping of Marxism-Leninism in China, and the horizons of the party-state, are clearly related to common assumptions that were already present in Chinese political culture.

It is ironic that the very strength and longevity of the traditional empire in China contributed to the trauma of modernity. The weaker and more

limited governments of the West had no choice but to acknowledge the societal complexity that incubated bourgeois civil society, and to permit the rise of institutions that could evolve into a legislative state. The Chinese state was sufficiently strong that its only restrictions were self-restrictions, and its corporate orthodoxy was publicly oriented and flexible enough to preserve its power until that power was smashed from the outside by the maturing modernity of the West. Although the crisis that then confronted China was unprecedented, Chinese political culture was deep enough to provide a transition and to shape the reception of foreign models. The old pyramid of virtue was abandoned and vilified, but the obligation was quietly shouldered to create a new one.

**THE FAILED SINIFICATION OF THE LIMITED STATE**

Traditional China was not overthrown by John Locke and John Stuart Mill, but by the gunboats of liberal democratic imperialism. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the primary motive for studying the West was to create a new, prosperous China, as powerful as its adversaries. Nevertheless, democracy – with regular, popular elections of leadership as a key feature – was seen as essential to the power of the West. Democracy, according to Chen Duxiu in a famous essay, was one of the two Western gentlemen with whom China must become acquainted. In the early twentieth century, China learned from the West at a speed befitting a culture of scholars; indeed, the very rate of appropriation of Western ideas – what I call “compressed intellectual modernization” – deeply affected Chinese reception. Learning from the West also entailed the transfer of Western institutions to China, an effort that proved continually frustrating. Finally, Sun Yat-sen set in motion an effective “sinification of the liberal democratic state.” Like the limited Western state, China acknowledged and compromised with the forces existing in society: the warlords, imperialists, and communists. The Guomindang (GMD) state that emerged was successful because it adapted its politics to its weakness. It was neither liberal nor democratic, and eventually it lost to an uncompromising revolutionary strength based directly on popular mobilization.

From the failure of the “Hundred Days Reform” in 1898 to the “Northern Expedition” of 1927, the intellectual life of China underwent a complete transformation. In 1898, few Western books had been translated into Chinese; by 1920, Bertrand Russell and John Dewey were making extended lecture tours in China at the invitation of their returned Chinese students. Their talks were immediately translated and appeared in the newspapers. Within three decades, China had appropriated three hundred years of Western cultural development.
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The rate of change in political ideology can be illustrated by the fate of Kang Youwei: In 1898 his reform program had been scandalously revolutionary; in 1916 he embarrassed his students and admirers by participating in a scheme to restore the empire. Yet he was proud of the fact that his views had not changed; what appeared to be his movement from extreme left to extreme right was in reality a measure of the change in China's field of political discourse. Such rapid intellectual change meant that there had been no time for maturation or institutional articulation of specific viewpoints. Kang Youwei was called "China's Luther" at the turn of the century, but there was no time for a Confucian protestantism to unfold.

Intellectual modernization necessarily produced an urban and youthful orientation, because the schools and the cities were the contact points for the outside world. City and countryside rapidly became different worlds, one not daring to look beyond the local gentry, and the other choosing among Wilson, Kropotkin, and Marx. In some respects that was a golden age for youth. Six years after Mao Zedong read his first newspaper, he published an article in China's leading progressive journal. It took little apprenticeship to participate in attempting to lead China; the examinations, the old ladder to success, had been discontinued in 1905.

The basic problem of compressed intellectual modernization was that ideas vastly outran realities. As the empire fell and China degenerated into warlord rule, urban progressives moved further into the borrowed intellectual world of Western politics and emerged with ever more radical prescriptions for China's happiness. For the communists and the left GMD, that culminated in the tragedy of betrayal and defeat in 1927.

The transfer of Western political institutions into China began with an improbable patron: the Empress Dowager. After the debacle of the Boxer uprising, she decided that reform was necessary and that Western models of government should be studied. In 1905, official delegations were sent to Japan, Europe, and the United States to study their institutions, and a nine-year reform program for instituting constitutional government (xian zheng) was devised according to their suggestions. The reforms included a declaration of constitutional principles, as well as elections of provincial and ultimately national assemblies. The scope of the reforms impressed some contemporary observers and later scholars, but progressives viewed them as insincere attempts to delay truly democratic change. One incident well expressed the tension between imperial reform and the demands of progressives: The train carrying the first official delegation to study Western politics was blown up by an anarchist's bomb.

The constitutional history of the Republic of China is quite complex, and it included some serious efforts to impose a structure of legislative government. But the impotence of such efforts was their most striking feature. During the warlord period, the machinations of the "legislators" often provided a comic foreground to the serious business of warlord factionalism. Under GMD rule after 1927, parliamentary and constitutional questions occasionally became major political issues, but at no time was the country's political direction under the control of the legislature, or the officials under control of the electorate, or indeed politics in general under the control of constitution and laws. Despite modified Western trappings, the Republic of China was neither liberal nor democratic.

Just as it would be a mistake to judge the contribution of the PRC to popular power in terms of constitutional democracy, it would be a mistake to judge Sun Yat-sen's political heritage in terms of the effectiveness of borrowed Western institutions. To be sure, a good part of Sun's historic role was to symbolize the modernization of China in a Western sense, and republican political institutions were an important part of that. In that respect, Sun contributed to the political myth of the GMD, but the myth shadowed the actual ineffectiveness of the borrowings. So Sun's mission, in large part, was a failure. But the failure did not occur in 1949, or even in 1927. It had already begun in 1913, and it reached its nadir in 1918, and Sun's later politics, including his Three Principles of the People, included adjustments to his earlier naïveté. The success of the GMD in 1927 was based on Sun's accommodation of his failed Westernizing ideals to the realities of Chinese politics.

Sun's sinification of the liberal democratic state involved an acknowledgment of the limitations imposed by existing Chinese conditions and a determination to pursue political effectiveness — in a word, it was based on compromise. In his political theory, the compromise was most clear in the idea that a situation of political tutelage was necessary before democracy could be implemented. In his political practice, it was expressed in accommodations with a variety of warlords and foreign powers, as well as in the alliance from 1923 to 1927 with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Consider the following passage, in which Sun tried to show the perfidy of one of his erstwhile warlord patrons:

Why did Chen Jiongming lead a revolt against us in Guangzhou year before last? Many people said that he only wanted to seize Guangdong and Guanzhong for himself, but that is far from true... I thought that perhaps... our northern expedition might seem to be interfering with his domain, so on the last day of our conferences, I said to him with utter frankness, "If our punitive expedition against the North succeeds, our government will be moved to either Wuhan or Nanjing and will certainly not come back here, in which case we will entrust the two Guang provinces to you and ask you to be our rear guard. If the northern
expedition should unfortunately fail, we will have no face to come back here and...you will certainly be able to preserve your sphere of influence.”

Clearly, Sun was willing to make the compromises necessary for survival and victory and to develop an agglomerative hegemony based on arrangements with various “real powers.” Doubtless Sun would have provided a unique style of leadership had he lived long enough to rule, but Chiang Kai-shek’s politics of accommodation did not differ in principle.

Compromises with existing forces enabled the GMD to come to national power in a chaotic environment in which no existing power was sufficiently strong to compel obedience. This can be called a sinification of Westernism, because the GMD government played the game of a weak government vis-à-vis other social forces, a game common enough in the West, but against the Chinese imperial tradition. By building on arrangements with other social forces, the GMD government approximated the situation of the feudal governments in the West: a sovereignty with a negotiated relationship with society. Unfortunately, the chief negotiations were with warlords and foreign powers, so the limits of the GMD state were not liberal democratic limits.

As Sun’s willingness to compromise implied, by 1920 he had little faith left in the revolutionary power of the people or in the transformative power of Western democratic institutions. Dedication to democratic ideals remained important, but democracy was not an effective answer to China’s current problems. China was disorganized – a “sheet of loose sand” – with too much democracy, rather than too little. A tutelary GMD elite would first have to establish its political control before the process of democratization could begin.

The Republic of China as a weak authoritarian state was similar to many others in developing countries and to those in the earlier history of the West. Obviously such states are not democratic; neither popular interests nor liberal institutions control public authority. Indeed, to the extent that the gaming table of government is open only to elite powers, the power of the people threatens the entire game. As Mao Zedong observed from a dangerous angle, the one matter on which the warlords and the GMD all agreed was opposition to popular revolution. Nevertheless, various institutional characteristics of Western states can thrive in such an environment: Parliaments, cabinets, constitutions, and even elections can become the rules and counters of an elite game, because all players except the most powerful want rules. It is impossible to know how the politics of the GMD would have developed; Chiang Kai-shek seemed more committed to consolidating strength than to accepting and respecting limits. But the remarkable

GMD experiments with democratization in Taiwan since 1987 can be understood as a compromise in an entirely new context of social forces and political horizons.

There is little direct continuity between Western liberal democracy and the PRC, but such democracy appears to have a certain attractiveness in the post-Mao period. Various reforms, such as elections with more candidates than positions, suggest that the current leadership is recalling arguments from an earlier time concerning the nature of democracy. Perhaps this is because of their personal sufferings under the tyranny of the masses during the Cultural Revolution. Perhaps the focus on modernization has reawakened the linked images of Western power and liberal democratic politics. One could also argue that the goal of modernization, because of its reliance on expertise and entrepreneurship, puts societal forces that are largely outside the party in a position of some strength. In any case, the reforms within the Marxist-Leninist party-state have in general been in a liberal direction, although no redefinition of state legitimacy has occurred.

COMMUNISM AS A WESTERN INFLUENCE ON CHINA

In the West (and in this essay), the term “Western” usually refers to the countries of industrialized capitalism, but it is important for our understanding of the communist influence in China to recall that communism’s initial appeal in China was as the latest and most radical Western influence. It provided a Western critique of the West as China had experienced it: imperialist and exploitative. It claimed to advance beyond the historical phase of capitalism, and it provided a model for radical political organization. The young intellectuals who joined the CCP in the 1920s composed the last and most cosmopolitan of the waves of compressed intellectual modernization; that was also the wave most out of touch with the gray realities of China, and it broke upon the rocks of warlordism and compromise in 1927. As a Western influence, communism failed. It eventually triumphed as the ideological and organizational paradigm of a rural revolution.

The uniqueness of the appeal of Marxism-Leninism lay in its relationship to the Russian Revolution. The October Revolution demonstrated that ideologically directed political transformation was possible in a way that transcended Japan’s copying from the West. The evil aspects of traditional China – “feudalism” – and of capitalism could both be overcome, and Chinese radicals could be at the vanguard of national salvation and at the same time active, conscious participants in world revolution. Marxism-Leninism provided a proven model. In the terminology of Clifford Geertz, it provided an ideology that could replace the discarded
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cultural system of traditional China.\textsuperscript{21} Class struggle became the analytical key to sorting out domestic and international phenomena.

Just as important as the intellectual orientation provided by communism was the organizational model of the disciplined, revolutionary party. The idea of a dedicated party core leading mass groups and occasionally forming united fronts with other groups for specific goals was quite compatible with the capacity of the intellectuals for dedicated effort and with the opportunities afforded by the chaos of Chinese society. It provided a practical starting point for effective action that would be directly linked to national and even world transformation. Just as Marxist ideology provided a comprehensive response to the disorientation of total crisis, so the party provided a tough, flexible framework for action in a chaotic society.

Communism had a more direct relationship to the power of the people than had the GMD in the 1920s. Indeed, within the GMD-CCP alliance of 1924 to 1927, the CCP specialized in mass organization. In line with Marxist theory and Bolshevik practice, the CCP concentrated on organizing urban workers. Originally it had hoped to lead an autonomous proletarian revolution, but after railway workers were slaughtered by a warlord on February 7, 1923, the CCP decided to follow Comintern advice and join a united front with the GMD against warlordism and imperialism. But the basis of its organizational strength remained its union activities.

Of course, worker organization did not imply a commitment to democracy in a “Western” sense. Marxism-Leninism emerged in Europe as a radical critique of Western, capitalist politics and therefore considered itself superior to bourgeois democracy. Because all states were organs of class rule, the only significant political question was which class would be in power. The masses were a natural historic force; the details of their political participation were insignificant. This is reminiscent of the role of the people in traditional China, except that communism encouraged the revolutionary activity of the masses. They were mobilized rather than shepherded; class struggle and striving for the future replaced the “five bonds” and respect for the past. Nevertheless, the revolutionary elite was neither controlled by the masses nor limited by institutions; its popular legitimation depended on a self-proclaimed service to popular welfare.

The CCP in the 1920s was an organization of urban intellectuals with an organizational base among urban workers and allied with the GMD and the peasantry against China’s semi-colonial, semi-feudal status. It was confident of victory because of its ideology and the guidance of the Comintern. The GMD had been building military and political strength around Guangzhou (Canton) since 1923, and at the end of 1926 it initiated the pattern of alliance with some warlords and confrontation with others that led to the success of the Northern Expedition and to national power in 1927. The GMD alliance with the CCP was inconvenient to its acquisition of new partners, and so the CCP was crushed. Remnants of the CCP escaped to various isolated spots in the countryside. In the cities, Marxism became an academic interest rather than a political interest.

The reasons for the failure of the CCP in 1927 look rather obvious in hindsight. It was uncompromising with the real powers in China, and its own power base was small and vulnerable in a military confrontation. The GMD’s broad-mindedness in compromising with the communists made predictable its treachery when confronted with better offers from the right. But the CCP was blind to its impending fate. The leadership was bitterly divided in early 1927 over how much support to give to the peasant associations or whether the alliance with the GMD should be upheld to the end, but both factions were terribly wrong in their anticipations. It was foolish for Chen Duxiu to imagine that the alliance could be preserved, but Mao was just as wrong in his prediction that the peasants would arise “like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back.”\textsuperscript{22}

The CCP that reemerged after 1927 and succeeded in 1949 was not the same as its predecessor. It was based in the countryside, and it knew that “political power grows from the barrel of a gun.” It had developed a rural revolutionary strategy that was suited to Chinese conditions. The continuity between the successful, peasant-based CCP and its urban, intellectual predecessor lay primarily in party organization and also in general ideological orientation. The disciplined party structure worked well in chaos, even the chaos of its own defeat. It turned out to be well adapted to survival, and its pattern of forming a political base by mobilizing the masses was applicable to the new situation. Ideological adaptation was more complex. A proletarian revolution was out of the question, but the analytical tool of class struggle could be applied to the village, and the overall confidence in the science of Marxism-Leninism was an even more necessary consolation. The rural reformation of Chinese communism after the defeat of 1927 could thus be described as a creative adaptation to Chinese conditions, a sinification of Marxism-Leninism.

Mao Zedong and the Mass Line

The Cultural Revolution and its aftermath have made it difficult to appreciate Mao Zedong’s primary contribution to Chinese history. Mao’s development of a strategy of rural revolution not only eventuated in victory in 1949 but also brought the Chinese masses into Chinese politics
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for the first time in modern history. The village, which had been at the periphery of elite politics, became the center of revolutionary politics. The mobilized power of the people was the party's primary resource, and it became the basis of a very strong party-state. Despite the CCP's success in mass mobilization, however, the political structure of the CCP was not democratic.

The relationship between the party and the masses was called "the mass line" (qunzhong luxian), a process of consultation and continual adjustment of policy. Democratic mechanisms such as elections and citizen rights played only a marginal role in this process, and yet the party responded seriously to mass criticisms, demands, apathy, and so forth. The reason that the party was mass- regarding in its politics, despite its authoritarian political structure, was that its survival depended on mass support. Superiority in every other resource lay incontestably in the hands of the government. In competition with a more powerful enemy, the CCP had to remain close to the interests and capacities of the masses in order to optimize its chances for survival and victory. I call this a "quasi-democratic system": an authoritarian political structure systematically tending toward mass- regarding politics because of a competitive environment. We shall first consider the origins of the mass line and its organizational characteristics, and then compare its democratic components to Western concepts.

From the beginning of his political career, Mao Zedong had been concerned with mass-oriented policies and with political effectiveness. Those concerns brought him into the CCP after the failure of the May Fourth movement of 1919. In early 1927 Mao's populism brought him into conflict with Chen Duxiu's cautious attitude toward peasant associations; according to Mao, a "true revolutionary" could not be afraid of mass mobilization. After he was forced into the countryside, Mao, as a matter of survival, had to pay close attention to local conditions and adjust his policies in a process of trial and error. From 1927 to 1930 he developed his basic tactics of guerrilla warfare and his land-reform policy. More important, he saw that popular mobilization would depend on the party's closeness to the masses. The most dangerous sin for the party and for individual cadres would be tuoli qunzhong, estrangement from the masses, because distance in the party-mass relationship would increase the strain and friction of mobilization. As head of government for the Jiangxi Soviet from 1931 to 1934, Mao innovated the technique of mass campaigns, and after the "Long March," when he became the most powerful leader in the CCP, Mao systematized his approach and applied it throughout the CCP. The mass line and its techniques remained revered principles in the PRC, but the change in context from struggle with the

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GMD to party-state monopoly of power fundamentally affected its democratic character.

The basic outlines of political organization remained the same as they had been before 1927: The party organization was the disciplined minority core of larger mass organizations, and policy direction was dictated by revolutionary strategy. The larger organizations amplified and applied core policy, but their reactions to policy also served as a constraint on the party's policy-making. Outer organizations were useful not only for their service to party policy but also for the encouragement of activists (potential party members) and for reflecting mass opinion. Especially when one adds the specific features of mass-line organization discussed later, it is more accurately thought of as an organization of concentric circles than as a vertical hierarchy.24

First, the mass line was base-oriented. Its broadest circles reached out to almost every inhabitant of a village, and its core was kept to a minimum. There was little hierarchy and professionalization of roles. That was reflected in the Red Army's guerrilla style and in every other form of management as well. All cadres were expected to minimize their cost to the movement by raising their own food and avoiding waste. Second, there was considerable cadre discretion. Cadres were, of course, bound by party discipline, and there was much emphasis on correct ideology, but there was broad discretion for territorial leadership at each level. Weberian measures of organizational discipline — rules, reports, sanctions, clear demarcations of responsibility, professional recruitment — were minimized. Mao encouraged originality; cadres were supposed to behave like general commanders. Mao said that in disputes between local and outside authorities, the presumption of correctness should lie with the local leadership.25 Each cadre was responsible to the center, and sometimes to the masses, for the objective results of their leadership, and they were exhorted to investigate local conditions and avoid bureaucratism.

The key to the organizational focus in the base areas was the third characteristic: the campaign cycle. Campaigns directed general attention toward urgent goals — food production, army recruitment, land reform, cadre rectification — and associated other policy goals with those main targets. Everyone would participate in the campaign, regardless of their normal tasks. The typical campaign went through a cycle of experimentation with models and cadre orientation, a high tide of mobilization, and then consolidation, including reports and corrections of mistakes. Official guidelines tended to be collections of slogans and models at high tide, with detailed official policy only in the consolidation phase. The targets of mass campaigns were matters of obvious mass interest: survival,
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land, food, good leadership. There were election campaigns, but like the others they were considered successful when everyone was enthusiastic and targets were achieved. Elections did not control or directly affect leadership or policy. The influence of the masses rested in the fact that the party needed their enthusiasm.

Fourth, the mass line favored an alliance-maximizing principle of reaching decisions. The decision-making style was consensual rather than adversarial, an approach that advantaged the agenda-setting role of the party and responsible cadres. When consensus was a problem, the party’s strategy was to maximize the alliance rather than simply to allow the majority to dominate, because the basic mobilizational problem was that of having maximum support against minimum opposition. That meant that policy was determined by the interests of the most marginal member of the coalition, though it also had to include the interests of the majority. For example, during the war against Japan, patriotic landlords were encouraged to join the struggle, and therefore a policy of reduction of rent and interest replaced the policy of redistribution of landlord holdings.

Clearly, popular support was essential to the mass line, and the close relationship between party and masses in the revolutionary period was later recalled with nostalgia. But there were fundamental differences between the mass line as a democratic ideology and Western notions. For Mao, the mass line provided a self-correcting, mass-oriented executive structure. Policy-making was a practical problem of leadership, but it was not a political problem to be resolved by popular sovereignty. The unity of party policy and mass interests was absolutely unproblematic in theory and was the key tenet of correct, situationally appropriate leadership in practice. Thus, in principle, there could be no division between control and spontaneity, or between legislative and executive functions. The popular electoral structure was pseudo-legislative. Its function was to reflect the opinions of the masses within the current horizons of party policy. If the horizons were narrow, the range of public discussion was narrow.

This is totally different from Rousseau’s idea of the general will. Rousseau starts from the assumption of absolute individual spontaneity and then argues that it is rational to submit only to an authority that is all-powerful and is based on equal, universal citizenship. The general will thus created is a fantasy of collective spontaneity: It cannot be in error; it is not an aggregation of factions or representatives; it is the true common denominator of the participants. It is an overwhelmingly legislative system; the executive merely applies the general will. Marxism-Leninism preserves the myth of supreme popular power, but rejects the abstract, free individual as its base. The Marxist base is the concrete historical actor, the proletarian class. The content of the general will is correspond-

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ingly concrete – revolution – and so the macro-political problem of Marxism-Leninism is an executive problem of realization and execution.

Mao’s attention to the problem of maintaining closeness to the masses was a significant deviation from Marxist-Leninist assumptions, but he did not return to popular sovereignty as the aggregate of individual wills. Mao turned the communist assumption of party correctness into the key problem area for leadership. His goal of closeness to the masses implied and recognized the problem of distance between the party and the masses: In a concrete, practical sense, the party must serve the masses. However, its mass-regarding political style occurred within the assumption that that was not in conflict with the party’s service to history. There was no chance that popular style and flexible policy would evolve into citizen and legislative control.

The success of the mass line in mobilizing rural support led eventually to a massive popular revolution that crushed the entire framework of previous elite politics and brought to an end the general situation of weakness, disunity, and chaos that had characterized modern China. In twenty-two years of revolutionary experimentation and construction in the countryside, the CCP had built a new power base through attention to the welfare of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese population. As Hong Yung Lee describes in Chapter 6 of this volume, the personnel, policies, and values of the revolution became the heritage of the PRC. But the competitive context of the quasi-democratic system was changed by victory, and neither the party in general nor the individual cadres remained as dependent on the goodwill of the masses.

DEMOCRACY AND THE TRANSITION TO SOCIALISM

The founding of the PRC on October 1, 1949, set an entirely new framework for the relationship between popular power and public authority. In contrast to traditional Chinese politics, a government was founded that promoted social and economic change, that had led a class struggle of peasants against landlords, and that had a dual, party-state political system. The PRC was vastly more powerful than the empire had been. Not only did it have the technologies of modern government at its disposal, but also, because of its rural origins, it reached down to and inside of every village in China.

The contrast between the PRC and the Republic of China was even more striking, because the PRC ended the situation of total crisis to which the GMD had accommodated itself. It was not a weak, aggregated government of established elite forces, but a successful challenge to the entire