of colleagues occurred within the framework of promoting revolutionary tasks, the influence of the masses occurred within the process of popular mobilization. Despite the impression given by later canonizations of his thought, Mao's typical argument relies not on the intellectual appeal of a brilliant idea but on the urgency and practicality of a specific measure for popular mobilization. It is particularly clear in his earlier writings that a great deal of the quality of Mao's political thought comes from lessons from the masses gained in the processes of investigation and mobilization. It is also evident from Mao's conflicts with party leadership before 1935 that the process often mistakenly individualized as a power struggle between Mao and the "Twenty-eight Bolsheviks" who controlled the CCP from 1931 to 1935 was more importantly a process of a new political style emerging collectively (with Mao as its chief exponent) from the experience of revolutionary government in Jiangxi.

Mao's active reliance on colleagues, the masses, and changes in the objective political situation allows the study of his political thought to be more than biographical delving into the personal idiosyncrasies and brilliance of a leader. Such interdependence makes the popular question of Mao's individual innovations within Chinese political thought, Marxism, or social science both less significant and much more difficult to answer. By concentrating on Mao, this study inevitably gives a misleading emphasis both to his role in the events discussed and to his originality in politics. But if the problem of who holds the copyright on a particular idea is left aside, Mao's writings analyzed in context become a fascinating window to the politics and thinking of his China. Not only did the significance of Mao's China and his own personal weight within that sphere increase enormously, but his writings became the core of the official ideology—the orthodox definition of the meaning of the revolution. Thus the attempt to acquire an intimate understanding of the dialectical development of Mao's politics and thinking is also an approach to the roots of contemporary China's most prevalent self-understanding.

1 Mao before Marxism

Considering the small quantity of Mao's writings prior to his identification with the Chinese Communist Party and the relative insignificance of his precommunist political activities, the "early Mao" has received an unusual amount of attention from both Western scholars and Chinese biographers.

The three most prominent Western scholars who base their interpretations of Mao on circumstances or writings of this period differ widely in what they consider significant. Richard Solomon's psychological interpretation stresses biographical and autobiographical accounts of Mao's struggles with his father to indicate the root of a basic urge to struggle against authority. Mao's revolution is thus the collision of this urge with a traditionally docile political culture. Frederic Wakeman's wide-ranging study *History and Will* attempts to establish the significance of Mao's thought by coordinating a presentation of the Chinese and Western thinkers who influenced Mao's intellectual development. Certainly Mao has stated that he read and was influenced by these thinkers in his youth. But Wakeman's intellectual historical approach and Solomon's psychological perspective both presuppose that the continuity between Mao's youth and his maturity is more important than any discontinuity or development. Stuart Schram, the major translator of Mao's pre-Marxist works into Western languages, has proposed the more complicated thesis that the ideas presented in Mao's early works submerge during his Marxist period (1922–1965) and surface again with the Cultural Revolution. The truly Maoist periods in this view are youth and old age, when his own ideas were not subservient to Marxist ideology.

Chinese interest in Mao's early life has produced two very
useful biographies, Xiao San’s *Comrade Mao Zedong’s Boyhood and Youth* and Li Rui’s *Comrade Mao Zedong’s Early Revolutionary Activities*. These are supplemented by a number of historical articles and reminiscences including a 1979 essay by Li Rui entitled “The Ideological Trend of Mao Zedong in His Youth.” The period as a whole is viewed by these writers as the time when Mao’s characteristic intellectual and political habits took shape. Hence their position is more similar to Wakeman’s view than to Solomon’s reductionist interpretation or to Schram’s discontinuity thesis. Their emphasis, however, is more on Mao’s political development than on the significance of his intellectual encounters.

From Mao’s own epistemological standpoint, one would expect him to consider youthful experiences important but not determining, and indeed that seems to be the tone of his well-told autobiographical account. The conditions under which consciousness arises are of primary importance to a materialist. But for Mao this primacy has significance only in action, and his practical orientation is grounded in the conviction that any condition can eventually be overcome through persistent effort. Thus the dialectic between subjective and objective renders abstract statements concerning the priority of one or the other (“determinism” or “voluntarism”) virtually meaningless. In one of his earliest preserved remarks, Mao writes:

> 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.*

Our focus in this chapter will be primarily on Mao’s pre-Marxist writings, because a careful reading of these works yields valuable information about Mao’s intellectual and political starting point. But we will begin with a brief look at the context of Mao’s childhood and youth, since Mao’s energetic involvement with family and school provided a striking source and corollary to his theoretical and political disposition.

The Context of Mao’s Youth

Although many other revolutionaries came from pleasant family situations, in Mao’s case life at home was analogous in many respects to the society he was later to revolutionize. From his father he learned power, exploitation, and hatred; from his mother he learned compassion and love. It should be noted, however, that Mao’s father was a “teacher by negative example”: Mao’s frontal and energetic opposition was a mirror image of his father’s strongest trait, while the possibilities of alternatives were shown by his mother. Significant for his later activities outside the family, he learned that paternal authority could be successfully opposed. This victory in the struggle for recognition with his father was won by exploits of unusual courage which must have contributed greatly to Mao’s early development of an independent and vigorous character.*

Two other aspects of Mao’s family situation may have influenced his later behavior: its economic activities and its financial support for his studies. From an early age Mao imitated his mother’s benevolence in dealing with needy people,* and he must have been disturbed by his father’s callousness in expanding the family fortune.* Economic success came too late to spare Mao from a childhood of hard physical labor, but it did enable his family to provide the medium of support which allowed him to pursue his studies. Mao’s first acts of opposition to academic masters began at the same time as his disobedience to his father. Indeed, running away from school at the age of ten is the first act of protest Mao recalls, and it brought better treatment from both teacher and father. “The result of this act of protest impressed me very much. It was a successful ‘strike.’”* Although he resented having to memorize the classics, he learned to deploy them to his advantage in arguments with his father.

Mao entered the environment of the large “modern schools” at the age of sixteen, and with a two-year interruption for army service and independent study, he continued his studies until he graduated from the Hunan First Normal School in 1918 at age twenty-four. Mao’s experiences during this period were much more than merely a confirmation of habits developed within the family. They were a socialization into the turbulence of modern China which took place as a characteristicistically energetic dialectic between himself and his school environments.

Mao’s most notable conflicts during his scholastic career were directly related to the structure and pedagogical assumptions of the modern schools. As Mao said in a later work introducing a new kind of school system: “The general root of the evil [of the
modern schools] is causing the students to be passive, grinding away character and tearing down the soul. 'Timid ones become superficial followers of opinion and gifted ones hesitate to come forward.' The specific occasions for student protest were matters like the large number of required courses, the prohibition of political activities, and the lack of an adequate physical education program. Fortunately for Mao's occasionally threatened school career, some influential professors and many students agreed with him and either defended him or joined him. Without such peer support and approbation from respected superiors, not only would his early efforts at reforming his immediate society have met with complete failure, but he would probably have found introspective pursuits more satisfying.

As Mao promoted various constructive, critical, and educational movements among his classmates—occasionally reaching out to groups beyond—for instance, a night school for workers, he developed personal ties which were to assure future support for analogous activities under his leadership. This power to mobilize was enhanced beyond mere numbers by the prestige of students in general and by the reputation of the First Normal School in particular, where Mao was evidently the preeminent student leader. The high opinion which influential teachers like Yang Changji had of Mao's character and intelligence gave him a foothold in the national academic world of China, although the fracturing of this academic world by its politicization after the May Fourth Movement—and the parochial character of his arena—foreclosed the type of quick national fame made by many in the Xin Qingnian (New Youth) generation.

Not the least contribution made by the modern schools to Mao's general development and political behavior was educational: he acquired a deep acquaintance with Chinese culture, the ability to express himself with finesse and power, and a considerable knowledge of world affairs and history. His tutoring in moral philosophy by Yang Changji was not only of high quality but thoroughly in harmony with Mao's habits of independence, social concern, and action. Yang's interest in ethics and his syncretic method led him to emphasize the similarity of Chinese and Western moral concerns, so that Mao's study of Western philosophy was not a disorienting confrontation with completely alien ideas. Mao's attitude toward the Chinese classics developed past his ear-

lier use of them as cultural weapons against his father. Both Mao's autobiography and his later writings indicate the breadth of ancient and modern intellectual influences which he absorbed during his school days in Changsha. Yang Changji's emphasis on the harmony rather than the disparity of East and West undoubtedly contributed to Mao's later habit of using traditional Chinese examples to illustrate Marxist principles.

The provincial, national, and international political environments of Mao's youth were most influential in determining the content of his political activity. Political literature of the times introduced him to China's national plight. Personal experience of provincial affairs informed him about internal politics close at home:

At this time [in 1906, when Mao was twelve] an incident occurred in Hunan which influenced my whole life. Outside the little Chinese school where I was studying, we students noticed many bean merchants, coming back from Changsha. We asked them why they were all leaving. They told us about a big uprising in the city.

There had been a severe famine that year, and in Changsha thousands were without food. The starving sent a delegation to the civil governor, to beg for relief, but he replied to them haughtily, "Why haven't you food? There is plenty in the city. I always have enough." When the people were told the governor's reply, they became very angry. They attacked the Manchu yamen, cut down the flagpole, the symbol of office, and drove out the governor. Following this, the Commissioner of Internal Affairs, a man named Chang, came out on his horse and told the people that the Government would take measures to help them. Chang evidently was sincere in his promise, but the Emperor disliked him and accused him of having intimate connections with "the mob." He was removed. A new governor arrived, and at once ordered the arrest of the leaders of the uprising. Many of them were beheaded and their heads displayed on poles as a warning to future "rebels."

This incident was discussed in my school for many days. It made a deep impression on me. Most of the other students sympathized with the "insurrectionists," but only from an observer's point of view. They did not understand that it had any relation to their own lives. They were merely interested in it as an exciting incident. I never forgot it. I felt that there with the rebels were ordinary people like my own family and I deeply resented the injustice of the treatment given to them.
The figures who won Mao’s sympathy were the rebels—common people driven to extremes who fought heroically, though in the end futilely, against the powers that were.

Upon entering school in Changsha Mao began his lifelong habit of voracious newspaper reading. He thus became intimately acquainted with the chaotic conditions of Chinese politics. The republic which replaced the emperor quickly lapsed into tragedy and then farce. The 1911 revolution ended imperial power by dissolving the political center; political unity would not be completely restored to China until 1949. The threat of actual dissolution was serious, and foreign debts grew astronomically. The sentence Mao remembered reading in 1910, “Alas, China will be subjugated,” seemed just as appropriate in 1919, when the results of the Versailles Peace Conference induced the explosive growth of new anti-imperialist forces in China. Mao became an eloquent and powerful voice of anti-warlord and anti-imperialist sentiment in Hunan.

Because of its location, Hunan’s sufferings during this chaotic period were especially acute. The struggles between northern and southern powerholders crossed Hunan several times. Moreover, the economic boom caused by European preoccupation with the First World War was over by 1917, and by 1919 provincial mining exports had declined to 1913 levels. Mao’s impassioned account of Hunan’s oppression by the rest of China and his support of the Hunan self-government movement show the provincial-patriotic direction of his early political thought. Mao’s attitude toward Hunan was complex. He considered it backward; its politics did not know of “thorough solutions based on agreement, but only of private wars.” But it was a province with a glorious tradition of revolution and of revolutionary intellectuals, particularly in recent times.

Despite his rural beginning, Mao quickly caught up with the leading currents in Chinese progressive thought. Mao “worshipped Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao” at the Tongshan Upper Primary School. At the Hunan First Normal School he became an avid reader and later a contributor to the influential New Culture Movement periodical Xin Qingnian (New Youth), and in the May Fourth Movement he became known for his political and intellectual contributions to the Hunanese student movement. To someone with this background, China seemed young in thought, antiquated in institutions, and almost hopelessly adrift in politics.

Mao’s Early Works

Although Mao was an exceptional student and radical leader during his years in Hunan, it is safe to say that had his activities and writings ceased in 1923, when he was twenty-nine years old, the surviving works of the period would not have received widespread attention from Western scholars. This is not to say that they are (or were) insignificant in themselves, but that much of their national and all of their international significance depends essentially on the further career of their author. The major utility of these early works in this respect is that they help to establish Mao’s political identity before he became exclusively involved in the affairs of the Chinese Communist Party. A close analysis of Mao’s pre-Marxist or precommunist works is essential for determining the effect of this change on his thought.

Unfortunately for the purposes of periodization, neither Mao’s political commitments nor his ideology were suddenly transformed. If Mao could say as his good friend Cai Hesen did, “Whatever my earlier thoughts, they are all mistaken and bad; hereafter I will fly in pursuit of [Marxism],” then neither the dividing line nor its significance would be in doubt. But in Mao’s case, “pre-Marxist,” “precommunist,” and “exclusive devotion to party tasks” could all indicate different points in time. Mao’s autobiography is cautiously worded: “By the summer of 1920 I had become, in theory and to some extent in action, a Marxist, and from this time I considered myself a Marxist.” Other communist reminiscences prefer to quote this remark rather than supply their own periodization. Mao founded the Hunan nucleus of the Chinese Communist Party early in 1921, and he attended the First Party Congress in April of that year. But the CCP in its first years was heterogeneous in both ideology and organization, and Mao, as the founder and leader of the Hunan provincial branch, was in a position to determine for himself the practical significance of his commitments to communism. Therefore I have shaped this chapter according to the continuity of Mao’s political activities and viewpoint rather than by the date of his confessed allegiance to Marxism or the date of the organization of the CCP. Mao continues to be engaged in (and to write about) province-wide activities with a “populist” rather than a class appeal until the fall of 1921, when organizing labor (the main effort of the CCP at this time) becomes his preoccupation. Although Mao’s Marxist-oriented activities
started as early as the summer of 1920, for the following year they
cocist with more broadly based efforts. There are writings by
Mao in a three-volume anthology he edited in the early twenties,
*Collected Correspondence of New Citizens Study Society Mem-
ers,* which would shed valuable light on this theoretical de-
velopment, but unfortunately they are unavailable. The available
writings for 1920 and 1921 all concern his public, political, and
cultural activities in Hunan.

The incompleteness of the corpus of Mao's early works is a
considerable hindrance to comprehensive research on this period.
The editors of Mao's *Collected Works* list the titles of thirty-one
works written before 1922 which are not available, including one
from 1919 entitled "What Is Socialism? What Is Anarchism?" and
articles on women's rights and the labor movement. Beyond these,
the large number of school essays and notebooks written by Mao
during his five years at the First Normal School would be extreme-
ly useful in specifying the significance of various influences on his
intellectual development. Thus an analysis of what is available—
some snippets from various sources, six articles or series of ar-
ticles, four advertisements—should not be mistaken for a complete
picture of Mao's intellectual activity. But they are important
works about subjects important to Mao, and a close reading of
them is not likely to be misleading. The small number of writings
makes it possible to discuss the context and significance of each
major group of texts separately.

The earliest available texts by Mao are citations in Li Rui's
biography from a 1914 notebook and from Mao's extensive mar-
ginal commentary on Cal Yuanpei's translation of Friedrich Paul-
sen's *System der Ethik.* Mao's first published work was "A Study
of Physical Education" in *New Youth,* April 1917. The next
available complete works are announcements for the first and sec-
ond semesters of a night school for workers which Mao organized
in 1917. In the aftermath of the May Fourth Movement Mao
wrote many articles for journals which he started. The "Opening
Statement of the Xiang River Review" (14 July 1919) is a bap-
tismal piece for one of his journals, and "The Great Union of the
Popular Masses" is a series of three articles published in the fol-
lowing three issues of the journal. Mao's involvement with spe-
cifically Hunanese political and cultural endeavors is reflected in
three items: first, four articles and one coauthored manifesto on
the Hunan self-government movement of 1920; second, three ar-
ticles on the founding and early operations of the Cultural Book So-
ciety; and third, an introductory statement on the Hunan Self-
Education College which Mao started in August 1921.

**Quotations from Early Notes**

The fragments which Li Rui provides from Mao's earliest
notebooks are useless for the purpose of intensive analysis because
they are short comments from unknown contexts. The quotations
from Mao's marginal notes to Paulsen's *System of Ethics* are some-
what more useful because they are generally enthusiastic com-
ments on a known text. However, as Li remarks, these are casual
notes determined by the flow of Paulsen's text.

Friedrich Paulsen was an influential German educator
around the turn of the century who also wrote vigorous and popu-
lar works in philosophy and ethics. According to him the task of
philosophy is to build a "metaphysics from below" (*Metaphysik
von unten*) by synthesizing the results of the sciences rather than
mediating abstractly. The foundation and goal of all philosophy
is ethics, he argued, because will is primary to intellect. This dis-
tinction is not a conflict, since in Paulsen's view the laws of nature
are ethical and the laws of ethics are natural. Since will is essen-
tially the purposeful behavior of the universe, there is no ultimate
separation between subjective and objective. Inclination and cus-
tom, individual will and the will of the totality, tend by and large
in the same direction. This ethical scientific world view was an
assimilation of Darwinism and various aspects of philosophy in-
to a well-developed structure; it thus appealed to the progressive
intellectuals in China who were faced with their own mediation
between modern knowledge and a valuable ethical tradition.

Mao's enthusiastic response to Paulsen's *System of Ethics*
and the parallel between Paulsen's views and Mao's later philos-
ophy make a comparison of Paulsen and Mao tempting. However,
the comparison would necessarily imply an intellectual connec-
tion for which there is insufficient evidence. A Paulsenian essay
which Mao wrote, "The Strength of the Will," and Mao's copy of
*System of Ethics* from which Li Rui quotes would be essential to
such a comparison. The quotations given by Li are of course se-
lected to demonstrate the continuity of Mao's thought, but it is
noteworthy that since Li's biography was written in 1958 some of these continuities have continued to develop. Mao's youthful animus against those who consider anything old as good and reject everything that is modern (shì guì fèi jìn)⁰² is reflected in later movements which "sight the past and emphasize the present" (bó guì hòu jìn) and "use the past for the present and the foreign for China" (guì wèi jìn yòng yáng wèi zhòng yòng). His denunciation of the "four demons"—religion, capitalism, monarchy, and the three bonds (between prince and minister, father and son, husband and wife)—is an enduring political stance, although the evil basis of the four was later conceptualized as class oppression rather than oppression of the individual. The interdependence of opposites is another theme which has an important role in Mao's later thought. Stuart Schram has pointed out parallels between Mao's 1959 dialectics and the following reflection on Paulsen:

I say: concept is reality, the limited is limitless, the sense of duration is transcendence of duration, imagination is thought, form is essence, I am the universe, life is death, death is life, present is the past and the future, past and future are present, small is large, yang is yin, up is down, vile is pure, thick is thin. Speaking of essences, the many are one, change is constancy.²²

This logic is directly related to Mao's view of society in his assertion that strength depends on resistance and in his reflection on the interdependence of natural determinism and free will quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

"A Study of Physical Education"

Contemporaneous with the two-year ethics course in which he read Paulsen's book, Mao became actively concerned with the state of physical education at the First Normal School and in China as a whole. At school this concern resulted in his administration of an after-hours physical education program.³³ His general reflections on China's needs in this regard led to his first article, "A Study of Physical Education," published in New Youth in the spring of 1917.³⁴

The article challenges even the present-day reader with statements like this:

Those whose bodies are delicate and small behave flippantly. Those whose skin is flabby are soft and dull in will (Xīn). This is the effect of their bodies on their minds.³⁶

The purpose of the article is to alert readers to the general neglect and mismanagement of physical education in China and to urge them, especially students, to begin effective exercise. Although these two foci are respectively critical and hortatory, the major part of the argument is constructive. The insufficiency of contemporary efforts by physical educators is made evident in a disquisition on the fundamental importance of physical education. The exhortation to exercise is given force and content by an emphasis on the primacy of subjective consciousness in improving the situation and by the provision of a program of exercise.

The study of physical education is important to the individual because health is important; it is important to the nation because its weakness and lack of martial spirit stem from neglect of physical training. A vigorous pursuit of virtue and learning requires attention also to the balanced development of the body through exercise. But physical development is more than the presupposition of all other pursuits. The specific goal of physical education from a social point of view is martial heroism, something sorely needed in China, and thus training which develops strength of will and fierce is especially recommended.

The article encourages the reader to proceed from understanding to action in order to improve an urgent situation. Mao is merciless in confronting the reader with his obligation to start exercising immediately. There is nothing more important, it is never too late, any method will do, exercise enhances rather than detracts from cerebral activities, neglect of exercise leads to a short life, a weak will, and flippant behavior. The basic theme is the primacy of self-awareness: "Strength (jiānshì) lies in exercise and exercise lies in self-awareness."³⁷ The consciousness emphasized here is not abstract potential or freedom of choice, but the concrete ability (hence responsibility) to proceed from correct understanding to successful action. Mao's thorough rejection of physical education programs concludes not with an exhortation to change these programs but with a reminder that the main thing is the individual's awareness of the importance of physical education and his commitment to self-improvement.
Mao’s emphasis on subjectivity as the solution to physical development is balanced by an emphasis on practical results. A hundred exercise programs may be propounded, but if “one method or half a method” is sufficient, there is no need to bother about the rest. Talk about physical education is not important. What is important is actually doing it. Mao underlines the practical orientation of the article by concluding with a full set of exercises.

One striking characteristic of this article among Mao’s works is its nonpolitical nature. Praise and blame are assigned on the basis of people’s relationship to physical education rather than to politics. Thus the martial sports of Japan and the West are praised as well as robust figures of history: Yan Yuan, Mohammed, Theodore Roosevelt, Cu Yanwu, Zeng Guofan. Those berated most severely are the teachers and the educational system as a whole, both modern and traditional components, and, by implication, the students for allowing the system and group pressure to cause them to neglect their vital interests.

Although the single-mindedness of the article precludes a specific political viewpoint, the article does have political and social implications and displays traits which underlie Mao’s later political activities. Mao’s alternative ideas for education were not presented until the founding of Hunan Self-Education College in 1921, but his description of modern schools as detrimental to the physical well-being of students is a serious criticism of his immediate social structure. Just as important, however, is the theme of activism itself. “A Study of Physical Education” is the first and most basic of Mao’s many efforts to stir an audience to movement. To awaken communal self-awareness and to develop communal strength and will through practical activity are enduring themes of Mao’s social and political efforts. The potential attributed to conscious, disciplined activity is infinite. No one is too old or too weak, no obstacle is too great, for “the character of the body can change, the weak can become strong, body and mind can both be complete—this is not a matter of fate but is completely within human power.” The metaphysical foundation of Mao’s confidence in the metamorphosing potential of action is given with double emphasis: “There is only movement in heaven and earth.”

This rejection of the immutability of the world, with its corollaries of the dialectical relativity of knowledge and the unlimited potential for action, reappears in the well-known allegory “The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains.” The specific character of this dialectical mode of exhortation can best be seen in contrast to its nondialectical counterpart, “Do your best.” In the latter formulation, moral justification is attained through maximum effort, but horizons of potential are accepted. Mao’s formulation concentrates rather on the persistence of effort and its effectiveness in transforming present limits.

The Workers’ Night School

Mao’s work in physical education was only one of an astonishing number of projects, political, educational, and even military, which he engaged in before the May Fourth Movement. Originally most of Mao’s organizational talent was spent in student affairs, although he also distributed leaflets against Yuan Shikai and developed his political and social views. But as the final year of school approached, Mao and his activist friends began work in Changsha and founded the New Citizens Study Society, “a society which was to have a widespread influence on the affairs and destiny of China.” The group had three main purposes: the maintenance of selfless devotion to national salvation; self-improvement through discussion, study, and exercise; and progressive community activities. Whereas Mao’s vigorous support of student interests in the First Normal School sometimes led to serious confrontations with school authorities, the extracurricular activities of the New Citizens Study Society were not disruptive. In this respect their activities were considerably different from the antitraditional forays of the elitist and protected colleagues of Zhang Guotao, who recalls from his youth: “Thunderously we stormed temples, smashed images of the gods, and campaigned against medical cures dispensed by clay idols. Naturally we were in constant conflict with pious and religiously faithful people.”

Typical and most demanding of Mao’s projects was the Night School for Workers which was started in late 1917. The registration announcements for the first two semesters of the school provide short statements of its purpose and program. Claiming that the workers’ greatest handicap was not being able to read, write, and calculate, the students of the First Normal School offered free courses at a time convenient to workers. The enterprise involved considerable effort. There were over 120 students, with classes meeting for two hours five days a week, and Mao managed the school and taught history.
Another important activity of the New Citizens Study Society was encouraging Hunanese participation in the work-study scheme for education in France organized in Peking by Wu Yuzhang and Cai Yuanpei. It was in connection with this activity that Mao made his first trip outside of Hunan, during which he stayed for several months in Peking working in the library of Beijing University. Exposed to the leading edge of Chinese intellectual and political progressivism, Mao became more political and more radical. He returned to Changsha via Confucius’ birthplace and Shanghai a few months before the outbreak of the epochal May Fourth Movement in Peking in 1919.

Opening Statement of the Xiang River Review
The effect of the May Fourth Movement on Changsha is described in the opening paragraph of the Xiang River Review, written two months after the beginning of the movement:

Since the call of “world revolution” and the onrushing movement to “liberate mankind” antiquated outlooks must be changed. Formerly we did not raise doubts on many problems, did not quickly adopt many methods, and out of fear shrank from saying many things. Now the undoubtedly is doubted, the unattempted is attempted, many feared things are no longer feared. No matter who the personage, he cannot escape its influence."

Mao Zedong, recent college graduate and just returned from a stimulating trip to Peking, was a leader of one of the few activist student groups in China antedating the May Fourth Movement. He was thus in a preeminent position not only to experience but to direct the impact of the May Fourth Movement in Hunan. The significance of the May Fourth Movement cannot be reduced to the anti-Japanese movement or to the New Culture Movement. It served as a catalyst for a society which urgently needed a new form of political expression and a new map for political orientation. China, whose political life had traditionally been controlled and centralized, was shattered into shifting zones of power and mortally threatened by imperialism. Its social ordering, determined until the twentieth century by a centralized and open examination system, now left university graduates with an uncertain future. Lastly, the indomitable, unified, and progressive West to which China had grown accustomed had torn itself apart in the war and was now frantically on the defensive against new, even more progressive, popular forces epitomized by the Russian Revolution.

The founding of a newspaper was an appropriate May Fourth activity. Not only was the awakening of large groups of people to political action exciting and newsworthy but the rapidity of the movement’s development led to optimistic prognostications of political transformation. Mao’s Xiang River Review, although it lasted only four weeks before it was shut down by Hunan’s warlord, Zhang Jingyao, was a successful and widely respected May Fourth publication."

The “Opening Statement of the Xiang River Review” (14 July 1919) is more a call to enlightenment than to action. As Mao remarks elsewhere in the same issue:

Of China’s 400,000,000 people, approximately 390,000,000 are superstitious. They blindly believe in ghosts, they blindly worship unusual natural phenomena, they blindly believe in fate, they blindly believe in coercion (iqiang guan). They don’t recognize that there are individuals, that there is a self, that there is truth."

His message is that hunger is the world’s greatest problem and that the masses united have the greatest strength. Mao tries to explain “how mankind should live.” He says that democracy is the basis for all opposition to coercion. The powers that be in the sphere of religion, literature, politics, society, education, economy, thought, and international politics must be struck down by the call for democracy. Moderate methods are preferred to violent methods, because the oppressors are also prisoners of the old society and their abuse of power is an unconscious error. Besides this compassionate motive, Mao notes that the end result of using coercion to strike down coercion is still coercion.

Within his general preference for moderate methods, Mao makes distinctions between different situations and the behavior appropriate to them. In the academic sphere he proposes thorough research that is not bounded by tradition or superstition. In society he advocates unity of the masses to launch a persistent movement to offer those in power “loyal advice” and to achieve “revolution by appeals.” This strategy is contrasted to “revolution by bomb” and “bloody revolution,” which he feels merely result in
great confusion. To resist the immediate threat of Japan, however, he suggests boycott of classes, suspension of commercial activities, strikes against factories, and boycott of Japanese products as effective measures. This concern for finding the appropriate methods for diverse social and political circumstances finds its theoretical form in Mao’s later discourse on the particularity of contradiction.

The themes of awakening, fearlessness, and confidence in impending social transformation which pervade the article are expressions of a faith in the power of the united masses stimulated by popular ferment in China and the West. The May Fourth Movement served as the catalyst for fusing Mao’s progressive political sentiments and his inclination toward practical activity into engagement in radical politics. Political engagement gave Mao’s thinking a new starting point. From this time on, revolution is the focus of his theory and practice.

The content of Mao’s May Fourth views is as interesting as their new political engagement. The orientation is universal and thorough; the call is “worldwide” to liberate “humanity,” and the basic slogan is “achieve freedom from coercion.” Paradoxically, Mao’s confidence in impending, thorough social transformation accounts for the moderate tactics he suggests. He does not see the new society as a desperate undertaking, so violence is not required. In fact, violence would taint the new order with the methods of the old.

A link between this work and the Night School advertisements is Mao’s presupposition of enlightenment as a prelude to action. This attitude is best explained by an earlier comment on Paulsen:

To say that knowledge has no impact at all on man’s hearts is wrong; knowledge definitely has a great impact. . . . That mankind has had progress, revolution, and the spirit of correcting faults is completely due to activists (huodong zhe) who relied on the leadership of new thought.44

Although the dichotomies of teacher and taught, mover and moved, enlightened and ignorant are not explicit in the Xiang River Review, the overdrawn description of the backwardness of Hunan and the nature of the newspaper’s project suggest that a leading group is necessary to awaken the masses.

"The Great Union of the Popular Masses"

The main political essay of the remaining three issues of the Xiang River Review is the three-part article "The Great Union of the Popular Masses," which elaborates the idea of the power of the unified masses into a general perspective on politics and the Chinese and international political situations. The high reputation of the Xiang River Review probably derives in large part from this article, which was reprinted in full in Xingqitri [Sunday], a Sichuan publication, and later was reprinted in Shanghai.45

The most striking stylistic characteristic of the piece is a recurring dialectical progression from extremely bad to extremely good, and a related emphasis on the basic identity of diverse phenomena. The fact that “the darkness of society has reached an extreme,” internationally through the world war and nationally through the North-South War, is the precondition to political transformation. “Thus there arises reform, there arises resistance, therefore there is a great alliance of the masses of the people.” A similar transformation is expected for China. Although she now seems completely incompetent in political and economic affairs, in the future China will be preeminent among nations. As Mao observes in a later work, the theme of transformation of opposites is both very Chinese and very Marxist. Marx’s philosophical reason for suggesting the proletariat as the ultimate revolutionary group is that they are so oppressed that they are an anticlass rather than a part of bourgeois society. A similar confidence in the transformation of opposites leads Mao to welcome the observation (which otherwise would be disquieting) that the principle of action he recommends, the “great union,” has been the root source of power for the nobles, the powerful, and the capitalists throughout history. The technique of union, whose power comes from numbers, was perfected by the few against the many. From the resulting community of weakness and misery arises the greatest union to destroy its oppressors.

The “Great Union of the Popular Masses” is a theory of society, a methodology for social transformation, and a judgment of China’s readiness for transformation. In the first installment Mao discusses the “possibility and necessity of the great union.” The argument proceeds from the observation that “no matter what the type of historical movements, there are none which do not proceed from the union of some people.” He points out that the power-
holding minorities using the advantages of education, money, and military strength have driven the masses of people to such extremes that they have an intimate knowledge of the methods of oppression and are becoming conscious of the incomparably greater power of a mass union. Only a great shout need be given, and the old society will crumble. In the second installment, Mao presents the method of building up to a great union by starting with groups of common interests. He gives examples of the common interests of various basic groups (farmers, workers, women, and the like) and suggests aggregating these groups in general unions. The third installment deals with China’s readiness for such a movement. Mao presents the situation realistically, demythologizing the 1911 revolution but valuing the experience of provincial and county assemblies and of course the organizations blossoming as a result of the May Fourth Movement. He reasons that China’s embarrassing performance in politics and economics is due to lack of political experience stemming from long oppression. He concludes that the very length and intensity of oppression will lead to exceptionally rapid development:

Some day the reform of the Chinese people will be more thorough than that of any other people. The society of the Chinese people will be more glorious than that of any other people. The great union of the Chinese people will be successfully completed before that of any other place or nation. Gentlemen! Gentlemen! We must exert ourselves together! We must strive forward together! Our golden world (shijie), our glorious and bright world, is right before us!\(^{66}\)

Mao’s political horizons are indistinct in this article. The first part is dominated by a universal frame of reference and a call to imitate countries, like Russia, more advanced in their great unions. Since the second part deals primarily with small unions it is locally oriented, with Changsha in mind, but the suggestions apply to other localities. The last part deals with China as a whole and is nationally oriented. As Stuart Schram has pointed out, the article’s conclusion (which is quoted above) is one of the most nationalistic passages in Mao’s writings.\(^{66}\) However, it would certainly be mistaken to ignore the internationalist tone of the first installment and the “Introductory Statement of the Xiang River Review,” since internationalism constitutes an integral part of Mao’s argument. This seeming paradox of nationalism versus internationalism is partly explained by a difference in timing. For the present, China’s task is to learn from countries which are more advanced in popular struggles against power. China’s future transformation, once accomplished, will be as glorious as her oppression was severe, but this preeminence will exist in a transformed world order and thus will not constitute hegemony among competitive nations. Mao’s patriotism for China’s existing political order does not extend beyond faith in China’s future and defensiveness vis-à-vis foreign encroachments. In his proposals on Hananese self-government in the following year, Mao reviews the utter failure of central government in China since 1911 and concludes, “The best thing would be [for China] to split into twenty-seven countries (guo).”\(^{67}\) Even this apparent provincialism is not as far from Mao’s nationalism and internationalism as it would seem. Mao’s reasoning leads him to this proposal through the principle of self-determination, which he establishes with international examples as a universal principle. Mao propounds this self-determination of China’s subunits for the immediate good of the Chinese people and expects them in the future to be reunited in a single polity.

The deeper problem in categorizing Mao’s stance in regard to national boundaries is that China’s national experience in modern times has differed fundamentally from that of the West. Western nationalism was at its most characteristic in the discovery of collective cultural identities and the attempts to establish corresponding political entities. In some cases nationalism demanded the subdivision of culturally diverse empires; in others it involved the amalgamation of culturally similar but politically diverse polities. Western nations by and large defined themselves against each other, seeking to distinguish separate identity from a common heritage. China’s national experience was instead a discovery of a world beyond herself. China found herself defined by the forceful incursion of cultures she would have preferred to ignore. In Kang Youwei’s Datong Shu [The book of great harmony], China’s retreat from the presumed universalism of her cultural significance to being one nation among many is linked to a general dissolution of national boundaries and establishment of a world community. Mao seems to share this self-confidence of cultural subsistence within a cosmopolitan framework, a position which cannot be described simply as nationalist or internationalist.
A further problem in interpreting this article arises from the following passage:

As for the actions to be undertaken after the union [of the masses has been achieved], there is one very radical faction which uses the method of doing unto others as they do unto you, and which does its utmost to cause trouble for them [the capitalists and the aristocrats]. The leader of this faction is a German-born person named Marx. The faction which is milder than Marx is not anxious to see quick results and begins with the understanding of the common people. All should have a morality of mutual aid and work voluntarily. If nobles and capitalists turn their hearts toward the good and are capable of working, are capable of helping people and not harming them, then they don’t have to be killed. The ideas of this faction are more comprehensive, profound, and far-reaching. They want to unify the world and make it one country, unify humanity into one family, enjoy harmonious, happy, intimate, and good relationships—not the type of intimate and close relationship suggested by Japan—and together achieve prosperity. This faction’s leader is a Russian-born person named Kropotkin.

The question which of course arises from this passage is whether Mao was an anarchist at this time—or at any rate more of an anarchist than a Marxist. Mao relates in his autobiography that he discussed anarchism during his stay in Peking in 1918. It is evident from this quotation that the anarchism Mao has in mind is of a very mild sort. Richard Solomon’s statement that “Mao himself, in student days, had toyed with the anarchist’s glorification of violence for its own sake” is completely mistaken. In China the content of anarchism ran the whole gamut from men of good will with an animus toward hierarchy to violent nihilists. Mao’s “anarchism” favors organization for political and social ends, but it opposes the use of violence in attaining them. If the question of political violence is disregarded, it could be argued that rather than Mao later converting to Marxism, Chinese Marxism came to Mao, since such characteristically Chinese Communist tenets as mass line, internationalism, and benevolence to transformed reactionaries roughly correspond to the virtues of anarchism which he enumerates in the article. Early Chinese Communists were not hostile to anarchism. They applauded its rejection of existing society and its communal ideal but considered it impractical and utopian as a political movement. As a 1921 article put it, “the anarchists are our friends but not our comrades.”

There are, however, some significant differences between the political viewpoint expressed in “The Great Union of the Popular Masses” and Mao’s later Marxism. The most evident is his reluctance to consider violent means in confronting the powerholders. Instead of this means of confrontation, two methods are proposed: the immediate one of patiently building up basic groups and the ultimate one of the all-powerful “great shout together.” Mao’s pacifism is intimately related to the reliance on groups rather than classes—sociability rather than unequal relations—as the basic social unit. The result is a cry for liberation rather than a call for revolution. In this sense it could be said that Mao’s political views in 1919 were more utopian than anarchist, and his own description, “a curious mixture,” is most accurate.

The Hunan Self-Government Movement

With the political stimulation of the May Fourth Movement, Mao became involved in a variety of public causes. The most notable of his efforts were an attempt to unseat the Hunan warlord Zhang Jingyao and a flurry of articles on the status of women prompted by the suicide of an unwilling bride in late 1919. Mao lost the first round of his battle with Zhang when a general student strike against the warlord led to the suppression of the Xiang River Review. Mao went on his second trip to Peking and Shanghai in order to enlist the aid of influential Hunanese in the capital in removing Zhang. Mao’s writings on the status of women helped stimulate a major discussion of this question in Changsha, but only fragments of these newspaper articles are currently available. Mao’s basic point was that traditional Chinese society had bound women in an “iron cage” from which suicide might seem the only escape. The same general sentiment is echoed in Mao’s position of the 1950s that “genuine equality of the sexes can only be realized in the process of the socialist transformation of society as a whole.”

Zhang Jingyao was driven out of Hunan by July 1920. Although this event was due more to the vagaries of warlord politics than to the vigorous efforts of Mao, the New Citizens Study Society, and many other Hunanese to oust him, the situation presented an unusual opportunity for the war-ridden province to acquire some autonomy and freedom from military rule. In these circumstances a two-factioned movement for “Hunanese Self-Government” arose. The more conservative faction was composed
of established politicians and favored a constitution written by a committee of provincial politicians and assembly members. The more radical wing favored a popularly elected constitutional assembly. Of the ten articles Mao wrote supporting the radical self-government faction, four (and a codrafted proposal) have been discovered by Angus McDonald.66

Mao's articles have two basic concerns: the first is the precondition of a successful and long-lasting self-government; the second is the possibility and desirability of self-government for Hunan. The basic requirement for successful self-government is that it have a popular basis, since self-government organized exclusively by gentry would be fundamentally misconceived. This popular basis can be achieved by real mobilization of the people. On the second point, Mao observes that the theory that only big nations are strong enough to survive is an imperialist lie disproved by revolutions all over the world. That autonomy would benefit Hunan is indicated by a long and impressive narration of the sufferings Hunan has undergone because she was part of China. The fifth work, "A Proposal to Convene a 'Hunan People's Constitutional Convention' by the 'Hunan Revolutionary Government' to Enact a 'Hunan Constitution' for the Purpose of Constructing a 'New Hunan'," is just what its title implies. It was coauthored by Mao, the editor of the Changsha Da Gong Bao, and the president of the Hunan union of students, and was signed by 377 students, journalists, lawyers, and others. Although it cannot be considered an article which Mao wrote, it is a document to which he contributed.

The content of these articles can be fruitfully related to that of the "Great Union of the Popular Masses" written the previous year. To some extent we have here a "great unionist" at work, one not discouraged by starting small, engaging in patient work at the existing level of people's consciousness, insisting that a durable government needs a popular basis, and finding proof of the possibility of Hunan's self-government in international developments and the extremity of Hunan's suffering. Angus McDonald calls such activity "more Woodrow Wilson than Lenin,"67 and the same scornful judgment from a radical point of view is made seven months after Mao's articles in the journal Gongchandang (Communist): "If one day the warlords were overthrown by the gentry (shenren) class, the gentry class would immediately turn into the previous warlords, doing evil of the same kind and manner, robbing the common people."68 Both these judgments confuse a concern for immediate activity with an acceptance of the politics of such a movement as abstractly necessary and sufficient—for that matter, they are considerably more rigid than the political tactics of Lenin or Marx. Mao had defended the "Oust Zhang Jingyao" and "Self-Government" movements to critical members of the New Citizens Study Group:

The movement to oust Zhang was just a simple opposition to the powerholder (qiang quan zhe) Zhang Jingyao. The self-government movement is just a simple aspiration that Hunan could specially produce a method which would allow Hunan to become a relatively good environment. Within this environment we would like to pursue concrete preparatory work.

These two movements are both only expediencies utilizing the present context in order to achieve measures for basic reform.68

On the other hand the tone is significantly different from that of his May Fourth work. Much of the energy of the May Fourth Movement seemed to have evaporated as quickly as it arose, and, although Mao took the long view rather than despairing, the lessons of the movement significantly affected his political outlook. The world and China had awakened, but persistent and practical movements drawing their strength from the people were replacing the political mechanism of the great shout. This recognition of the political power of organization and concrete programs is a natural and direct development from Mao's emphasis the previous year on organizing "small unions" around shared grievances. In his autobiography, Mao connects this realization to an incident in the self-government movement:

I remember an episode in 1920, when the New Citizens Study Society organized a demonstration to celebrate the third anniversary of the Russian October Revolution. It was suppressed by the police. Some of the demonstrators had attempted to raise the Red Flag at that meeting, but were prevented from doing so by the police. They then pointed out that, according to Article 12 of the Constitution, the people had the right to assemble, organize, and speak, but the police were not impressed. They replied that they were not there to be taught the Constitution, but to carry out the orders from the governor, Zhao Fengji. From this time on I became more and more convinced that only mass political power, secured through mass action, could guarantee the realization of dynamic reforms."69
The Cultural Book Society

The self-government movement was not the only effort Mao made at this time to prepare Hunan for basic reforms. In 1920 Mao organized a Russian affairs study group and a work-study scheme for students going to Russia, a Marxism study group, a Hunan branch of the Socialist Youth Corps (one of the most successful provincial branches), and the Cultural Book Society. He was, moreover, director of the Primary School Section of the First Normal School and chairman of its alumni club.

Of all these varied activities, it is most fortunate that material has been preserved on the Cultural Book Society. Whereas the political relevance of his other activities is fairly self-evident, that Mao would operate a bookstore as a mission rather than as a means of support seems anomalous. The available documents on the society make clear the various educational functions of the enterprise.

The Cultural Book Society was a cooperative capitalized by members' contributions and run by an elected manager (Mao) who was obligated to make semiannual public reports. Its main purpose was “allowing all kinds of worthwhile recent publications to spread throughout the province, giving everyone the opportunity to peruse them.” This was done by operating a main bookstore and ordering service in Changsha and encouraging branches to be set up in all counties. Later plans were announced for setting up an editing and translation bureau and a printing department. All persons contributing one yuan or more were considered equal members; contributions did not pay interest and could not be withdrawn; no profit was made by the main bookstore on branch society purchases; and the society's accounts were available for inspection to everyone, member or not.

These regulations already suggest some of the secondary motivations for the society, motivations which are made explicit in the report of April 1921 given just before Mao left for the First Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. The society was not just a bookstore trying to sell progressive books. It considered itself a semipublic provincial organ with a mission to make available “books of value” to everyone. Enhancing its semipublic character was its partially successful attempt to use county educational officials and facilities for organizing branch book societies throughout Hunan. Moreover, it was constructed as a model organization for Chinese social ventures: its business was open (contrasted to the Chinese penchant for secrecy in business); its capital was not threatened by the possibility of withdrawal; it was not an undertaking for individual profit (Mao castigates the excessive individualism of Chinese merchants in “The Great Union of the Popular Masses”); and its accounts were orderly and efficient. This “model enterprise” reminds one of Robert Owens' attempt to win British merchants to humane treatment of workers by demonstrating that his New Lanark factory was a financial success—except that Mao tried to do without either the primitive or the essentially capitalistic aspects of the entrepreneurial system.

So far as its fate is recorded, the Cultural Book Society was a success. A coup was scored at its founding by getting Tan Yankai, durable Hunanese politician and then governor of the province, to supply his calligraphy for the signboard of the bookstore. By the time of the semiannual report, seven branches and seven school depots had been established and the society had sold 160 titles (including, according to Li Rui, An Introduction to Marx's Capital, History of Socialism, and The Worker's and Peasant's Government and China), 40 different magazines, and 3 newspapers. Perhaps Mao's success with an alternative enterprise encouraged him to attempt alternative education the following year.

The Hunan Self-Education College

Mao's last Hunan venture which did not presuppose a class viewpoint was the founding of the Hunan Self-Education College. Despite Han Suyin's claim that “the whole purpose of the college was actually the recruitment and training of cadres for the Communist Party,” the “Introductory Statement of the Hunan Self-Education College” persuasively argues a broader case based on a participatory concept of education which can be traced in Mao's earliest works. The school in its original conceptualization does not seem to have been successful, however, and Mao himself had little time for it after the first few months.

The college was conceived as a quasi-public provincial institution by its founder—and with ironic justification in that it was indirectly supported by provincial funds. A public stipend of four hundred yuan per month to the Quan Shan (Wang Fuzhi) Society was diverted, legally, to the establishment and maintenance of the college. The college was dissolved in November 1923 for
teaching rebellious doctrines, but in two months it reappeared as the Xiang River Middle School.

On 16 August 1921, the “Introductory Statement of the Hunan Self-Education College” was published in Changsha newspapers in order to explain the college and attract students. The article is a development of the theme clearly stated in the first paragraph: “Its [the college’s] purpose lies in using the traditional academy (shuyuan) form to acquire the content of the modern schools (xuexiao).” Mao goes on to criticize the career orientation of the traditional academies and, more interestingly, the structural and methodological faults of modern schools. After evaluating their respective good points, he describes their shared “non-democracy” (fei pingmin zhubi); entry is restricted by examinations and high fees, and an intellectual class (jieji) of academicians who isolate themselves from the people is established. Finally, Mao argues, the province of Hunan needs the college because there is no Hunan University as yet and the Hunanese people need something to satisfy their spiritual needs and develop their cultural desires:

Although in actuality it [the college] is unable to establish relations with every Hunanese, in spirit it must be made into a public academic organ of the Hunanese society; although it is impossible to say for sure that it will have very good results, if we advance energetically for many years and months, we believe that one day we will achieve our goals.

An interesting feature of this article is that although Mao was the leader of the Hunan Communist Party by this time, the article’s format, combining the good points of old and new educational systems, is the most moderate stance that Mao had taken toward existing conditions so far. The effect of the article was more radical, however, since Mao’s trenchant critique of the modern school was a basic attack on a progressively disposed and influential segment of the provincial elite. His critique of the modern school is basically this: there is no intimate relation between teacher and student, only uniform and mechanical management; moreover, the system requires passive students and thus inhibits individual character from developing. The second charge is directly related to Mao’s earlier criticism of the schools in “A Study of Physical Education” and “Great Union of the Popular Masses.”

The concept of class (jieji) makes its first strong appearance in this article, but the “class of common people” is the major focus and the proletarian class (wuchan jieji) enters as “the so-called proletarian class.” The most interesting use of the term is its application to academicians. They monopolize learning by making it mysterious, thereby isolating themselves from the society of common people and “developing the curious situation of a kind of intellectual class (zhishi jieji) using the class of common people as slaves.” The function of the term “class” here is to identify a group with its own interests vis-à-vis another group. Class is not defined by an individual attribute shared by all members but by a corporate behavior pattern in which all members take part. As used here, class is thus “class for itself” rather than “class in itself.”

Shortly after founding the Self-Education College, Mao became very busy in organizing the Hunan labor movement in line with party policy before the 7 February 1923 Incident involving the killing of railway workers in North China. The Hunan labor movement, spurred by the successful Anyuan Coal Mine strike in September 1922, developed rapidly. Mao’s leadership in the labor unrest made him a persona non grata with the governor, who ordered his arrest. Mao fled to Shanghai in April 1923.

Conclusion
Throughout all of Mao’s early activities and writings the most striking characteristic is an energetic and selfless concern for public affairs. In his innumerable efforts to do something for the common good, Mao is the prototype of the main target of future CCP recruitment—the activist (jifjenai).

Mao’s style consistently urges the reader to do something. The moral imperatives are neither abstract nor categorical: the discussion of the topic leads to a consideration of what to do which implies who to do it. In every article Mao identifies himself as one of those who see the problem and feel compelled to act. The pronoun “we” is far more important than “I,” and its reference group is never exclusive and usually is the people.

In the works discussed in this chapter, Mao’s activism is expressed in the intimate relationship between theoretical concerns and practical activities. Every article contains a significant and plausible proposal for immediate action, and in most cases Mao already had been engaged in the endeavor he suggests. His con-
cerns are thus about matters with which he is familiar, and he writes when he thinks successful action is possible. The question of where to begin is never left unanswered; in fact, it is sometimes used as a critical tool against alternative viewpoints. As Mao remarked to his fellow New Citizens Study Society members:

I feel that very many people talk about reform, but for them it is only an empty ideal. Where do they eventually want to get to with their reforms? What methods will they use to achieve it? At what point will they themselves or their comrades begin work?—there is very little careful research of these problems.

Mao's practical orientation has a basic influence on his theoretical style. Since any theory proposed is expected to be workable in practice, Mao's chief concern is with the correctness of the theory at hand rather than an abstract comparison of alternative hypotheses. Mao wants to penetrate to the essence of the matter, using assumptions of unanimity ("everyone knows . . .") to establish his formulation of the problem and wide-ranging examples from Chinese history and modern nations to support factual judgments. The assumptions of unanimity are not so much self-evident propositions as assumptions necessary to the general orientation of the article. When in the "Report of the Affairs of the Cultural Book Society" Mao says, "Everybody understands that there is nothing more necessary than the propagation of culture, and the efficacy of cultural propagation should not be limited to the efficacy of a few schools," he is not stating the obvious. However, the article is not directed at anyone who would have serious reservations about this statement. Mao's constant use of examples is another sign of his practical orientation. This is especially evident in "A Study of Physical Education" and the "Human Self-Government" article. In the "Great Union of the Popular Masses," the dialectic of oppression and liberation is grounded in a wealth of examples from Western history. Since the Cultural Book Society and the Self-Education College are new institutions, there is little place for argument from example. But it is interesting that a significant part of Mao's motivation in promoting these novel institutions is the exemplary function he expects them to have. The importance of examples in his thinking adds significance to the founding of model institutions.

In these early writings the dialectical interdependence and flux of reality has an explicit centrality for Mao's thinking which begins to submerge in the Hunan self-government writings. This shift does not represent the displacement of dialectics by a more categorical approach. Rather, the limited, practical tasks of his later Hunan activities required only proximate practical justifications, and still later his party activities required only proximate ideological ones. It is not difficult to perceive a continuity in dialectical substructure in Mao's later writings. When the development of his political thinking demanded a major reorientation in approach, as in 1937 and 1956-1957, Mao reasoned from his basic dialectical viewpoint. But the more philosophical works expose the logical skeleton of his thinking; they are not temporary apostasies from an otherwise dogmatic Marxism. The anti-Marxist bias typical of Western scholarship on Mao has contributed more to the apparent woodenness of Mao's writings than did Mao himself.

Ultimately, Mao's justification for ideological commitment is utility. Mao argues for the New Citizens Study Society to become Marxist: "Unions of feeling (ganjing de jiehe) should become unions of ideology (zhuyi de jiehe) . . . Ideology is like a baner. When the banner is raised, everyone then has something to hope for, something to run after." The acceptance of ideology for its utility does not imply a merely tentative commitment, because the revolutionary action which it facilitates is the central task. Given a crisis of ideological leadership, however, it might be expected (particularly with hindsight) that development of the useful aspects of ideology and revolutionary organization would take precedence over submission to party dogma.

The chief characteristic of Mao's political viewpoint in these early works is what he calls democracy (pingmin zhuyi). Although the expression is used in only two works, it underlies Mao's orientation toward the general welfare and organizational nonexclusiveness which permeate his writings and activities and explains his procedural tenets of self-determination and openness in public and semipublic affairs. His democratic-populist orientation is based on the conviction, expressed in his May Fourth articles, that the united masses of the people are the strongest political force. A corollary developed by the first and second "Hunan Self-Government" articles is that a strong and viable government cannot be built without eliciting popular support:

How can a matter in its inception, particularly when it is extremely important, be run successfully or well if there are not many persons
to engage in a movement to promote it, to inspect it from the side and to criticize it from behind.\footnote{26}

The Cultural Book Society and Hunan Self-Education College both assume a natural legitimacy from their democratic structure and populist missions. Both express, moreover, a quasi-governmental urge to be available to all the people within the provincial boundaries.

Mao's apparent shift of focus between provincialism, nationalism, and internationalism can be explained by changes in his political expectations. In each case Mao turns to the largest feasible unit. The optimistic May Fourth articles recognize no organizational limit to the power of the masses. By 1920 Mao did not think that mass politics could be achieved on a national scale, and his assumed provincial horizons. Thus his "provincialism" is not an enclosure of his political aspirations; it reflects a practical judgment that only a provincial movement could be attempted at that time. In all cases the well-being and discretion of subunits is respected, whether they are small unions, county assemblies, or branch book societies.

The developments in Mao's political thought during this period correspond to stages in Mao's political experience. The May Fourth Movement demonstrated to Mao that political institutions (analogous to paternal power and school authorities) were "paper tigers" when faced with a determined movement from below. The consequent politicization of his activities and attitudes was disciplined by the subsiding of the movement. His next attempt was within the framework of a political movement, admonishing its supporters to develop a popular base for their autonomous government. Not only were Mao's efforts unsuccessful, but the entire self-government movement soon became a political ploy of the new warlord, Zhao Hengtai. Mao's activities then became less directly political. His study groups were aimed at raising the theoretical level of fellow activists; more general endeavors like the Cultural Book Society and Hunan Self-Education College attempted to enliven social consciousness throughout the population. In the meantime Mao's own political standpoint was becoming more thoroughly Marxist and he became more involved in his organizational role in the Chinese Communist Party. From 1921 to 1923, Mao took a leading part in organizing labor throughout Hunan. The slaughter of railway workers in North China in the 7 February 1923 Incident signaled a retreat in unionizing activities, and the situation of the Communist Party in Hunan worsened. After his forced exit from Hunan, Mao worked for the Party Central Committee in Shanghai and shortly afterward became involved in united front work with the Kuomintang.

The significance of Mao's pre-Marxist thought is perhaps best epitomized by a statement in "A Study of Physical Education": "The will (yizhi) is definitely the forerunner of a man's career."\footnote{27} Mao's early activities and writings reflect the establishment of his basic mentality and style, which become enduring components of his political identity. The continuities which are recognizable from Mao's earliest writings are not crystallized aspects of ideas or behavior, however; they exist in an active dialectic with changing political environments and developments in thought and experience. The basic continuities of Mao's thought can be generalized as follows. First is the continuity in form or specific patterns of thinking in spite of discontinuity in content. Preeminent among these patterns are attention to the immediate despite changes in "what is concrete" at any particular moment and the use of a dialectical logic in ethics and social analysis. Second is the continuity in basic assumptions in spite of discontinuity in methods. The primary assumption that "the united masses of the people are the strongest political force" remains the same despite basic changes in Mao's framework of social analysis (from group to class) and his framework of political action (from self-organized local associations to the Communist Party). Assumptions of the necessity of struggle and the importance of practice also remain the same despite transformations of their application. Finally, there is continuity in ultimate aspiration in spite of discontinuities in practical policies. Mao's goal of a China transformed to serve the people is ultimately behind such apparently compromising or mundane affairs as running a bookstore.