The demarcation between Mao's democratic-populist activities and his commitment to the politics of the national revolution is the collapse of Mao's hope for Hunanese revolution. This change in orientation was not abrupt: as political conditions in Hunan restricted Mao's popular activities to cultural and educational ventures, his political enthusiasm came to be channeled into the politics of the working class and the Chinese Communist Party. But the final abandonment of a populist political style and of Hunan as an adequate revolutionary arena in 1923 is nevertheless a watershed of great importance for Mao's political development. Mao's next three years of CCP activities marked an irrevocable commitment to a new framework of politics. His concern with the peasant movement from 1925 to 1926 returned him to a direct concern with the problems of mass revolution, but despite serious tensions with the CCP leadership, his peasant-oriented populist empiricism remained within the Leninist party paradigm.

The consequences of the loss of Mao's native political base for his politics can be seen in a short piece Mao wrote just before leaving Changsha for Shanghai, "An Introduction to New Age." The return to broader political horizons—"how the nation is to be recast, how politics is to be cleaned up, how imperialism is to be defeated, how military rule is to be overthrown, how the educational system is to be reformed, how literature, art and other fields are to be revolutionized and reconstructed"—is not due to a resurgence of May Fourth confidence in the immediacy of revolution. It results from the conviction, painfully acquired, that a democratic revolution within one province was impossible. And it indicates a change in political focus from the masses of the people to a group of colleagues with "an independent and self-strengthening spirit, a persevering and unbending will." This "state of scholarly refugees" (xuwen shang di wangling zhi bang—referring to the new periodical and its sponsors) does not have the natural legitimacy or ultimate political power of the masses; it is the auxiliary to future mass politics. Its role lies precisely in the general unpreparedness of society for revolution. Its function is to "study the practically useful disciplines and carry out preparations for the reform of the society" and to be "an experimental standard." Some success in these tasks can be expected because of the spiritual qualities of the group: "Starting with such a purpose (zixin feichang zhengque), and proceeding with such spirit and will, it necessarily has hope for success." Although the colleagues of whom this was written were involved with the periodical New Age and the Self-Educational College, the description is also quite appropriate for the Chinese Communist Party. The article's emphasis on theory—"for, more precisely, on correct knowledge by which a dedicated group will pave the way for mass political activity—indicates a motif which runs throughout this period of Mao's politics and writings.

This chapter is concerned with the ideological aspect of Mao's development from 1923 to 1927 because ideology figures more prominently in Mao's thought after his commitment to communism. The conceptual framework of class struggle, the proletarian party, imperialism, learning from the Russian experience—all took the place of Mao's more global speculations of the May Fourth era on "how man should live" and the nature of political power. Although the values of Mao's pre-Marxist politics remained, the process of developing from the "good activist" into the "good cadre" involved basic political and intellectual adaptations. When the optimism of the May Fourth Movement proved unfounded, the focus of Mao's politics shifted from the metamorphosing instant of anarchist revolution and its ephemeral midwife, the great shout of the people, to more limited and feasible projects. The earlier expectation of a dimensionless moment of transformation required neither a revolutionary organization nor a strategy; the mission was a simple one of popular enlightenment—spreading the good news of the power of the aroused masses. With the dampening of hopes for a quick and painless transfer of power, popular revolution came to be regarded as the end product of a necessary process of revolutionary activity. A protracted struggle
The Growth of Mao's Marxism

There were changes in Mao's political style which are evident in "An Introduction to New Age"; moreover, there were changes in political commitments which involved going to Shanghai and pursuing a career of high bureaucratic posts in the Chinese Communist Party (and later in Sun Yat-sen's Nationalist Party, the Kuomintang). These changes have roots which go back to the beginning of Mao's political activities. Mao and Cai Hesen organized the New Citizens Study Society in 1917-1918 for reasons analogous to those for founding New Age; it was to be a group distinguished by its dedication to the task of national salvation—penetrating in its consideration of the problems of Chinese society and universal in its search for the most apt solutions. These similarities are not so surprising when it is recalled that in 1918 revolutionary expectations had not yet been awakened by the May Fourth Movement, and by the spring of 1923 the cycle of popular initiatives in Hunan arising from the ferment of the May Fourth Movement had finally run aground. The New Citizens Study Society functioned as a core of leaders, organizing a wide variety of single-purpose, broad-based organizations according to its own political preferences and the opportunities which Hunan politics presented. Originally, the politics of the society stemmed from petit-bourgeois idealism and patriotism, but it retained its role as the nucleus of revolutionary leadership in Hunan by continuously adjusting to the radicalizing lessons of active politics. The development of Mao's commitment to communism occurred within this political and ideological context which itself was undergoing successive metamorphoses.

The exact course of Mao's theoretical development is impossible to trace because the textual evidence of his precise relationship to various intellectual currents is insufficient. Although Mao showed an intense interest in a great variety of thinkers and political events, he did not feel impelled to engage in synthetic or critical theorizing. Among his friends he was better known as an activist than as a theorist. Li Weihan, a founding member of the New Citizens Study Society, recalled a slogan: "[Cai] Hesen is an expert on theory, Runzhi [Mao Zedong] is an expert on reality." As Li instantly admits, the epigram is unfair to Mao's theoretical interests and abilities, but it is evident that at this time Mao neither considered himself nor was considered by others a teacher of philosophy. It is also evident from the independence and solidity of
reasoning in his early works that he was nobody’s disciple in theoretical matters. In addressing the practical problems he wrote about, Mao would pursue them to their root, but he did not digress on the universal themes this endeavor involved. Rather than a teacher or disciple in general theoretical matters, Mao was an informed reader and careful user.

Nevertheless, as political and ideological ferment developed during and after the May Fourth Movement, the commitment to energetic, popular-democratic politics began to involve basic choices among emerging ideological positions. Mao witnessed this process at Beijing University on his second trip to the capital in the spring of 1920, and he himself made a preliminary commitment to Marxism after much reading and discussion. Upon his return to Changsha, Mao and the New Citizens Study Society assisted the founding of a Russian Study Club in addition to Cultural Book Society activities and Hunan self-government politics, and somewhat later they founded Hunan branches of the Socialist Youth Corps and the Chinese Communist Party.

An indicator of Mao’s ideological stance at this time of simultaneous democratic-populist and protoparty activities is Mao’s relation to a sharp dispute between Marxists and reformists which in the summer of 1920 divided the members of the New Citizens Study Society who were working in France. The French branch held a five-day meeting in July which attempted without success to decide on a political program for “reforming China and the world.” The Marxists were led by the eloquent Cai Hesen, who later became editor of Xiangdao (The Guide Weekly), the major communist periodical in the twenties. The reformists were led by Xiao Zisheng. The leaders of both factions appealed to Mao for his views, thereby indicating both Mao’s prestige among his friends and also that he was not already identified with one side or the other. Mao’s response to this dispute came in two letters written in December 1920 and January 1921. The letters are extant, but only commentary interspersed with excerpts is available. In the excerpts Mao makes a strong case against education as a sufficient method of social change by pointing out its interrelationship with the rest of capitalist society. Ultimately, his doubts about anarchism, absolute liberalism, and even democracy (demokelaxi) rest on the same ground: although they are pleasant enough in theory, in reality they cannot be achieved. Thus Mao indicates enthusiastic agreement with Cai Hesen’s Marxist viewpoint, whereas he “does not indicate agreement with the recommendations of Xiao Zisheng’s group.” This cautious wording by the editor suggests that the blow to the reformists is softened by unquoted passages. Nevertheless, in comparison with Mao’s May Fourth writings it can be said that Mao’s ideological center of gravity had shifted toward Marxism under the influence of the disappointments of earlier, more anarchistic expectations and with increasing exposure to Marxist theory.

Mao was not alone in accepting communism after deciding that finer political ideals were impractical. The new Chinese Communists of the early 1920s did not disparage the ideal of anarchism, but they did question its realism. As one author put it in 1921: “[The anarchists] want to strike down all controlling classes, to overthrow all organizations of the old society—but ultimately what is the clever plan?” Although this author concedes that the ideals of communism are not as deep as those of anarchism, he claims that any progress toward anarchism must pass through the stage of communism. The stubbornness of social evils requires a dictatorship of workers, and when one is starving, coarse food at hand should not be rejected because one dreams of fine food.

On the other hand, radical criticisms of the Kuomintang (KMT) before its reorganization in 1924 stressed its lack of ideology and its tendency to rely on military ententes rather than on popular movements in pursuing its political aims. These two factors were seen as interrelated, because the working relationship with warlords and imperialists necessary for the KMT’s wars—the KMT did not yet have an army of its own—constrained their propaganda and hence the development and propagation of a radical ideology. In the new spirit of Chinese revolutionary politics, a critic of the KMT states: “A revolutionary political party relying on national antiimperialist propaganda can become a great force... A truly revolutionary army can only be built using this propaganda, and this army would be definitely far superior to any hired troops of the Northern warlords.”

The apparent practicality of communism had many aspects. In the first place, the Marxist emphasis on the economic base of politics was plausible to those who had seen the ruling strata in China steady themselves after the May Fourth Movement and in some cases (most notably in Hunan) adopt democratic facades. Secondly, the success of the Bolsheviks in consolidating a new rev-
olitional order was quite persuasive. In 1911 the Chinese also had overthrown a traditional autocracy, but the progressive aspects of this event had quickly evaporated. Evidently a dedicated political organization was necessary to achieve the revolution and secure its fruits. Thirdly, the conception of the communists as a workers’ vanguard party preserved the mass orientation proved effective in the May Fourth Movement and at the same time promised greater stability and effectiveness by concentrating on a crucial modern class and by founding a professional revolutionary party. A fourth appeal of communism was its coherent and critical ideology, which however poorly understood at first provided a trusted portrayal of international dynamics and a scheme for domestic class analysis. The emphasis of Leninism on the struggle against imperialism—and the promise that imperialism was the last and highest stage of capitalism—seemed particularly appropriate for China. In the struggle against imperialism, nationalism was internationalism and vice versa.

Confirming the growth of a specific ideological commitment on Mao’s part was his increasing involvement with communist activities in Hunan. Considering the not yet centralized character of the Chinese Communist Party in its first years, this involvement should not be mistaken for a categorical submission to orders as if he were joining a well-established organization. The CCP was from its beginnings a coordinated ideological group, but intimate accounts of its early functioning (such as Zhang Guotao’s) suggest that the leading figures of the major geographical branches of the party (Chen Duxiu in Shanghai, Li Dazhao in Peking, Mao Ze-dong in Changsha) had a remarkable amount of personal discretion in operations in their areas. An additional peculiarity to keep in mind is that the early Hunan Communist Party emerged largely from the circle of Mao’s activist friends, especially his colleagues in the New Citizens Study Society. Thus the new party allegiance was in part only a change of labels and of national affiliations. Even so, Mao’s increasing involvement in party activities was a basic change from his previous democratic-populist politics—a change that contrasted with his continuing but diminishing public cultural efforts, the Cultural Book Society and the Self-Education College. The primary task of the Chinese Communist Party until the massacre of railway workers by Wu Peifu on 7 February 1923 (from this date until Mao’s eviction from Hunan in April the party was in shock) was organizing the proletariat. In Hunan this meant forming unions and calling strikes in the province’s large mining operations, among the railway workers, and among Changsha’s various trades. Mao and his cohorts (including Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi) were quite successful in all these interrelated efforts; the railway and mine strikes in September 1922 were the high point.

The theoretical innovations of Mao’s party politics were his acceptance of class divisions as fundamental in society and his dedication to the interests of the proletariat. Neither of these novelties is without precedent: Mao’s lengthy and sympathetic descriptions of the shared oppression of workers, farmers, women, and others in “The Great Union of the Popular Masses” appeal to a shared consciousness of oppression of various groups, and although the whole citizenry of Hunan was the ideal target of Mao’s democratic politics, the people he reached tended to be urban and literate. The changes are significant nonetheless. The attention which the party directed at the proletariat was not an effort to set up one “small union” among many; it was an attempt to organize a group with special historical features. Oppression was no longer treated simply as minority coercion, but as capitalist exploitation. The immediate objects of this oppression would be the vanguards of the revolution. Revolutionary activity is still considered representative of society at large: it is still a revolution against special interests rather than one for special interests. But the view of the masses tends to be structured into leaders and beneficiaries, and the communists attempted to be the leaders of the leaders. This efficiency of revolutionary attention meant a concentration on the affairs of a minority in unusual circumstances. In the case of Hunan, class politics was not democratic-populist politics, although it did not contradict a more universal orientation. Moreover, it was not indigenous provincial politics to the same degree as previous efforts, since the party’s activities were coordinated on a national basis and were not as flexible in exploiting local opportunities. The devastating effect of what was for Hunan the vicarious experience of the February Seventh Massacre proves the importance of the national linkage. And the national significance of Mao’s party activities in Hunan enabled him to transfer to party work in Shanghai after his expulsion from Hunan.

The international framework of Mao’s politics also became more prominent and specific within the communist paradigm. The most obvious instance is the increased importance of the Russian example. The expected global significance of the Chinese rev-
The Revolutionary Tasks of the CCP

It is ironic that upon becoming a professional revolutionary Mao ceased to be active in his own right in politics. It is also largely coincidental, since leaving Hunan meant leaving both his employment as a teacher and his political connections. Mao worked for the Central Committee from his arrival in Shanghai until the Third National Congress of the CCP, held in Canton in June 1923. The Comintern-sponsored proposal of a united front with the Kuomintang for national revolution was the major resolution of this assembly, and thereafter Mao's main task was to coordinate the measures of the CCP and the KMT. During the six months between the approval of the united front and its implementation at the first KMT national congress in January 1924, Mao wrote several articles for The Guide Weekly. These articles are limited in scope, but they indicate the interrelation of Mao's new political role and his political orientation.

In some ways this new stage in Mao's politics is analogous to his concentration on provincial politics after the disappointment of his May Fourth hopes. It was basically a withdrawal from a larger scope of political activity to a framework within which immediate, practical work for the reformation of society could be carried out. A cause of the shift in orientation from a geographical unit to a group of dedicated revolutionaries was Mao's disappointment with the people's apathy. One article begins with Mao's dismay that there has been no public outcry concerning a treaty arranged with Great Britain which sacrificed Chinese sovereignty in a strategic location (Weihaiwei in the northeast corner of Shandong province); another is a bitter ridiculing of the Hunan warlord Zhao Hengti for pretending to be the defender of the Hunan Constitution, bringing shame on Hunan's inert population. A contemporaneous author complains that popular spirit was weaker in 1923 than it was before the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. The admitted necessity of a mass movement from which the strength of the revolution would spring was at variance with the low level of popular consciousness and organization. The revolutionary party was to be the resolving agent of this tension.

The party is not a small but still self-sufficient natural unit of society. Rather, it is a group constituted by its members' unity of purpose to transform society. Thus the revolutionary group is a radically non-self-sufficient social entity; it exists to affect a larger body. It has legitimate self-interests only insofar as its existence can contribute to the larger body. Mao's limited provincial efforts could be justified on a continuum of concentric circles: first Hunan, then China, then the world. A temporal continuum provides the party's framework of significance—what can be done now to produce a revolutionary situation in the future? Behind the transition from directly mass-oriented politics to the indirectly mass-oriented politics of a revolutionary group is the assumption of a protracted political struggle.

As a forerunner of the revolution, the party must survive and utilize a prerevolutionary situation. Its tactical tools for attaining its political ends are cooperation with other organized political interests to achieve specific objectives of mutual benefit and the partial mobilization of its own political base by mass organizations and propaganda. The specific arenas of both these activities give day-to-day party political decisions a certain flexibility. Since it is the instrument of the revolution, the party can legitimately pursue policies which are immediately aimed at its own organizational interests. But the line between prudence and opportunism can easily become blurred—certainly there is a tendency to displace the revolutionary goal as the real determinant of policy with the narrow group interests of the "revolutionary" party. In Mao's case, party-centeredness allows for considerable political flexibility, but it never contradicts the ultimate goal of popular revolution.

The political activity of the revolutionary group also concentrates attention on the correctness of ideology. An explicit ideology is necessary because the basic political act is no longer a general call for liberation but specific activity designed to establish the prerequisites of liberation. The politics of the party is instrumental action, not self-legitimating mass spontaneity; it is based on an explicit scheme of the dynamics of society and is justified by its success in achieving revolutionary objectives. Since party activity involves a common understanding of the hindrances to liberation in the present society and how these obstacles can be removed, an explicit paradigm must be available—a structure of general theses which relate the interpretation of political events and proposals for political action to the general goal of the party. The ideological formulation of the path to the distant goal of
revolution replaces the goal itself as the referent of policy determination, and the actual relation of strategy and goal tends to become the domain of specialists in revolutionary theory. It could be said that the ideology constitutes the language game of the revolutionary group, but only with the stipulation that the consensus on common conceptions is grounded on the conviction that they are objectively correct. The shared language game (seen as jargon by outsiders) is a constitutive element of the group, but both in general and in its particulars it is eventually at the mercy of individual judgments concerning its relation to reality.

This idea of the party is not explicit in Mao’s Shanghai writings because his responsibilities did not include general formulations of ideology, but it is presupposed in the various anti-imperialist editorial tasks he did undertake. The best example of Mao’s new political approach is “The Beijing Coup and the Merchants.” Since this was apparently an assigned topic for the 11 July 1923 issue of Xiangdao, which is devoted exclusively to evaluating the political effects of Cao Kun’s usurpation of power, one should attach no particular importance to the choice of topic. At first sight this article seems to be a continuation of Mao’s democratic-populist politics; on the occasion of the Shanghai merchants’ opposition to the Cao Kun coup, he urges merchants to unite in their resistance to the warlords’ lijin (internal taxes on trade) and the low tariffs enforced by the imperialists. He claims that “the work which should be undertaken by the merchants in the national revolution is more urgent and more important than the work which should be undertaken by other citizens.” Close analysis shows that this appeal is an indication of the new flexibility of party politics rather than a continuation of transcendent populism. In Mao’s earlier writings the merchants would not have been excluded from an appeal, but it would not have been addressed especially to them. The merchants are considered important owing to “the necessity of history and the imperatives of contemporary events”—meaning presumably the bourgeois-democratic character of the national revolution and the inability at that time of any other class to organize effective opposition. The following passage suggests the new role of the party in Mao’s thought:

We know (women zhidao) that semicolonial politics is the politics of dual oppression in which the warlords and the foreign powers are conspirex together to repress the citizens of the whole nation.

Under the double oppression of this rule naturally the entire citizenry suffers deeply, but the group which feels this suffering most acutely and most urgently is the merchants. Everyone knows (daojia zhidao) that the lijin and tariffs are the two questions of life and death for the merchants, and that their urgent demands for lowering lijin and raising tariffs express heartfelt desires. But the reduction of lijin and the raising of tariffs are definitely not easy things to achieve, because the reduction of lijin harms the interests of the warlords and raising tariffs harms the interests of imperialism.

Besides containing the main point of the article, this argument has an interesting structure which does not occur in Mao’s earlier political writings. In all the writings analyzed in the previous chapter, with the partial exception of the advertisements for the Workers’ Night School, Mao attempted to identify himself with his audience in order to persuade them; in this work, however, the reference group with which he identifies is not the merchants. The “we” of “we know” in the preceding quotation shares a specific ideological framework—the double oppression occurring in semicolonies—which is the viewpoint of the communists and later of the kmt (Sun Yat-sen’s “hypercolony” metaphor), but not that of merchants in general. In another article Mao boasts about the correctness of “our” analysis of imperialism in Chinese politics. By contrast, what “everyone knows” is much more palpable and is not stated in an ideological framework. The point here is not that Mao deliberately chose his pronouns to emphasize the exclusive knowledge of the cccp, but that his pattern of expression is a clear symptom of the new importance of the ideological revolutionary group for his politics. This disjunction between “we” and “everybody” is the basis for a dichotomy between “we” (the revolutionaries) and the merchants which runs throughout the article and establishes a distance between author and subject which is new to Mao’s writings. The merchants’ revolutionary potential is explained in the third person and their earlier avoidance of politics is ridiculed. When the merchants are addressed in the conclusion of the article, it is the experienced revolutionary “we” warning the politically naive merchants that revolution is difficult and includes democratization. The natural elitism behind Mao’s populist mission has shifted from the May Fourth presumption of a mission of enlightenment to a party-centered presumption of knowledge and dedication.
Mao’s insistence that the merchants pursue popular, open politics in their opposition is a clear link between his earlier politics and his party tactics. Chen Duxiu’s contemporary article on the dominant political role of capitalists lacks this recognition of the importance of interclass dynamics within the revolutionary united front.28 Mao’s continuing preference for open and democratic political movements perhaps explains some aspects of his quick adjustment to the politics of the reorganized KMT, since the Three People’s Principles (nationalism, democracy, and people’s livelihood—San Min Zhuyi) of Sun Yat-sen29 correspond closely with the style of Mao’s earlier political involvement. But Mao’s personal experience with the failure of nonclass progressive politics in Hunan and the spotty record of the KMT assured that Mao’s participation in the KMT was alliance politics rather than total commitment.

Alliances and the National Revolution

The strategic formula under which the CCP operated until the break with the KMT in 1927 was that of the national revolution (guomin geming or minzu geming). This was conceived of as a revolution in two directions: anti-imperialist and anti-feudal (which generally meant anti-warlord). The primary emphasis was on anti-imperialism, a goal which was shared at that time even by groups outside the KMT–CCP alliance.30 The native targets of the national revolution, the compradores and the warlords, were seen either as groups directly dependent on imperialism or as symptomatic of the effect of imperialist intervention in China. Thus an all-class alliance of the citizenry could be called for to achieve the national revolution, and the bourgeois and proletarian parties, the KMT and the CCP, could join in a united front. The KMT’s tendency to deny the importance of class struggle within China and the CCP’s hope for a later proletarian revolution against the bourgeoisie were not immediately relevant to this objective because, as Chen Duxiu put it, “in the present economic situation the warlords and the capitalists have definitely split but the capitalist/proletarian division is not yet a complete break.”31

The idea of a national revolution as the next step in the revolutionary process—a limited but possible revolution—is a major Leninist concept. It is based on the recognition, present even in Marx’s earliest writings,32 that there would be significant stages in the revolutionary process. The notions of bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolutions were refined through vigorous debates between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. Using the notion of revolutionary stages within the framework of his analysis of imperialism as a world capitalist system, Lenin set the national revolution as the immediate task of radical parties in colonial and semicolonial countries. The national revolution was one in which all classes not dependent on feudalism and imperialism had an interest. Native capitalists wanted to throw off the restrictions of dependence, and for the proletariat it was a blow at the world capitalist system. Thus the political strategy appropriate to the national revolution was a united front of all nationalist parties.

In China the CCP’s interpretation of the national revolution was expressed by Chen Duxiu in a December 1923 article, “The Chinese National Revolution and the Various Classes of Society.”33 The article’s tone (peculiar for the leader of the CCP) is defensive on behalf of the bourgeoisie and critical of those who propose leading roles for the peasantry, the intellectuals, or the proletariat. Chen notes the awakening political consciousness of the bourgeoisie and stresses that economic development will inexorably lead to confrontations with imperialism. Despite the important roles of the petit bourgeoisie, the workers, and the peasants, the bourgeoisie is expected to play the leading role in the national revolution. Chen reasons that the development of the proletariat as a class must necessarily lag behind that of its employers,34 and he finds evidence for this prediction in the feudal mentality of most Chinese workers. The article is undoubtedly intended to soothe the KMT on the eve of the declaration of the KMT–CCP united front. Only at the end of the article does Chen sound a worrisome note for his new allies. The victors in the national revolution will definitely be the bourgeoisie, but what will happen next is unclear. A good example, he notes, is that of the bourgeois-democratic revolution of March 1917 in Russia, followed by the socialist revolution of October.

In retrospect, Chen’s understanding of CCP participation in the national revolution shows the theoretical roots of his rather passive dependence on the KMT alliance in the crises of 1927. The leading role ascribed to the bourgeoisie makes necessary the first sentence of the April 1927 Joint Declaration by Chen and Wang Jingwei: “In this time of the gradual approach of victory in the national revolution, the solidarity of our two parties is especially
necessary." But Chen's limiting conception of the national revolution was not the only possible one. The concept of the national revolution answered the strategic question of where to begin. By provisionally constricting horizons it broadened the scope of political tactics and permitted strategic alliances. The national revolution could be seen as the first practical step in an uninterrupted revolution rather than a preproletarian stage defined by economic parameters.

Although Mao first systematically elaborated his own idea of national revolution in his "New Democracy" writings of 1940, this second view of the national revolution helps explain the enigma of Mao's participation in the first KMT-CCP united front, in which he was both an enthusiastic collaborator and (in 1927) a major problem. It also focuses attention on Mao's view of alliances, a subject to which he devotes careful thought in some usually ignored articles he wrote for the KMT in 1925. These thoughts on alliances are the first appearance of the principles of Mao's alliance politics. Not only do they lie behind the later development of his united front strategy, but they also play an essential role in the logic of internal mobilization in the base areas.

Mao was active at the First National Congress of the reorganized KMT in January 1925 and was elected an alternate member of its Central Executive Committee. He worked for most of 1924 as the secretary of the organization department of the Shanghai KMT. This was evidently a frustrating experience, for Mao resigned early in 1925 on the pretext of a "brain illness" and retired to his family home in Hunan until summer 1925. Upon his return he was put in charge of the central propaganda department under Wang Jingwei, and in this capacity he began to edit Political Weekly (Zhengzhi Zoubao) for the KMT in December 1925. The significance of the concept of a limited immediate objective for alliance politics is evident in Mao's contributions to this periodical.

Political Weekly was political in the sense of relating to the KMT as a political force among the other political forces in China. Its specific purpose was to counter misinformation about the Guangdong political situation by presenting the facts and by counterpolemic. Mao promised in his initial editor's message, "The style of Political Weekly will be 90 percent narration of practical affairs and only 10 percent debate concerning the propaganda of counterrevolutionary factions." His own contributions were mostly counterpolemic, however, with the major exception of "The Chinese KMT's Propaganda Outline for the Anti-Feng [Fengdian] War," an official evaluation drafted by Mao. Adopted by the KMT's Central Executive Committee, this work analyzes a major struggle among the North China warlords and evaluates the significance of this struggle for KMT diplomacy.

If there are two principles underlying Mao's thought on alliances, they are that they should be as broad as possible and that urgency sharpens every hostility into two camps with no middle ground. On the second, Mao points out to the middle-of-the-roaders that their position is comfortable in quiet times, but when both camps start their mutual bombardment all the guns will be trained on those in the middle. Pacifism, the suppression of conflict, and damning the extremes do not in the end represent a third alternative. These viewpoints are ridiculed not because they are moderate but because they attempt to evade the inevitability of struggle.

Alliances are necessary if political victories are to be won when the revolutionary forces are comparatively weak. Since the object is to win, the alliance should be as extensive as the balance of interests will allow. Political conditions can lead to a nesting of alliances—narrow, long-term groupings operating within larger, temporary ententes. This situation is exemplified by the alliance strategy evident in the "Anti-Feng Propaganda Outline." A major ally in the war against the Fengdian clique of Zhang Zuolin is the Zhili clique of Wu Peifu and Sun Qianfang. In fact, it is actually their war; the KMT is only an interested outsider. The KMT is allied with Zhili despite the imperialist backing of both camps (America with Zhili, Japan with Fengdian, and England ultimately with whoever wins, though at the time supporting Fengdian). The reason Fengdian is the enemy while Zhili is an ally is that the direct targets of the May Thirtieth Movement, England and Japan, had united behind Zhang Zuolin in gratitude for his suppression of the Shanghai mass movements. Although in previous warlord struggles of this sort the public had been apathetic, in this case popular sentiment is rightly against Fengdian because of its Shanghai actions. But since Zhili and Fengdian are basically the same sort of warlord powers, there are two important limitations on the KMT's involvement. First, it is an alliance with the military power of Zhili, not with its imperialist, comprador, and landlord backing. Hence the political factions supporting Zhili (Research Clique,
New Diplomacy Clique, and so forth) are condemned. Moreover, union in the war against Fengdian is not support for Zhili’s victory. It is to be emphasized in the propaganda that Zhili should not simply replace Fengdian.

It might thus be deduced that the anti-Fengdian war (from the standpoint of the KMT) is only the first phase of the anti-Fengdian, Anti-Zhili struggle. This is evident from the next level of alliance, which is with Feng Yuxiang’s National Revolutionary Army (NRA-Guominjung), a group which received no support from the imperialists. The NRA can thus be a true ally: “The people (renmin) in distinguishing between friends and enemies consider only whether or not they have relations with imperialism. If anyone at any time has relations with imperialism, the people will thereafter not recognize them as friends.” The KMT has a much closer relationship with the NRA because it has the potential for opposing the imperialist roots of both Fengdian and Zhili and can be expected to be a direct collaborator in the national revolution. All this goodwill for the NRA exists in spite of the fact that “for the present because of strategic necessities [the NRA] has not yet broken with Zhang Zuolin.”

The final alliance, that between the KMT and the people, seems inseparable. “The true leader of the people is the Chinese Kuomintang. The true government of the people is the Guangzhou National Government.” Since the propaganda outline was written for KMT cadres by Mao in his capacity as head of the propaganda bureau and it was approved by the Central Executive Committee of the KMT, this attitude is to be expected. But Mao does suggest that the close relationship between the KMT and the people is up to the people: “The whole body of the oppressed masses of the Chinese people (Zhongguo quanti minzhong) are the masters of all of China’s problems. In the present anti-Feng war, the people should be the general commanders.” The KMT’s popularity is thus not a blind dependence on KMT leadership but a reliance on this leadership’s commitment to the people’s interests. The foundation of Mao’s democratic-populist politics—his belief in the ultimate political power of the masses—emerges here as the final touchstone of alliance politics. The principles of the KMT’s commitment in the current situation are the establishment of a representative people’s government and a representative assembly to resolve the unequal treaties problem. Moreover, the freedoms of assembly, speech, and organization are to be guaranteed.

Mao philosophized in the same issue of Political Weekly:

In today’s world, no matter whether things are animate (like people) or inanimate (like newspapers), they should not be viewed too rigidly. Since the “revolutionaries” and “counterrevolutionaries” have now divided the family estate, those animate and inanimate things can today be in this group and tomorrow be in that group. This is an apt description of Chinese politics, particularly KMT politics, from the death of Sun Yat-sen in the winter of 1925 until the final expulsion of the communists in the summer of 1927. The antiimperialist upsurge of the May Thirtieth Movement in 1925 particularly benefited the CCP, making the KMT right wing even more anxious about the “communication” (ichihua) of the united front. Moreover, with the KMT’s unification of Guangdong in late 1925, some neighboring warlords began to consider joining forces with the revolutionaries. Tang Shengzhi, a militarist who helped Mao’s old enemy Zhao Hengtai become governor of Hunan and had defeated Tan Yankai’s KMT-backed attempt to retake Hunan in 1923, was converted to the People’s Three Principles in the fall of 1925.

With political identity in such a state of flux, the question of alliances was correspondingly fluid. But Mao’s writings indicate a difference between alliance politics and opportunism. Alliance is cooperation for a goal. As we have seen in the anti-Feng piece, the more limited the goal, the more extensive the alliance. Opportunism is the sacrifice of purpose for immediate advantage. In criticizing the attempt of the rightist KMT Western Hills clique to transfer the base of KMT operations to Peking, which was then controlled by the warlord Duan Qirui, Mao describes their basic policy as “to be able to hold public meetings under warlords and under imperialism.” This policy compromises any possible significance in their antiimperialist and antiwarlord slogans. As Mao explains:

In places controlled by the enemy, the organization and meetings of a truly revolutionary party are completely secret, but their propaganda and recommendations are public. In order for the party’s organization and meetings to emerge into the open or enemy territory, first an understanding with the enemy is required. Hence there have to be some points where it is to the enemy’s advantage to
reach a tacit understanding or to guarantee protection... This is only possible for the enemy’s friends, not for a revolutionary party which wants to overthrow the enemy’s mandate.\(^4\)

This argument is part of Mao’s counterattack against the anticommunist rightists who were trying to disrupt the Guangdong KMT-CCP alliance, but its attempt to identify hypocrisy and opportunism by countering the responsibilities of a truly revolutionary party introduces a theme which was shortly to become important in the very different context of Mao’s writings on the peasantry.

The Peasantry and the National Revolution

From 1925 to 1927 Mao developed an emphasis on the importance of the peasantry for the national revolution which was significant both intellectually and politically for communist participation in the First United Front. With the CCP’s severance of ties with the KMT in mid-1927 and the failure of various communist efforts to seize control of urban areas, the rural orientation of Mao’s 1926–1927 politics provided an essential transition to the rural strategy of the first guerrilla bases. The uniqueness of Mao’s views on the peasantry has long been overemphasized,\(^4\) but the centrality of the peasantry for Mao’s revolutionary politics from 1926 to 1949 is unquestionable.

At the time of the May Thirtieth Movement, Mao Zedong was in temporary retirement at his family’s rural home in Hunan. Mao’s six-month retreat was not only the longest time he had spent in the countryside in his adult life; it was also a unique vantage point for viewing the national effect of the anti-imperialist upsurge. As Mao recounted to Edgar Snow:

Formerly I had not fully realized the degree of class struggle among the peasantry, but after the May Thirtieth Incident, and during the great wave of political activity which followed it, the Hunanese peasantry became very militant. I left my home, where I had been resting, and began a rural organizational campaign. In a few months we had formed more than twenty peasant unions, and had aroused the wrath of the landlords, who demanded my arrest. Zhao Hengti sent troops after me, and I fled to Canton.\(^5\)

Mao’s experience with rural activism in the summer of 1925 was undoubtedly important for his view of the peasantry, although it is claimed that Mao conducted rural investigations as early as the summer of 1921,\(^6\) and Zhang Guotao remembers Mao’s rural emphasis as early as the Third Congress of the CCP in June 1923. According to Zhang, “Mao Zedong stressed the importance of the peasant revolution. He went on to point out that the forces of the KMT lay only in a corner of Guangdong Province and that the CCP should concern itself with the broad masses of peasants throughout the country.”\(^7\) Although Zhang credits Mao with being the major official advocate of the peasantry at this time (and the Third Congress was the first party congress seriously to consider the peasant question), others were also directing attention to rural conditions. Peng Pai had begun his work among the peasants of Hailufeng in September 1922, and in July 1923 Chen Duxiu published a careful class analysis of the peasantry.\(^8\) But the first and one of the most interesting CCP articles on the peasantry was published in The Communist in April 1921.\(^9\)

The earliest communist article on the peasantry contains many of the themes of Mao’s later studies. The anonymous author maintains that urban radicals do not understand the misery and revolutionary potential of the Chinese peasantry, who “are no less miserable than the Russian peasants.” He gives a detailed picture of the varieties of peasant oppression drawn from his own observation and ends the article with an egalitarian appeal to the peasantry which is so stirring that it could have been used as an introductory speech by rural organizers from 1927 to 1949. The author also notes that the peasantry and the party need each other for the success of the social revolution:

If they [the peasants] become class conscious and arise in class struggle, our social revolution, Communism, will be assured. Therefore since they have this tendency, waiting for their natural, slow progress is not as good as using some man-made methods to accelerate them, thereby enabling them to become class-conscious a day earlier and avoid a day of suffering.\(^10\)

The official communist position as elaborated in Chen Duxiu’s “The Chinese Peasant Question” of July 1923 is considerably more restrained than this early exuberance. Chen begins by stat-
ing that in contrast to Russia, Chinese peasants are hard to organize because of the large proportion of landholders. He finds the peasant’s troubles caused more by a price squeeze due to imported goods and the devastation of warlord struggles than by the oppression of a local elite. Although Chen concludes his class analysis of the peasantry by recommending that various peasant associations be formed, the tone of the article is in keeping with Chen’s general emphasis on the leading role of the bourgeoisie.

But these pre-1925 communist discussions of the mass base of the national revolution were mostly hypothetical. There were only 950 CCR members in early 1925. It was only after the upsurge of the May Thirtieth Movement had multiplied this number by ten and the consolidation of KMT political and military power in Guangdong had made a march northward to Peking look possible that peasant policy became a practical question. With his emphasis on the peasantry in 1926–1927, Mao confronted an urban proletarian party with the necessity of organizing a dispersed and backward countryside, and he challenged a party coalition hungering for national victory with the uncomfortably radical demands of a class making no immediate contributions to the political-military struggle. Mao had not suddenly turned utopian. Through his experience and analysis of the peasant movement, he had become convinced that a meaningful and lasting victory depended on a transformation of relationships in the village and, conversely, that the countryside contained a latent revolutionary strength which would make victory inevitable.

Mao’s firsthand experiences in Hunan in the summer of 1925 were to prove a watershed in his political thought. His reestablishment of familiarity with rural conditions, his participation in successfully organizing a peasant response to national events, his perception of the warlords’ function as guarantors of the landlord’s interest—all provided a practical foundation for a fundamental rethinking of the objectives and forces of the national revolution. This foundation was not immediately utilized, however. Mao’s chief assignment upon arriving in Canton was to run the KMT propaganda bureau, which had been stagnating under the nominal leadership of Wang Jingwei and more directly under Wang’s brother-in-law Chen Qunpu. It was in this capacity that he founded Political Weekly in December 1925. Meanwhile Mao was becoming known as an expert on peasant affairs. In January and February 1926, he published two general articles on the peasantry in the first two issues of Zhongguo Nongmin [The Chinese peasant]. The Second National Congress of the KMT, held in January, placed great emphasis on peasant support of the national revolution. As a result, the peasant department received the largest budget of any department, 18,000 yuan per month. Mao was named director of the Peasant Movement Training Institute in Canton with a monthly budget of 5,000 yuan. The sixth class of the Institute, whose term ran from 5 May to 10 October 1926, was under his direction and was by far the institute’s largest and most intensively trained. There were over 320 students from twenty provinces. The method of instruction was quite reminiscent of the Hunan Self-Education College. Independent research was expected, and the fruit of that research was a book: China’s Peasant Problem, the first factual study of the whole peasantry from the point of view of the national revolution.

Mao’s first article on the peasantry is “An Analysis of the Various Classes among the Chinese Peasantry and Their Attitudes toward Revolution.” The purpose of “Peasant Classes” is to specify a peasant strategy for the revolutionary “we.” A peasant strategy depends on the inclinations and disinclinations toward revolution which exist within the villages; Mao claims that there are classes common to all Chinese villages. The suggested strategy springs immediately from the class descriptions—namely, to organize the petit bourgeoisie, semiproletariat, and proletariat, to ask the landlords to retreat but be prepared to struggle and smash the worst elements, and to encourage the “vagrant proletariat” (Youmin, Lumpenproletariat) to join the revolution by pursuing a solution to the unemployment problem. Mao’s descriptive analysis which eventuates in this strategy is a presentation of the archetypal economic, social, and psychological situations of the different “kinds of people” (zhong ren) in rural China and an estimate of how many people are in each situation. For all the generalization involved in such a survey, the class descriptions are quite precise and undogmatic. Mao excels at describing the misery peculiar to each class from owner-peasant to vagrant. Even the small landlords have occasionally felt the oppression of the big landlords and warlords and thus have some feelings of opposition, but as a class they have an exploitative relation to the peasantry. The great majority of the owner-peasants feel the weight of worsening economic conditions, and those who are steadily getting poorer suffer their relative deprivation acutely: “The agony of spirit felt by this
type of person is greater than that felt by anyone else because they have the contrast between past and present." The rural semiproletariat—those who rent part of the land they farm (semiowner-peasants), those with tools but without land (sharecroppers), and poor peasants completely at the mercy of their landlord—are one-half of China's rural population and lead lives of bare survival in degradation. The condition of the rural proletariat, which is primarily farm laborers, is worse than that of the workers with regard to hours, pay, and treatment. At the bottom of the list are the vagrant proletariat: soldiers, bandits, thieves, beggars, prostitutes. "In all of humanity, their lives are the most unsettled." To win them to the revolutionary cause, their specific problem, that of joblessness, must be taken as one of China's most serious problems.

This style of description is reminiscent of the middle section of "The Great Union of the Popular Masses." Shared misery is the primary theme, and this theme is intimately related to potential for revolutionary consciousness, both of which are grounded on the class's economic relations and condition. Since the class framework in which the descriptions are presented is more general than the "small union" framework of the May fourth article, it is more useful as a policy referent for a national revolutionary party and less amenable to completely unencumbered spontaneity. It is noteworthy that the specific theme of inequality (the landlords are X percent of the population and own Y percent of the wealth) is absent here. The dominant themes are direct oppression within village society, deteriorating economic conditions, and lack of the necessities for survival among the poor.

The landlords are the enemies of the peasantry because of oppression rather than mere possession:

[The big landlords'] interest is built upon the severe exploitation of five kinds of peasants: owner-peasants, semiowner-peasants, full tenants, poor peasants, and farm laborers. They have five methods of exploitation. (1) Heavy rents. From 50% to 80%. For the semiowner-peasants, full tenants, and poor peasants this form of exploitation is exceptionally widespread and horrible. (2) High interest rates. Monthly interest is between 3% and 7%, yearly interest between 36% and 84%. This is also exploitation of the semiowner-peasants, full tenants, and poor peasants. Occasionally the evil of this type of oppression exceeds that of heavy rents; often there are cases of people driven to complete bankruptcy in a few years because of debts and mounting pressure. (3) Heavy local taxes. This is using a type of pressure to require the owner-peasants and semiowner-peasants to pay charges according to holdings for the expenses of the township defense department (tuan fang ju). This department . . . is the armed forces of the landlord class, a necessary setup for putting down peasant uprisings and for maintaining the exploitative system of the landlord class. (4) The exploitation of farm labor, that is, the exploitation of their surplus labor. But in China there is still not much capitalist agriculture; the big landlords do not manage their land personally. As a result there are still more small landlords than big landlords practicing this type of exploitation. (5) Cooperating with warlords and greedy, corrupt officials to pay in advance the peasant's land taxes and to demand heavy interest the following year from the taxpaying peasants. How these five forms of exploitation altogether cause the misery of the peasantry is beyond description. Therefore China's big landlords are the mortal enemy of China's peasantry, they are the real foundation of imperialism and the warlords, they are the only fortress of the feudal, patriarchal society, they are the final cause for the development of every sort of counterrevolutionary power.17

The peasant movement to counter this oppression cannot be merely a distant echo of urban antifascism; the countryside has its own intense class struggle, the immediate targets of which are individual local landlords. The relationship of the rural class struggle to the national revolution lies in the function of the landlords as the basis for the larger systems of warlord and imperialist oppression.18 The peasantry is thus more than an ally in the national revolution; it is a distinctive mass basis for the antifeudal, antifascist struggle. Implicit in the leadership opportunity Mao describes in this article is a leadership responsibility for a truly revolutionary party.

Mao's next article, "An Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society,"19 is peculiar in that it appeared in the issue of The Chinese Peasant following "Peasant Classes," yet it repeats verbatim the descriptions in the earlier article of most of the rural classes (although the description of the big landlords is left out). The new elements in "Classes in Chinese Society" are its orientation, particularly its introduction and conclusion, and its inclusion of urban classes. The differences in orientation are significant, and the repetitions are explained by Mao's recollection to Snow that it was
originally written for *The Guide Weekly* but was rejected by Chen Duxiu.

Structurally the article centers on the question of “who are our enemies and who are our friends,” which is considered basic to proper tactics (*celue*). The body of the article is a class analysis that is introduced as a gloss on the manifesto of the First National Congress of the Kuomintang. After analyzing the various rural and urban classes in terms of numbers and attitudes toward revolution, Mao returns to the question of friends and enemies and suggests that it is only necessary to get the oppressed classes, the 395 million (out of 400 million) true friends, to unite. In obvious juxtaposition to the tactics of Chen and the rest of the CCP Central Executive Committee, Mao maintains that it is not essential to concentrate on winning over the middle class (small landlords and national bourgeoisie). In fact, such a strategy might only confuse true friends.

This article is a significant advance over the previous one because it completes the class analysis of China and makes explicit the relationship between the class analysis and the policy of the revolutionary party. In this article, the tactical question “who are our enemies, who are our friends?” is a litmus test for the identity and legitimacy of the truly revolutionary party. The premise of this test is also the premise for Mao’s earlier criticism of the Western Hills clique: “If one does not distinguish clearly between enemies and friends, then one cannot be a revolutionary element.” In this case, however, the problem is not to expose a hypocritical group by describing the principled action of a truly revolutionary party, but to remind the revolutionary party of its true mission.

The responsibility, legitimacy, and ultimate political power of the revolutionary party lie in unifying the masses for revolution against the oppressors. That Mao felt it necessary to remind “the revolutionary party” (presumably the Guangdong *kmt* and the CCP) about such a basic point is a symptom of the quickening maelstrom of Northern Expedition politics; that Chen refused to publish it in *The Guide Weekly* verifies its timeliness. Mao poses the problem in harsh terms:

The reason the Chinese revolution has had so little success in its thirty years is definitely not due to errors of aims (*mudi*) but is completely due to errors of tactics (*celue*). The so-called tactical error is just this, not being able to unite true friends in order to attack true enemies. . . . We are all [members of a] revolutionary party, we all lead the masses, we are all the guides of the masses. But we cannot help but ask ourselves, do we have this ability (*bening*)? Could it not be that we are leading the masses down the road to defeat? Can we definitely be successful? If we want to have the assurance of “not leading them down the wrong road” and of achieving “certain success,” great care is necessary in important tactics. In order to determine these tactics, who are enemies and who are friends must first be distinguished clearly.

The basic justification of a revolutionary party is its promotion of the revolution. This requires knowing who the masses are and who the oppressors of the masses are; it involves representing the interests of the former against the latter. The flexibility of party tactics is flexibility for a purpose. The party should not be misled by its special political role into thinking that it is self-justifying or that revolution is no more than its own controlled, iterative efforts. “A revolutionary party is the guide of the masses.” Therefore Mao describes the revolutionary masses, answering the question of true enemies and true friends and also indicating the “unerring path” and “certain success.” The path is serious investigation of the real situation and interests of the masses, and certainty of success can be deduced from the revolutionary potential produced by the severe oppression of the overwhelming majority of the population. The article moves from fundamental queries at the beginning to revolutionary confidence at the end: “395 million people, organize!”

The more universal framework of class analysis in “Classes in Chinese Society” allows Mao to discuss some basic points not mentioned in “Peasant Classes.” The general theory of class analysis and the comparability of Chinese classes to those in other countries is discussed in two paragraphs which preface the individual class descriptions. The theory of class divisions is represented quite oddly:

No matter which country, it is natural that they all have three levels of people: upper level, middle level, and lower level. Carefully analyzed, however, there are five levels: the big capitalist class, middle class (zhongchan jieji), the petty bourgeoisie, the semiproletariat, and the proletariat. *n

The relationship between the three natural divisions and the five classes is impossible to determine with certainty, because Mao does not indicate the perspective from which upper, middle, and
lower are decided. But the individual class analyses are generally divided into threes, and in these cases the division is formally on the basis of economics and coincidentally demarcates receptivity to revolutionary propaganda. The attitudes of the Chinese classes toward national revolution are regarded as almost exactly the same as those of classes in capitalist countries toward the social revolution. This is due to the unity of world revolution:

The revolutions of the modern age are basically one revolution; their aims (nuoli) and methods (shouduan) are the same, namely the same purpose of smashing international capitalist imperialism and the same method of uniting oppressed nationalities and oppressed classes to fight. This is the present revolution’s most important peculiarity, unique among all revolutions in history.  

Mao’s emphasis on the peasantry increases significantly between the “Peasant Classes” article and “Classes in Chinese Society.” The concentration on the peasantry and the critique of the big landlords is more explicit in the first article, but the general significance of the analysis is left ambiguous. Is the peasant policy an opportunity to be exploited, like the anti-Feng war, one policy among many, alongside a merchants’ policy and an overseas Chinese policy? Or is it something more basic? In the second article, the specific theme of rural revolution is played down, but the centrality of the revolutionary party’s representation of the oppressed classes is forcefully emphasized. Seven months after “Classes in Chinese Society,” Mao wrote another general article, “The National Revolution and the Peasant Movement,” which is the culmination of the two themes of the importance of peasant movements and responsibility to the masses. In the intervening time, the Northern Expedition had been launched, Changsha had been captured, lost, and recaptured by the KMT-related forces of Tang Shengzhi, and an intensive training program of peasant movement cadres had just been completed under Mao’s direction at the Peasant Movement Training Institute.

The manifesto-like vigor of the article is apparent from its first few sentences:

The problem of the peasantry is the central question of the national revolution. If the peasantry does not arise and participate in and support the national revolution, the national revolution cannot succeed. If a peasant movement isn’t quickly produced, the peasant problem cannot be solved. If the peasant problem does not attain an approximate solution during the present (xianzai) revolutionary movement, then the peasants will not support this revolution. Up to the present moment there are still people even within the revolutionary party who do not understand these principles.  

In this passage and throughout the first part of the article, Mao emphatically argues that the litmus of party legitimacy—representing the oppressed—must include leading the peasantry in the struggle with the landlords. The peasantry must be identified with; it cannot merely be allied with. To restrict the peasant movement would be to restrict the foundation of the national revolution. Mao’s confidence in the centrality of the peasant question is founded on the experience of the KMT in Guangdong. He attributes the thorough eradication of Chen Joingming’s rival government to the rise of the peasant movement in the areas under Chen’s control, particularly in Hai Feng. Not only did the peasant associations undermine Chen’s position militarily, but they created a new, radically reformed atmosphere in the countryside. From this success story Mao deduces an eloquent reformulation of the national revolution:

Hence [we] can know that the situation of the Chinese revolution is just this: Either the suppression of the peasantry by local bullies, bad gentry, avacious officials, and corrupt clerks [forms] the foundation of imperialism and the warlords, or the suppression of the local bullies, bad gentry, avacious officials, and corrupt clerks by the aroused peasantry forms the foundation of the revolutionary forces. The Chinese revolution only has this form, it does not have a second form. Every locality in all of China needs to move toward the situation of Hai Feng; only then can the revolution be considered successful, otherwise no matter what the situation it can’t be considered successful. Every locality in all of China needs to move toward the situation of Hai Feng; only then will the foundations of imperialism and the warlords really be shaken. Otherwise they won’t be. . . . From this [we] can know that those who disparage or dislike the peasant movement are in reality sympathizing with the local bullies, bad gentry, avacious officials, and corrupt clerks; in reality they do not want to strike down warlords, they do not want to oppose imperialism.  

Among the key elements of this passage is the emphasis on local oppression as the target and inducer of revolutionary power. The
revolutionary struggle at the village level does not take place in abstract terms. The peasant movement is a personal, local confrontation with known oppressors, and it draws its strength from hatred and the instinct for survival. The similarity of class conditions in every village makes possible the coordination of the rural struggle, and the function of the landlords as primary exploiters at the base of a system of secondary and tertiary exploitation enables the movement to have broader antiwarlord and anticolonialist dimensions. The leadership of the party in this context is not so much control as the evocation of the maximum strength and maximum participation of the masses in their own movement. Any other attitude implies suspicion of the peasant movement, and a suspicious attitude is only appropriate for its targets. The last clause of the passage is daring, since many of those who were cool to the peasant movement were active anticolonialists. This is a characteristically dialectical logic: because of its relation with more primary forms of exploitation in China, anticolonialism cannot be a political goal to which all others are sacrificed. Effective anticolonialism must set itself first against the landlords. Mao specifies what he means by the landlords being the base of imperialism in his attack on the notion that the compradores and the landlords are equally significant targets. In Mao’s scheme, the warlords are the “selected leaders” of the landlords, who are far more ubiquitous and financially important than the compradores. The warlords utilize the compradores to bring imperialism to their side.

Mao does not attempt to go beyond his vigorous defense of the peasant movement’s role in the national revolution and present a comprehensive program for peasant activists. Although Peng Pai’s experience in peasant organization in Haifeng is a vital demonstration of the possible success of peasant movements, this model alone is evidently insufficient for abstracting a general strategy for the agrarian revolution. The research task remaining is to make a comprehensive and detailed study of rural conditions throughout China. The practical task is to initiate peasant movements in as many places as possible. Mao’s approach to the theoretical problem was typically frontal and thorough: a major assignment of his class at the Peasant Movement Training Institute in the summer of 1926 was to write The Peasant Problem, which included a comprehensive survey of rural conditions in each province, a study of peasant movements, and some material on foreign experience, particularly Russian. “The National Revolution and the Peasant Movement” was written as a preface to this book. On the practical side, Mao emphatically recommends that more cadres get involved in the rural movement, although he cautions that this shift of attention must not be to the detriment of organizing workers, students, and middle and small merchants. But how can the peasant movement be organized and led without a comprehensive plan for rural work? Mao’s answer to this question is the first clear prototype of the mass line:

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

This is not a regression of Mao’s politics to May Fourth populism occasioned by the ferment and promise of the Northern Expedition. The distinction between party and mass and the self-consciousness of their relationship indicates that the dedicated group of revolutionaries had become the starting point of Mao’s political thinking. The harmony he expects between the organization of the peasants’ own struggle and the national policies of the party shows a confidence in the correctness of its general political paradigm. In this sense theory plays a much more explicit role than it did in his earlier politics. On the other hand, the party/mass interaction which Mao describes in this first “mass line” passage is just as far removed from the Leninist concept of agitation as a unidirectional transmission belt as it is from simple populism. The cadre following Mao’s advice presumes the ultimate harmony of party interests and peasant interests, but he does not assume that he knows what the peasant’s immediate interests are, and in several senses these interests are primary to his agitational effort. It is also assumed that the cadre will be the first politicizer of the peasants rather than the broker of established political interests. The path toward mobilizing the revolutionary potential of the peasantry begins with attentive responsibility to the peasant’s im-
mediate needs. It is remarkable that this basic principle of Mao's rural politics, which he eloquently restated on the basis of six years of guerrilla experience in 1934, antedates Mao's intensive involvement with peasant organizing and is a direct consequence of his already established intellectual and political style.

Many characteristics of these 1926 peasantry articles are strongly reminiscent of Mao's pre-Marxist politics. The enthusiasm and popular orientation of his discovery of the peasant movement seem closer in spirit to his May Fourth politics than to his 1923–1925 writings. Mao also displays a drive to penetrate to the root of the problem, something which is not prominent in the intervening articles except as a systematizing force in alliance theory and propaganda. Equally basic is a return to an unfettered empathy with the sufferings of the overwhelming majority of the population—in the confidence that this misery can be transformed by mobilization into an insuperable revolutionary force. Misery, rather than economics, is the basic criterion of Mao's class analyses, although of course the two are intimately related. A corollary of this return is Mao's fascination with the numerical superiority of the oppressed, indicating that he still believes the "greatest union" wins. In "Peasant Classes" and "Classes in Chinese Society" Mao is deeply disturbed by the problem of winning the vagrant proletariat, bandits, thieves, beggars, prostitutes, and soldiers for the revolution. He insists that their problem of joblessness is equal to the peasants' problem of poverty, although it is evident that the revolutionary potential of the vagrants is not comparable. This strong concern indicates that Mao's mass politics is not simply a matter of numbers; it is lower-class oriented simply because of the arithmetical center of gravity: it builds up its overwhelming majority from the bottom—that is, from the most miserable.

Another important line of continuity in Mao's political thought is his reliance on actual investigations to establish his new viewpoint and his caution in generalizing a plan of action on the basis of inadequate material. Social science in the sense of a systematic and thorough study of social conditions is evidently a key element in his populist empiricism. But Mao's social science is not a detached effort to disclose the enduring truths of social life. Rather, it is aimed at specifying the revolutionary potential of society and establishing the context of the party's political behavior. As S. M. Miller has pointed out, political commitment does not preclude a concern for objectivity; after all, the objective consequences of actions will materially affect the movement. Hence commitment to a political enterprise can serve as a corrective for ideological distortion or complacency. For Mao research is a survey of political resources rather than an attempt to discover general laws. The method of research is not a detached study of latent traits; it is empathy with the consciousness of the participants and the experience of the revolutionary movement. Despite its directive nature, investigation is not a preliminary to revolutionary action but emerges from struggle. Mao complains about the lack of information on the peasant movement and explains why this is so:

The collection of this type of material naturally depends on the progress of the peasant movement. Since with the exception of Guangdong every place is just beginning, the materials are scanty.\textsuperscript{11}

The Hunan Peasant Movement

The importance of the Huilong peasant movement in ousting Chen Jiongming and the subsequent rapid expansion of peasant associations throughout Guangdong aroused the attention of both the KMT and the CCP. The expectation that peasant movements would play a significant role in the advance of the Northern Expedition led the KMT Central Executive Committee to expand greatly the funding and activities of its peasant department, although the elimination of local despots was the last item in the KMT program described in the manifesto of the Second National Congress of the KMT in January 1926. For its part, the CCP passed a resolution on the peasant movement at an enlarged conference of the Central Committee in July 1926.\textsuperscript{14} This resolution was extremely mild. The economic demands were that peasants should not receive less than 50 percent of the harvest, that annual interest on loans should not exceed 30 percent, and that no advance taxes or exorbitant taxes should be levied. The political demands were for freedom of assembly and organization for peasants, election of county magistrates, and prohibition of the arrest and adjudication of peasants by the local defense corps (min tuan). The policy suggested to the peasants by the CCP was an alliance broad enough to include middle and small landlords. This policy, which opposed only big landlords with notorious reputations, was considerably
less radical than the one implied in Mao’s “Classes in Chinese Society,” and according to Zhang Guotao, the resolution was opposed by the Guangdong district committee, which argued for greater support of the peasant movement. The agrarian policy of the KMT as expressed in its “Political Platform” of October 1926 was more radical than that of the communists in at least one point: they demanded a maximum annual interest of 20 percent instead of 30 percent. In reality, however, many KMT progressives with roots in the countryside were becoming alarmed by the rapid growth of the peasant movement and the possible economic and political consequences of their demands. The situation can be illustrated with an excerpt from a letter to The Guide Weekly requesting the peasant movement to avoid “bloody incidents”:

A friend from my village who was quite revolutionary was particularly enthusiastic about the peasant movement. In June of this year [1926] at the time of the reduction of rents by the peasant associations he wrote his father and elder brothers saying, “Speaking of the present reduction of rents, it is spreading throughout Guangdong like a fast tide; it would really be impossible to stop it. My father and elder brothers see the daily misery of the peasants; my father and elder brothers should comply with and implement the peasant associations’ announcement of rent reduction.” His father and brothers were furious upon receiving this letter and wrote back, “What sort of books are you reading, and what revolution do you want to make? You have studied so much that you want to make revolution against us!” Immediately his father sent an urgent telegram to his son, which said approximately “We hope that upon receiving this telegram you will return home immediately. We are not able to continue paying the expenses which you incur in studying. If you are again disobedient your allowance will be cut off.” When this revolutionary youth received the telegram, he was very sad and troubled. He was unable to continue his studies, so he went home.

The CCP’s concern with controlling the peasant movement was more indirect. They were generally enthusiastic about the explosive growth of a new segment of the mass revolutionary movement and about its civil revolutionary contribution to the progress of the Northern Expedition, but their (and the Comintern’s) conception of the bourgeois nature of the national revolution made the maintenance of the united front the paramount concern. Underlying this priority was the view expressed by Chen Duxiu in 1923:

Workers’ movements, peasant movements, and student movements are all unable to separate themselves from political movements, because political freedom is a necessity to every movement. For instance, if Cao Kun and Wu Peifu don’t collapse, then democratic government can’t be secured, so where besides Guangdong can railway workers’ unions and general student unions exist?”

The same point is made more succinctly by Zhang Guotao:

If the influence of the peasants was to be made firm and the land problem was to be solved, the most essential need was for protection that could be provided by a government supporting the interests of the peasants.

The more that political events in rural areas outran the united-classes, anti-imperialist formula of CCP–KMT cooperation, the more the Central Committee of the CCP felt obliged to insist that the interests of groups involved with the Guangdong and later the Wuhan KMT be respected. This attitude was parallel in many respects to the relationship of the Western Hills group to Duan Qirui which Mao had criticized the previous year, although the political content was entirely different. The mass revolutionary goals of the “really revolutionary party” were gradually sacrificed for the sake of maintaining party relationships with the KMT and the Comintern. The Central Committee began issuing critical words of caution to the peasant movement about “excesses” as early as September 1926. The ultimate principle was the alliance. Insofar as it was controlled by the Central Committee the CCP became the party of the alliance rather than the party of the masses.

The explosive growth of peasant associations in areas under KMT control forced the CCP’s agrarian policy to develop rapidly from diffident vagueness in mid-1926 to outraged frustration at peasant excesses by the spring of 1927. Total peasant association membership jumped from 981,442 in June 1926 to 9,153,093 in June 1927. As the peasant movement grew behind the leading edge of the Northern Expedition troops, attention shifted away from the older peasant associations of Guangdong to the rapidly proliferating ones of Hunan, Jiangxi, and Hupei. Of these, Hunan was the principal focus of hopes and anxieties about the peasant movement from the fall of 1926 until the Autumn Harvest Uprising of 1927.
The successes of the pioneering Guangdong peasant movement had bred by late 1926 a powerful and violent counterrevolutionary force in that province, and although the peasant associations continued to grow as late as January 1927, the movement was preoccupied with this new and harsher phase of the rural struggle. "There is not a village without bloody atrocities ... It could be said that the peasant movement of the whole province has plunged into a difficult situation for the time being." From June 1926 to June 1927 the membership of the Hunan peasant associations rose from 38,150 to 4,517,140; in Guangdong the increase was from 647,766 to 700,000—the rounded membership figure and conspicuous lack of detailed information in the latter census are ominous symptoms of deterioration. In 1927 armed landlord counterattacks against peasant associations spread into Jiangxi and then Hunan. In Jiangxi, where the peasant associations had mushroomed from 6,000 to 50,000 members in the month of October, the antipeasant, anti-Bolshevik reaction began with the third session of the KMT provincial assembly on 1 January 1927. A sharpening conflict between the provincial KMT government and the peasant movement led by Fang Zhimin culminated in June with the suppression of the peasant movement and an order expelling communists from Jiangxi. In Hunan, growth of the peasant movement was more massive and repression was correspondingly more severe. On 21 May 1927, an army commander in Changsha violently suppressed the Hunan CCP and peasant associations headquarters in Changsha. After initial plans of armed retaliation had been frustrated by Chen Duixiu's efforts at mediation, landlord forces attacked peasant associations throughout June, resulting in the deaths of over 10,000 people. The landlord backlash against the communist-led peasant associations eventually provided the armed political base for the "new warlordism" of the anticommunist KMT.

The Hunan peasant movement was Mao's chief preoccupation during late 1926 and 1927. This attention by no means indicates a narrow provincial focus, however. Mao continued to be a high-level functionary in the CCP and the KMT during this time, and he even assumed the new duties of running a Central Peasant Movement Institute in Wuhan and organizing a national peasant association. But Hunan was a national focus for hopes and fears concerning the peasant movement. Hunan had the largest peasant associations and provided a favorable context for peasant activism. On the threatening side, most of the military forces supporting the Wuhan KMT had their roots in Hunan, and these roots were with the terrified rural elite rather than with the peasantry. As we have seen earlier, Mao was involved in early peasant organization in the counties around his home in the summer of 1925. In 1926-1927, he actively participated in the first Provincial Peasant Congress in December, spent the month of January investigating local conditions in five counties, and in February and March made written and oral reports on his Hunan investigations to various groups in Wuhan. Central Committee bureaucrats like Zhang Guotao were undoubtedly right in their suspicions that the radicalism of the Hunan peasant movement and the Hunan Provincial Committee of the CCP was encouraged by Mao's sponsorship.

During Mao's December visit to Hunan, the "Manifesto and Resolutions of the First Congress of Peasant Representatives of All Hunan Province" was composed under his personal direction. Befitting its representative character, the manifesto shows definite signs of having been written (or rewritten) by a committee. Its argument is much more orthodox than any of Mao's other writings on the peasantry, and its organization is looser. The initial theme is the harm done to China's peasantry by imperialism and its instruments, the warlords. The exploitation led to popular uprisings, but until Sun Yat-sen these lacked adequate organization. Now the peasant movement has made great contributions to the Northern Expedition, particularly in consolidating rear defenses and smashing local tyrants and bad gentry. These activities are important because exploitation at the village level is the real base of the warlords' power. Onto this already circuitous argument are attached three defensive points. The first shows that the liberation of the peasantry will benefit the whole country; the second argues that the chaos in the cities is due to war rather than to the peasant associations; the third contends that the extralegal measures of the peasants against the local tyrants and bad gentry are justified by the urgency of the struggle. This last point foreshadows the defense of peasant "excesses" which is central to the argument of the Hunan Report. But the perspective of this defense is slightly different because it centers its critiques on the nervous pacifism of the party officialsdom: "If [the party is afraid of 'quarrels' and has a suspicious or opposing attitude, then it can't be considered a revolutionary party." The Hunan Report stresses instead the objective necessity of peasant actions which seem excessive from the
distance of the cities. The central metaphor of the Hunan Report is jiao weng guo zheng. "Proper limits have to be exceeded in order to right a wrong." The metaphor of the manifesto is the first usage of an equally famous Mao trope: "At this time either the east wind prevails over the west wind, or the west wind prevails over the east wind, so how can harshness be avoided?"

The Hunan Report

In great contrast to the manifesto, the Hunan Report (Report of an Investigation of the Hunan Peasant Movement) is personal and eloquent. It has become Mao's best-known article, but even from the start it was an important and controversial analysis of the peasant movement. It is claimed that Chen Duxiu would not allow the second and third sections of the report to be published in The Guide Weekly because of policy differences with the first installment, but the report was quickly republished in various degrees of completeness in pamphlet form and in other periodicals. The overwhelming majority of revisions in the 1951 official version of the report and in the elegant English translation of the Selected Works are stylistic; the only really tendentious series of changes in the official edition is a cover-up of the report's united front origins by inserting "Communist Party" in appropriate places.

The Hunan Report is an extraordinary work of political persuasion aimed at the most crucial question facing the united front. The potential for political change through victory of the Northern Expedition seemed to be at loggerheads with the potential for social change evidenced by the peasant associations. The situation presented the leadership with a particularly acute form of the perennial question for Chinese radicals: zou nei tiao lu?—which road to take? Mao's answer to this question is fascinating both for its persuasive ingenuity and for the insight it permits into his political thinking.

Relying on his month-long investigation tour of rural Hunan, Mao preempts the discussion of possible trade-offs of political and social goals by assuming that the dilemma does not exist. Mao argues that rural social revolution is an irrepressible force, and he mercilessly confronts "revolutionary comrades" with the choice of leading the vast revolutionary majority or siding with the rear-guard of the landlords in the rural struggle. By building his strate-
gic argument up from the peasant movement, Mao simply bypasses the prudential concerns of leaders like Chen Duxiu who reasoned down from the dual prerequisites of victory in the Northern Expedition and maintenance of the united front. The crucial step in this bypass is the nature of "peasant excesses." Mao interprets the question of excesses as whether or not unnecessary injustices occurred in the villages, and he rightly points out that the tales of atrocities heard in the cities were being fed by the partial accounts of fleeing landlords. But the question of village justice was not central to the Central Committee's anxiety about excesses. From the perspective of the leaders in Wuhan, any activity which strained the KMT-CCP alliance or jeopardized the forces of the Northern Expedition was excessive. Mao does not address this notion of excessiveness because to do so would dilute the persuasiveness of his argument—and, more important, because he does not believe that a legitimate revolutionary group could be hostile toward mass activism.

Mao achieves a vigorous encapsulation of the basic message and attitude of the Hunan Report in the first paragraph. This paragraph is so well written that a thorough analysis of it is the best introduction to the report:

On this trip I made firsthand investigations of the five counties of Xiangtan, Xiangxiang, Hengshan, Liling, and Changsha. In the thirty-two days from January 4 to February 5, I called together fact-finding conferences in villages and county seats, which were attended by experienced peasants and by comrades working in the peasant movement, and I listened attentively to their reports and collected a great deal of material. Many of the hows and whys of the peasant movement were exactly the opposite of what the gentry in Hangzhou and Changsha are saying. There are many strange things which I have never seen or heard before. I believe that the same is true in all of China no matter what the province. Therefore all talk directed against the peasant movement must be speedily set right. All wrong measures taken by the revolutionary authorities concerning the peasant movement must be speedily changed. Only thus can the future of the revolution be benefited. For the present upsurge of the peasant movement is an exceptionally great issue (yige jida di weishi). In a very short time, in China's central, southern, and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back.
They will smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward on the road to liberation. They will eventually sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants and evil gentry into their graves. Every revolutionary party and every revolutionary comrade will be put to the test, to be accepted or rejected as they decide. There are three alternatives. To march at their head and lead them? To trail behind them, gesticulating and criticizing? Or to stand in their way and oppose them? Every Chinese is free to choose, but the lot of the present situation will force you to make the choice quickly. Therefore I have written my report and my views for the perusal of the revolutionary comrades.*

The argument of the paragraph is in two symmetric halves. The first presents the minimum message and content of the Hunan Report: Mao’s investigation shows that the accepted picture of the peasant movement is wrong and that policies which derive from the mistaken view should be corrected. The second half is the maximum message: Mao’s view (yijian) of the peasant movement as the central political force, whose needs are thus the criterion of revolutionary behavior. The relationship of the two halves is quite close. The first presents the facts of the rural situation and the second presents its dynamics; the first recommends that policy be re-adjusted to accord with the facts and the second suggests that revolutionary attitudes be readjusted to accord with the current trend. The argument of the second half is less self-evident because it is an estimate of the potential of the peasant movement; its policy conclusions are more radical because it demands a party and a personal empathy with and commitment to the relatively autonomous momentum of the movement. The relationship between the two halves is not factual versus interpretative but external versus fundamental. Both are essential to a revolutionary understanding of the peasant movement. Likewise the relation within each half between observation and recommendation is quite close. It would be irrational for the party not to adjust its policy in the light of a better understanding of the situation, and the description of the overwhelming force of the expected rural revolution actually preempts the “freedom of choice” mentioned near the end of the report.

Equally noteworthy in this paragraph is Mao’s relationship to the party and to the peasant movement. Mao speaks in his own right as expert on the peasant movement.* His authority to speak on rural conditions, conferred by his lengthy on-the-spot survey, is mentioned at the beginning of each of the article’s three sections and also in the important subsection, “It’s Terrible or It’s Fine.” This self-confidence derived from personal experience is the missing element in “China’s Peasantry and the National Revolution.” The experienced “I” addresses a rather undefined group ranging from “revolutionary authorities” in the context of correcting policy mistakes to “every Chinese” in the context of presenting the basic political choices. Above all, Mao addresses his “revolutionary comrades.” The decision whether to lead, follow, or oppose is put in personal rather than in party terms—not only because of the coldness toward the peasant movement manifested by the leadership of the kmt and the ccc, but also because the imminence of the revolution and the upsurge of spontaneous popular organizations (the village-level peasant associations in particular) imply that revolutionary politics is on the verge of passing out of its preparatory, party stage and that mass revolutionary leadership is needed. The subject of the report, the peasant movement, is presented as a spontaneous uprising of the broad masses of the oppressed. Mao’s metaphors suggest that it is an irresistible natural force; to report on “a force so swift and violent” is not to present a case for judgment but to describe historical necessity. The alternatives of leading, following, or opposing are not only preemted as far as revolutionary content is concerned: as far as historical survival is concerned they are a choice between the wave of the future, insignificance, and suicide.

The introductory paragraph just analyzed constitutes the Hunan Report’s first subsection, “The Importance of the Peasant Question.” The rest of the “Rural Revolution” section details the organizational growth and politics of the peasant associations and attacks attitudes which are critical of the peasant movement. The growth of the peasant association is divided into two periods: from January to September 1926 and from October 1926 to January 1927. In the first period the peasant associations were small and underground. A peculiarity of the early phase was that organization preceded political action; struggle in the villages had not appeared and the primary political involvement was assisting the Northern Expedition. The second (and continuing) phase was that of revolutionary action. The earlier organization enabled a serious and successful rural revolution in many counties of central and southern Hunan, with the result that within four months one-third
of the Hunan peasantry was organized and "a revolution without parallel in history" was under way. More important to the sudden blossoming of the peasant movement was the conquest of Hunan by Northern Expedition forces. Although Mao does not mention this conquest, the events were fresh enough in the minds of his audience.

The primary target of the revolution is a personal one within each village—the former oppressors. The peasant associations are now all-powerful in their villages, and the targets are pursued with great gusto. With this reversal of oppression, the supporting culture of the landlords is also attacked. The threat which the "new world" of the peasant movement ultimately posed to the existing social order was felt with particular force in the cities as the rural landlords who fled there told of their experiences. According to Mao, the notion of a terrible rural situation was so pervasive that even revolutionary-minded people could only say that such situations were inevitable in a revolution. Mao's task is to show why even the violence of the peasant movement is "fine." Claiming that the overthrow of local tyrants, bad gentry, and lawless landlords was the real objective (zhengzheng mubiao) of the national revolution, Mao declares that "all revolutionary comrades should know that the national revolution needs a great change in the countryside, that the 1911 revolution did not have this change and therefore failed." In the present national revolution he estimates that the achievement of the city dwellers and military is 30 percent and that of the peasants 70 percent. There would be no question of considering the peasant movement terrible if all revolutionaries had had Mao's experience:

If your revolutionary viewpoint is firmly established and if you have been to the villages and looked around, you will undoubtedly feel thrilled as never before. Countless thousands of the enslaved—the peasants—are striking down the enemies who battened on their flesh.**

The first section of the Hunan Report ends with a discussion of another criticism of the peasant movement: "The Question of Going Too Far." This is a middle-of-the-road position because it accepts the necessity of the peasant associations but criticizes them for excesses. Mao does not deny the incidents; in fact, he gives examples of what could be considered extreme behavior. But they are not excesses. In the first place, the notorious peasant actions are against notorious oppressors; they are not random. Mao's second point, that revolutions require such actions, contains an eloquent statement of his view of revolution:

A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another. A rural revolution is a revolution by which the peasantry overthrows the power of the feudal landlord class.**

The "excesses" were necessary in order to make the landlords fear the peasantry. Since the peasant associations are seeking to transform society and politics in the village, they must have absolute power. There can be no remnant of landlord prestige or power. To criticize excesses is thus a position in the interests of the landlords.

In general the task of the first section of the Hunan Report is to describe the context of the peasant movement and to oppose an informed and revolutionary grasp of the rural situation to attitudes prevalent in the cities which are critical of the movement. The essential characteristics of the rural revolution are that it will prevail, that it is the just and final solution to thousands of years of feudal oppression, and that it must be complete. The specific mistake of the categorical denunciation of peasant activities is that it ignores the historic mission of the peasant movement. The specific mistake of the criticism of excesses is that it ignores the nature of revolution.

The second section, "Vanguards of the Revolution," analyzes the dynamics of the rural revolution within the village. The primary element is the poor peasants, who constitute 70 percent of the rural population; the corresponding counterrevolutionary theory is that the movement is led by riffraff.**

The origins of the antipeasant attitudes of the gentry are the antigentry activities of the peasants. These activities against the gentry occur because the peasant associations at the village level are run by poor peasants, and these activities are the base of the rural revolution. Hence the poor peasants are the vanguard and heroes of the revolution. "To deny their role is to deny the revolution. To attack them is to attack the revolution. They have never
been wrong on the general direction of the revolution. To support this judgment, Mao gives a class analysis of the village peasantry. The content of his class descriptions is basically the same as those of his writings of a year before. This time, however, the division is into three classes: rich, middle, and poor peasants. The poor peasants include the semiowner-peasants and those more destitute. The convenience of this division into three parts is that the parts correspond to attitudes toward the peasant association. The rich peasants are hostile or cold, the middle peasants are vacillating, and the poor peasants are the main support of the revolution. Just as they were despised because of their misery before the peasant upsurge, the poor peasants are feared because of their fierceness as its leaders at the village level. Mao’s emphasis on the poor peasants became a cornerstone of his rural politics, but after 1927 his thinking about middle peasants and rich peasants underwent considerable change. In the Hunan Report rich peasants are described as unfriendly to the movement but not as an enemy. Middle peasants on the other hand are dismissed because of their vacillation. In the more serious class struggles of the base period, winning over the middle peasants to active participation became a major policy focus and the rich peasants became a target of the village revolution.

Only after presenting a general grasp of the rural revolutionary situation and an understanding of intravillage dynamics does Mao detail the relationship of the peasants to the peasant associations in the last section, listing fourteen major achievements. The thorough reporting of this last section complements the previous two by describing the political, economic, and reconstructive efforts of the peasant associations. The political and reconstructive efforts are numerous and impressive; the economic demands seem mild by comparison. According to Mao the peasants were quite effective in destroying the prestige of the landlords, but they were not demanding that land be redistributed. One explanation for the absence of the land issue was seasonal—since peasants are consumers rather than producers in the winter, their measure of preventing the shipment of grain out of the village was of greater immediate benefit. Moreover, since the CCP had not yet arrived at a land policy, the corresponding absence of this demand in the peasant associations can be taken as an indicator of the importance of central political leadership in determining the movement’s direction. In retrospect, the most underdeveloped part of the Hunan Report is the discussion of the peasants’ military power. Although the military power of the landlords had been overthrown, their armed bands merely switched their allegiance to the peasant associations. A new, purely peasant military force had come into being—namely the spear corps, which were 100,000 strong in one county alone—but the mass mobilization involved and the terrifying effect of these corps on the landlords is stressed more than their military effectiveness.

The Hunan Report ends with one last appeal to take the revolutionary commitment seriously and to support the achievements of the peasant associations. Empty revolutionary talk is condemned with a most apt allusion:

To talk about arousing the masses of the people day in and day out and then to be scared to death when the masses do rise—what difference is there between this and Lord Shu’s love of dragons?\textsuperscript{135}

The peasant movement which Mao describes in the Hunan Report corresponds remarkably well with his prognoses of the rural situation of the previous year. Bitter class struggle within the villages was producing a political and social revolution in the countryside which was shattering the traditional feudal structures of landlord rule. But the peasant movement is not the central issue of the national revolution in the sense of being the key to victory in the struggles with Zhang Zuolin and the other warlords. Mao notes that in Hunan organization preceded revolution. The peasant movement did not emerge vigorously until after the conquest of Hunan by KMT forces. The importance of the peasant question, and the significance of the Hunan peasant movement, is its centrality to revolutionary legitimacy—to the purpose of the Northern Expedition—and to the stability of the succeeding regime. The reference to the 1911 revolution is instructive. This event was superficially successful but merely replaced one form of oppressive government with another. Militarily the function of the peasant movement was the not very urgent task of securing the rear area, but politically the ultimate justification for military advances was to expand the area where political transformation could take place.

Mao’s optimistic assessment of the Hunan peasant movement was evidently unconvincing to both the KMT and the CCP, either because of a fear of dragons or because of a more pessimistic view
of peasant power. And indeed the political events of 1927 seemed to support the doubters. The massacre in May was a great shock to the self-confidence and prestige of the peasant movement, and the failure of the Autumn Harvest Uprising completed the picture of rural organizations ineffective as political or military forces in their own right. When the political and military context of the peasant movement turned from benevolence to hostility it proved to be insufficiently resilient. A large part of the blame for this unpreparedness should be assigned to the CCP Central Committee—as the alliance deteriorated, the Central Committee worked frantically to prevent any defensive realignment of the mass movements. But there are important structural reasons for the failure to be gleaned from the Hunan Report.

The principal structural defect is the contradiction between the demands of Mao’s newly discovered source of mass politics and the interests of the established parties to which he appeals for support and leadership. For the urban and landed progressives of the KMT left wing and the labor and cosmopolitan revolutionaries of the CCP, his revolutionary understanding of the “new world” of the villages was simply not within the horizon of possibility. The idea of a world of hostile classes but without a proletariat contradicted the constitutive ideologies of both revolutionary parties, and the spontaneity of its development was a threat to their legitimacy. Most concretely, social revolution in the countryside threatened the multifaceted military situation of the Northern Expedition, since warlords who had only recently joined the KMT in order to share the spoils of the Northern Expedition were the main strength of the Wuhan KMT. These contradictions are evident in the report primarily as a suppressed tension. The contrasts between existing attitudes and what Mao proposes, between village peasant associations and county levels of every kind of organization, between uncompromising village politics and moderate village military and economic policies—all are understated in the Hunan Report but can be seen as the dark side of the peasant movement.

The suppression of these tensions indicates the Achilles heel of the 1926–1927 peasant movement. Just like the CCP, it grew as a movement politically and militarily dependent on the KMT and thus at its mercy in the event of a conflict. When the conflict became inescapable and the weakness apparent in the latter half of 1927, reorientation toward independent survival became the major leadership task.

It may seem strange that Mao’s populist empiricism—that is, seeking the real potential for mass-oriented political action—would prove so tragically misleading about the strength of the peasant movement. But facts occur in a context of environmental conditions, and a change of context can render apparently well-founded expectations obsolete. Mao’s lack of prescience consisted in his blithe extrapolation of the peasant movement’s growth and his failure to see that peasant success would breed a powerful consolidation of antipeasant forces. His overoptimism is analogous to his hopes in 1919 for the efficacy of the “great shout of the popular masses,” but it was not counterfactual at the time. Mao’s experience proves a point he was to make ten years later in “On Practice”: “Man’s knowledge of a particular process at any given stage of development is only a relative truth.”

The important thing is quick and accurate assessment of the new stage and a reorientation of policies. Mao proved equal to this task at Jinggangshan in 1928.

Conclusion

The most significant characteristics of Mao’s writings and politics in the 1923–1927 period are essentially related to his commitment to the Chinese Communist Party. Mao by this time was no longer a May Fourth activist; he was a revolutionary cadre. In contrast to his earlier work, organization, both ideological and political, played an explicit and sometimes dominant role. The practical immediacy of Mao’s May Fourth writings which voiced itself in nontheoretical, general calls to action was submerged in mundane party tasks until the upsurge of the Northern Expedition. Even Mao’s return to mass politics in Hunan in 1926–1927 is not a return to his earlier political style. The significance of the peasant movement is established in Marxist categories of class struggle and the political activities of the peasant associations have to be reconciled with party authority.

But the populist revolutionary aims which led Mao into the Communist Party retained their importance as the final criteria of revolutionary legitimacy. In Mao’s relationship to the CCP there is a blend, at times a suppressed tension, of unreserved commitment to the party and at the same time a grasp of the party’s instrumentality to mass revolution. As Mao’s class analysis located the main potential of the national revolution in the oppressed rural classes, his emphasis on the responsibilities of the “really revolutionary
party,” along with his emphasis on the counterrevolutionary character of suspicious attitudes toward the peasantry, became an indirect but serious criticism of the direction of CCP leadership. In turn, Mao’s relative lack of concern with the politics of the Northern Expedition and his concentration on rural revolution must have seemed premature to many of his colleagues. But Mao’s growing alienation from the Central Committee in 1926 and early 1927—signaled by Chen Duxiu’s refusal to print Mao’s “Classes in Chinese Society” and evident in Zhang Guotao’s narration of the period—did not lead to a break with the party. The party, particularly in its idealization as the really revolutionary party, had become the essential framework of Mao’s revolutionary action.

The uniqueness of Mao’s attitude toward the party is most clearly seen in contrast with other theories of revolutionary organization. Suppose we compare Mao’s position with the views of three prominent European Marxists: Georg Lukacs, Karl Korsch, and Antonio Gramsci. The reception of Bolshevism in China and Europe was similar in that the practical success of the October Revolution was the key to its appeal. But the florescence of Leninism in Europe occurred in a fundamentally different political context, because the existence of large, officially Marxist, social democratic parties in Europe made the question of revolutionary legitimacy a bone of contention between parties within a general Marxist framework. Rejection of Bolshevism (because of traces of tsarist authoritarianism and anarchist voluntarism) became the new integrating ideology of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), while the frustration of radicals with the opportunism of the established workers’ parties led them to promote Lenin’s “revolutionary Realpolitik.”

The most elegant and coherent Leninist view of the party is given by Georg Lukacs in his 1922 essay “Methodisches zur Organisationsfrage.” Lukacs stresses the dialectical interrelationship of revolutionary theory, party, and class, with the party’s practical activity as the central mediating moment:

The correctness of revolutionary Marxism in an objectively revolutionary situation is much more than the merely “universal” correctness of a theory. Precisely because it has become completely actual, completely practical, theory must become the director of every single daily step. But this is only possible if theory completely abandons its purely theoretical character and becomes purely dialectical... thereby practically overcoming every opposition between theory and praxis."

The party’s concentration on practical revolutionary tasks requires members of high quality and dedication, strong discipline, and tactical flexibility. Only the opportunity for revolution is inevitably presented by history; the revolution itself is a free act of the proletariat and its vanguard. To develop crises into revolution, the proletariat must win the support or at least the neutrality of nonproletarian oppressed classes. Thus the problem of alliances is a key tactical problem:

Since the proletariat can free itself only through the destruction of class society, it is forced to fight its struggle for liberation on behalf of all oppressed, exploited groups. But whether in individual battles these [other groups] will be on its side or on the side of the enemy is more or less “accidental” because of their unclear class consciousness. It depends... very much on the correct tactics of the revolutionary Party of the proletariat."

The themes of practical, dialectical orientation, flexibility, and the importance of alliances are close to Mao’s view of the party. Where he and Lukacs begin to diverge significantly is with Lukacs’ belief that the party’s practical mission will preserve it from error and with Lukacs’ related complacency about the party’s leading role. Karl Korsch, one of the most prominent Cassandra figures of European Marxism, viewed the correctness of the party’s leadership of the proletariat as more problematic and therefore placed greater emphasis than Lukacs on democratic mechanisms of leadership. Korsch’s lifelong interest in workers’ councils sprang from this concern for the vitality of the party’s representative role. For Korsch, as for Mao, the question of the relationship of theory and practice was not an internal, tactical problem for the party. His concern for the real connection between the proletariat and the party led first to a split with Stalinism and later to serious strains in his commitment to Marxism. Underlying Korsch’s critique was a very empirical approach to the needs of the proletariat and to the economic and historical roots of developments in Marxist theory.

Antonio Gramsci’s view of the party’s role and temptations is considerably more political than either Korsch’s or Lukacs’, and
in this respect he is closer to Mao’s position. The title of his main work, The Modern Prince, already indicates a respect for the realities and structure of political power. Gramsci analyzes the Communist Party as part of a larger political and cultural situation; as a result, his analysis does not assume that the party is isolated from common political diseases and blindness. He stresses the need for accurate situational analyses and the need to avoid bureaucratic rigidity in the secondary leadership. In conformity with the Italian political context, he recognizes the necessity of an alliance of the northern proletariat and the southern peasantry:

The proletariat can become the leading and ruling class to the extent to which it succeeds in creating a system of class alliance which enables it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State; this means, in Italy, in the actual relations existing in Italy, to the extent to which it succeeds in obtaining the consent of the large peasant masses.

Gramsci’s analysis of the contribution of the peasantry differs from Mao’s 1926–1927 writings in two significant ways. First, the priority of the proletarian class is not as clear in Mao’s analysis. Gramsci was a leader of Turin’s industrial proletariat, whereas Mao, as spokesman for the Chinese peasant association movement, could expect his colleagues in the trade union movement to maintain the primacy of the proletariat. Second, and more important, Gramsci’s analysis of the peasant question is primarily an analysis of their political leadership. Although he is not proposing an alliance with the southern Italian intellectuals as representatives of the peasantry, he does not seem to assume, as Mao does, that the Communist Party has a natural role as the immediate organizer and leader of the peasantry. Although Gramsci moves beyond the dogmatic scornfulness implied in Lukacs’ description of “classes with unclear class consciousness,” the peasantry appears to remain an external ally to the revolution.

The basic principle which Mao has in common with these European radical theorists is succinctly expressed by Lukacs: “The question of the organization of a revolutionary party can only be developed organically from a theory of revolution.” But whereas this thesis was challenging in the context of European Marxism, it was the unquestioned starting point of Marxism in China. Mao’s dissent with the Central Committee in 1926–1927 centered on what should be the compass for strategic and tactical decisions. On this point the positions of the Europeans are more explicit but still discernible: for Lukacs the objective revolutionary interests of the party; for Korsch the revolutionary will of the proletariat; and for Gramsci a careful analysis of revolutionary potential or proletarian advantage. Mao’s stress on the overwhelming numbers of the peasantry and the political potential for their misery seems less Marxist and more primitive than these views, but it was an appropriate response to China’s less differentiated political situation. In the great watershed between Leninist and revisionist theories of the party, Mao, like Lukacs, Gramsci, and Korsch, is firmly on the side of revolution. But Mao’s populist empiricism demanded that revolutionary legitimacy in China be founded on an inclusive mass revolutionary leadership, and thus the peasant question became central to his idea of party policy.

Just as Mao’s earlier political attitudes and the peculiarities of the Chinese political context influenced his appreciation of the party’s role, they also shaped his grasp of Marxist ideology. Marxist class analysis provided a powerful new paradigm for Mao’s revolutionary viewpoint, but it is a paradigm adopted for mass-oriented activism. Mao’s class analyses are not primarily studies of economic or political structures; they specify mass revolutionary potential for the national revolution. To find the types of people (zhong ren) who can be mobilized—with the firm expectation that these will build up solidly from the lower classes—implies a basic discontinuity of method with Mao’s earlier democratic populism, but it includes an even more fundamental continuity of his ultimate aspiration and motivation in politics. Marxism does not have a simple instrumental relation to Mao’s continuing pre-Marxist political goals; rather, it is a framework that shapes his perception of political reality. But it is evident in the process of Mao’s discovery of the peasant movement that the motive of his application and development of Marxism is the furthering of mass revolution. Until the failure of CCP participation in the Northern Expedition drove Mao into the mountains, his politics did not require more than a populist focusing of Marxist class analysis. It was the unique problems of political-military survival in the countryside which prompted the development of his own political paradigm.

The magnitude and complexity of the contextual changes from the May Fourth Movement to the Northern Expedition make
it very difficult to trace specific developments and continuities in Mao’s thought. Contradictions of earlier opinions are rare, and similarities between Mao’s Hunan politics of 1919–1922 and his return in 1926–1927 can be superficial. In general, the major developments of Mao’s pre-Marxist period were practical-political and those of the following period were theoretical-organizational. Mao’s already proven abilities at differentiating complex political situations and appropriate policies led to two major theoretical advances: a theory of alliances and the seminal class analyses of “Peasant Classes” and “Classes in Chinese Society.” Perhaps more important, the class viewpoint of Marxism replaced the populist universalism of Mao’s earlier political appeals with mass revolutionary struggle. The optimism of the “great shout together” and the organizational weakness of federated unions of the masses are replaced by a political strategy and apparatus designed specifically for prolonged and bitter struggle.

The main characteristic of this period is the strategic notion of the national revolution, and the transformations which this notion undergoes in Mao’s writings are quite significant. In Mao’s Shanghai writings of 1923, the function of the national revolution is to provide a focus on present tasks. The ideas of mediated revolutionary politics, policy by stages, and present objectives versus ultimate goals lie behind the limited concept of the national revolution as the first step of revolutionary success. In a sense this type of politics is an application of Mao’s emphasis on doing what can be done to a prerevolutionary situation. The alliance theory implicit in the “Anti-Feng” article of late 1925 is already a considerable improvement over the mechanical stages of “Merchants and the Peking Coup.” The nested alliances of the anti-Feng front are clearly related to a definite goal. More important, this scheme does not allow the interests of long-term allies to be sacrificed to the success of a short-term entente. The most significant transformation of the concept of national revolution occurs in the articles on the peasantry. In these the national revolution undergoes a subtle redefinition from the immediately possible political target to the immediately possible mass revolution. The link between the two is Mao’s continuing assumption of the ultimate power of the mobilized masses and its corollary that any government or revolution which neglects the masses lacks an adequate foundation. The lesson of the 1911 revolution, also analyzed in the same context by Mao in 1919, shows the shallowness of merely political revolutions. Within this redefinition (or at least respecification) of the national revolution, Mao also shifts the focus of class politics to the overwhelmingly overwhelming rural masses. In “The Peasant Question and the National Revolution” it is clear that the peasantry should no longer be regarded as merely a resource to the national revolution. The struggle in the villages, at the base of feudal and imperialist exploitation, is the central problem. With this theoretical perspective already established, Mao’s approbation of the village-level peasant associations in the Hunan Report is readily understandable.

Between the established game of elite struggle being played out by most of the political and military forces of the Northern Expedition and the radicalization of demands threatened by the mobilization of the poor peasants there was a strain that could be neither reconciled nor suppressed. The Northern Expedition eventually succeeded and its victory was consolidated under increasingly anticomunist, anti-mass organization leadership. With the hostility of nearly every political and military force in China, the peasant movement failed as an independent base for a national revolution. This event could be taken in two ways: as a vindication of Mao’s thesis of the meaninglessness of victory without active mass support or as a vindication of the CCP Central Committee’s complaints that the relatively defenseless peasant movement should curb its demands until after national victory. In any case, despite its unexpected failure, Mao’s peasant politics was more farsighted than other aspects of communist policy. When survival became the dominant concern after the general failure, Mao was again in the forefront of rural policy, but in vastly different circumstances.