In the latter half of 1927, the first KMT–CCP united front split apart and the KMT crushed most of the urban strength of the CCP. Correspondingly, Mao’s concerns changed from problems of the national revolution’s orientation to the difficulties of survival in the rural crevices of a hostile environment. In retrospect, it may have been Mao’s chief contribution to the Chinese revolution to turn this disastrous fallback to the starting point of revolutionary power into the beginning of a new type of rural revolution and a style of leadership which was novel and uniquely appropriate for Chinese conditions. Mao’s new political paradigm began in the scramble for survival on the mountainous border of Hunan and Jiangxi. The paradigm itself would not be formulated for ten years, but the successful political practice which formed its contents were creative responses to the problems of survival.

The movement which Mao found necessary for survival was an integrated political, economic, and military effort with the effective mobilization of the peasantry as its chief concern and resource. Although related to Marxist and Chinese precedents, Mao’s strategy for a protracted, self-sufficient, rural struggle constituted a major innovation within both traditions. The major contribution to Chinese tradition was the transformation of the economic, social, and political structure of the village. This was a social accomplishment equivalent to splitting the atom: the most difficult, most basic, and most energy-releasing task. Mao’s most prominent contribution to Marxism was a theory of leadership adequate to this task, one built on the principles of flexible closeness to the masses and maximum effective mobilization.

More than any other location, Mao’s first guerrilla base at Jinggangshan is justly celebrated as the birthplace of the Chinese revolution which culminated twenty-two years later in the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. Although the catastrophes of 1934 which led to the Long March were just as disastrous for the CCP as the collapse of the First United Front, the major policy changes of 1935–1942 were not as original or basic as those developed in the 1928–1934 period. Researchers have tended to overstate the originality of the later period (the Yanan period) because it was then that Mao formulated the comprehensive, authoritative statements of his political paradigm. Just as Mao claims in theory, however, in the reality of his own political development innovations in practice preceded conceptualizations in theory. The foundation of Mao Zedong’s political thought was his political experience before Yanan.

Mao’s politics during the early base area period followed a course of development quite different from that of the preceding First United Front period. In 1923, Mao’s exile from Hunan occasioned a shift of horizons to national politics which gave added importance to organizational and ideological concerns. In the course of the First United Front Mao’s political thought moved from questions of party politics to the theory and practice of national popular revolution. In 1927, the failure of communist participation in the Northern Expedition forced a reduction of Mao’s political horizon to the parameters of a locality where he and those with him could survive as a revolutionary force. With the success of these early efforts Mao’s politics moved from the problems of personal survival to theoretical affirmations of the revolutionary significance of the base areas and the organizational and leadership methods necessary to maintain their strength.

The task of this chapter is to describe Mao’s practical initiatives during the early base area period and to analyze their inherent rationale. Although it is important to remember that other communist leaders were facing similar problems in other base areas (among them He Long, Zhang Guotao, Liu Zhidan, and Pang Zhimin), I will not attempt to compare their efforts with Mao’s since his policy developments in the early base area period were quite autonomous. A serious comparison of early base areas would, however, be interesting and complex enough to deserve a separate investigation. Focusing on Mao’s views of his own base area inevitably distorts the general picture of the CCP during this period, which was one of multiple base area activities and con-
continuing underground urban work. But our focus is the development of Mao’s politics, and to pursue it we must accompany him into the relative isolation of guerrilla warfare.

The early base area period has two main subdivisions: Mao’s activities in the Jinggangshan base area from 1927 to 1929 and the creation of the Jiangxi base in 1927–1931. With the movement of the Central Committee to the Jiangxi base in 1931 and its redesignation as the Central Soviet Republic of the Chinese Soviet Republic, a new phase of Mao’s politics begins, a phase which is the subject of the next chapter.

A Sketch of Political Developments

In the summer of 1927, it became increasingly evident to CCP members that Chen Duxiu’s politics of restraint were not preserving the united front with the Wuhan KMT but, rather, were preventing preparation for an inevitable armed struggle. Chen’s attempt to discourage the spontaneous radicalization of the peasant movement was particularly upsetting to the more radical rank and file. When Tan Pingshan, one of three CCP members serving as ministers in Wuhan, resigned his government post in July 1927, he expressed regret for his inability “to set the peasant movement right from its excessive demands and illegal deeds.” Discontent came to a head with the 7 August Emergency Conference, which placed Qu Qiubai in command of the party, approved a long letter to the party membership castigating the old leadership, and started plans for armed struggle against the KMT. Mao was given the major responsibility of winning Hunan for the communists with a peasant uprising known as the Autumn Harvest Uprising.

Mao’s leadership of the Autumn Harvest Uprising was a lesson in the difficulty of insurrectionary military operations and the isolation of the CCP forces. After some initial victories, the uprising turned into an almost total rout. Of Mao’s four regiments, composed of Northern Expedition troops who had sided with the communists, Hunanese peasants and miners, and local bandits, three were severely defeated and one defected to the enemy during battle. In late September, Mao gathered his remnant forces of no more than a thousand fighters and offered anyone who wanted to disperse into the villages five dollars for the road. In October, those who decided to stay with him reorganized as the First Regiment of the First Division of the First Army of the Chinese Work-

ers and Peasants Revolutionary Army, reached the Jinggang mountains on the border of Hunan and Jiangxi provinces, and started to build a base area. Fortunately for Mao, the fight over the division of spoils in Hunan distracted the major military forces in the area. Mao reversed his bad luck by capturing Chaling, a county seat in Hunan, and holding it for forty days, but beginning in 1928 his attention had finally turned toward retaining and expanding his Jinggangshan base area. The arrival of other retreating army units under Zhu De, Chen Yi, and Lin Biao in April 1928 raised the number of communist troops to at least ten thousand, and in May the first of many anticommunist “Encirclement and Suppression” campaigns was defeated.

The chaotic events of late 1927–1928 were rendered even more complex for Mao by his strained relationship with Qu Qiubai’s party leadership. While the criticism of Chen Duxiu by the 7 August Conference was a welcome change from the previous paternalistic suppression of differences, it was soon evident that calling for uprisings and assigning blame were obsessions of the new leadership. Mao was retired from the Politburo for the failure of the Autumn Harvest Uprising and for relying too heavily on military strength rather than on peasant enthusiasm, and in the early days at Jinggangshan he was censured for his concentration on the peasantry at the expense of the proletariat. Qu’s own peasant policy was one of “revolutionary terrorism” in order to “turn the petit-bourgeois [peasants] into proletarians and then force them into the revolution.” This policy was intended to maximize rural support for Qu’s continued attempts at insurrection, but it was necessarily opposed as nonviable by those in the base areas. In the summer of 1928, Jinggangshan was bombarded by contradictory directives from various superiors, and Mao was replaced as leader by an emissary who nearly lost both the base area and the army. Events such as these led to a general antagonism between the base area leadership and the Party Center: the former viewed the latter as dogmatic and misinformed; the latter was frustrated at attempting to control opportunistic and nonproletarian subordinates.

The situation was eased considerably by the resolutions of the Sixth Party Congress, held in Moscow in July 1928. The congress upheld Qu’s condemnation of Chen’s earlier opportunism, but it dismissed Qu’s understanding of the rural revolution as “far from penetrating.” It declared that China was still at the stage of
democratic revolution (minquan geming), a judgment which allowed Mao’s experiments in distributive land policy. Although the congress still emphasized armed insurrection and predicted that the contradictions of the reactionaries would soon reach a new, vulnerable crisis point, its more realistic view of the rural situation and its replacement of Qu by Li Lisan promised a better relationship between the base areas and the center.

But closer coordination with the Party Center was frustrated by military developments in 1929 and by Li Lisan himself, who turned out to be even more domineering and insurrection-oriented than his predecessor. In December 1928, the fifteen counties of the Jinggangshan base were threatened by a large xmt force, and it was decided that Mao and Zhu De should cross Jiangxi and set up a new base area on the Jiangxi-Fujian border. Mao spent most of 1929 in constant warfare in these two provinces, getting sufficiently out of touch with the center to be declared dead by the Comintern. Unfortunately this low profile did not protect him from Li Lisan’s imperious attentions. As Mao grew more confident of his own approach to guerrilla warfare and base area policy, his struggle on the ideological front with inappropriate central directives grew more intense. He opposed Li’s pessimistic demands to disperse the Red Army in 1929. In 1930, when the establishment of some fifteen base areas in China changed Li’s mood, Mao took part in Li’s last great attempt at urban insurrection, but he had already developed a fundamentally different strategy which he described in a letter to Lin Biao some months before the insurrection.

The struggle to take the big cities of Changsha, Nanchang, and Wuhan lasted from July to mid-September 1930, and with the costly failure of the second attack on Changsha, Li Lisan lost his hold on the Central Committee. Mao and his army returned to their base in Jiangxi, and the attention of all parties interested in the fate of communism in China—the Party Center, the Comintern, and Chiang Kai-shek—turned finally to the countryside. Mao’s struggle against Li’s agrarian policy, which favored rich peasants, continued in Jiangxi, culminating in the bloody Futian Incident of 8 December 1930. As the revolutionary situation in the cities continued to deteriorate, the CCR Central Committee decided to move to the Jiangxi base, and it was transformed into the Central Soviet Area of the Chinese Soviet Republic in late 1931. The arrival of the Central Committee caused a fundamental change in Mao’s leadership role as well as a redefinition of the base area. As chairman of the Chinese Soviet Republic, Mao was charged with almost exclusively civil administrative tasks, leading to important developments in his theory and techniques of revolutionary government, which in turn engendered new conflicts with the party leadership.

The Spatial Dimension of Survival

The general effect of the reorientation toward survival on Mao’s political thought can be understood most simply as a transformation of its spatial dimension. Mao’s temporal perspective on the revolution also received a severe shock as he went from the conviction in the Hunan Report that a social revolution was imminent to the necessity of preventing the total extinction of organized revolutionary forces. But by far the most important development occurred in Mao’s spatial perspective. In an environment of armed hostility, the base area defined the perimeter of direct revolutionary activity. Politics in this context was the mobilization of existing resources in order to extend the perimeter and establish other base areas. Mao had worked within spatial limitations in his Hunan activities of 1920-1923, but that constraint had been merely a recognized horizon of possible political influence rather than a defensive perimeter with control inside and hostile armies outside. After examining the spatial dimension of Mao’s rural politics as it was first presented in two works from 1928, we will analyze it more abstractly in terms of its center-periphery logic and interstitial tactics. Finally we will return to Mao’s self-confident restatement of his base area strategy in 1930.

Mao’s 1928 writings

Mao addresses the question of survival with customary directness in two works written in October and November 1928. Although they concern the same theme, the works differ significantly in their emphases because of different audiences. The purpose of the first work, “Draft Resolution of the Second Congress of County Party Representatives of the Xiang-Gan [Hunan-Jiangxi] Border Area,” known in the Selected Works as “Why Is It That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?,” is to explain the revolutionary significance of their survival to the cadres at Jinggangshan. The ostensive purpose of the second, “Report of the Jinggangshan Front Committee to the Center,” called “The Struggle
in the Chingkang [Jinggang] Mountains in the Selected Works, is to report and explain this survival to the party leadership in Shanghai. A secondary, political purpose of the report is to argue for the correctness of Mao's policies and against earlier attempts of the Party Center to dominate base area leadership.

Although the "Resolution" was written at a time of victory for the Jinggangshan base, there were sufficient grounds for sobriety in estimating chances of survival. Many communist-controlled areas which had sprung up in late 1927 had already been thoroughly defeated, including Peng Pai's peasant soviet at Hailufeng. The Jinggangshan base itself had been overrun by White forces twice in 1928 (and would be overrun again in 1929 after Mao's departure). A blockade was in effect at the time of writing, and forces were beginning to mount for a third encirclement campaign against the base. Cadres cognizant of the relative weakness of the Red Army and the unpredictable chaos of warlord and KMT politics might well have wondered how long the red flag could be kept flying.

In explaining the significance of communist survival in the base area, Mao betrays his own uneasiness at this time about the shift of the revolution to the countryside. The basic paradox was that on the one hand survival was possible in the base areas because of a peculiarit y in China's political superstructure—namely the chronic rivalry and warfare between the various localized elements of her ruling class. On the other hand, Mao's Marxist framework of analysis stressed the unity of economic conditions and hence political situations throughout China (and, more abstractly, throughout the world)—the same classes of oppressed struggling against the same classes of oppressors. Mao's rural strategy was a military necessity, but the localism necessary for Red survival, manifested by an almost exclusive dependence on the most localized class, the peasantry, must be seen as historically regressive from an orthodox standpoint. Mao was diffident about this reorientation, but he did not have the fear of peasant corruption of the revolution evident in the center directives of Qu Qiubai and later of Li Lisan.

One of the specific advantages of the fissured condition of the ruling class, the possibility of advantageous alliances, plays a much smaller part in this article than it did in 1925-1926. Mao's openness to principled alliance is still evident, however. It is of course impossible to ally with imperialism, warlords, or the "new warlords" of the KMT, but the progress of Wang Jingwei's "anti-imperialist, antiwarlord, anticomprador" reorganization efforts is reported sympathetically and separately from the KMT's other factional problems. By January 1930, the Comintern had forbidden alliances with any KMT factions, but a consistent notion of principled alliance seems to run from Mao's earlier writings to this article. It is again indicated in the "three conditions for a united front against Japan" (January 1933) and is finally enunciated explicitly in the Zunyi Resolution of January 1935.

Mao's purpose in the "Resolution" is to reconcile the 1927 goal of national revolution with a new starting point. This reorientation demanded much less theoretical adjustment from Mao than it did from his colleagues; as we have seen in the previous chapter, from 1926 he had been insisting that the revolution against warlords and imperialism must be carried out at the rural base of the exploitive system. What is novel in the article vis-a-vis the development of Mao's thought is the practical experience of survival which it summarizes and the strategic reformulation which this new experience required.

The centerpiece of the "Resolution" is Mao's general analysis of the conditions which allow the emergence and survival of Red power. Of the five conditions, the first and most basic specifies the necessary general environment, the second and third are more specific locational conditions, and the last two are organizational prerequisites for the survivors.

How can a small revolutionary force hostile to the common interests of China's ruling class survive? Mao answers that China's localized and divided political economy makes it impossible for the ruling class to sustain unified action. The natural fractiousness of the warlords is encouraged by the indirect colonialism and competitiveness of the imperialist powers. The tension between the inability of the ruling class to unite and their common interest in suppressing the communists produces a strategic situation which oscillates between times of relative cohesion of the ruling class (and therefore coordinated aggression against the Red areas) and times of dissension among the elite in which no coordinated White attack or defense can be arranged. At the time Mao wrote, his Chinese audience had had ample experience of the chronic contention among various powerholders to which he referred. Since the overthrow of Manchu rule almost twenty years earlier, Chinese politics had been characterized by an unending series of
factional struggles. They were a sort of national lottery played by local powerholders, the imperialist powers, and politicians. Though the winners varied, particularly at the intermediate and lower levels, the system—or antisystem—endured. Disintegration would stimulate a new alliance motived to unify the country, and the success of the alliance would induce its own disintegration into a new alignment of friends and enemies. In keeping with his 1926 analysis of the village-level foundations of warlord power, Mao attributes this permanent fracturing of the ruling class’s power to China’s localized agricultural economy and the imperialist policy of marking off spheres of influence.

The next two conditions which Mao discusses specify where and when a viable revolutionary group can establish itself. It must be situated where the masses have already participated in the bourgeois-democratic revolution. It is necessary to have a modicum of mass revolutionary consciousness and organization. This does not imply an economically advanced area, however. The reasons which Mao later gives to Lin Biao for preferring Jiangxi as a base area are tied to its relatively isolated and feudal political economy. Moreover, the base area must be part of the continued development of the national revolutionary situation. It is evident in this condition that Mao’s evaluation of base area success is immediately tied to its contribution to a national communist victory. Both these factors emphasize the dependence of base areas on a larger revolutionary context. Their spatial location depends on their revolutionary exposure; the timing of their emergence depends on a general revolutionary trend. Mao’s viewpoint in this matter is quite analogous to Lenin’s original view of the Bolshevik revolution—namely, that the October Revolution was a great success toward a larger (world) revolution but could not sustain itself without victories in the industrialized countries. At this time Mao viewed the base areas not as the seat of a protracted revolution but as a way station to a national revolutionary high tide. For both Lenin and Mao, the problem was that their initial revolutionary paradigms were formulated from a perspective which did not correspond to their actual revolutionary situation. In both cases the discord was eventually resolved in favor of reality.

The fourth and fifth conditions—the existence of an adequate Red Army and “the strength of the Communist Party’s organization and the correctness of its policies”—are respectively the conditions of adequate military and political organization and leadership. The emphasis on the correct policies of the party is one of Mao’s most frequent tropes, and sometimes criticism of past or present party policy seems to be implied.

The practical significance of these last two conditions is more fully developed in the “Report of the Jinggangshan Front Committee to the Center,” written one month after the “Resolution.” This comprehensive report to the Central Committee in Shanghai falls into two main parts: a narrative account of the fortunes of the Jinggangshan base and a survey of the major issues facing the base area. While the “Resolution” sets forth the revolutionary context of the Red areas, the “Report” provides a thorough analysis of the first year of work in this new setting.

The historical narrative is an essential part of the report because the many changes of leadership during 1928 and the corresponding success or failure of the communists amply substantiate Mao’s thesis of his and Zhu De’s correct leadership. To use Mao’s formulation, this history comprises the “lesson of objective actuality” (keguan shishi di juanxun), which led to the base’s present policy and leadership. Mao must have enjoyed telling this story. Upon the assumption of leadership by two different party emissaries the Red Army suffered almost annihilating defeats and both times Mao resumed leadership under straightened circumstances and led the army to victory and base area expansion.

The theoretical framework for Mao’s historical analysis is a recast version of his five conditions and two strategic periods. The five conditions presented here are: good masses; good party; strong Red Army; good geographical setting; adequate economic base. The difference between this listing and the previous one can be explained by a difference in audience. The primary purpose of the “Resolution” was to formulate and unify the strategic thinking of the cadres at Jinggangshan. The most urgent problem in the context of relatively consolidated local leadership was the overall significance of their mission. The fissured condition of the ruling class was assurance that their survival had not been accidental. Moreover, the essential link with the continued development of the national revolutionary situation was a reminder of the necessity for strategic subordination to national revolutionary planning. The Central Committee did not need such reminders. It needed to be informed of the practical conditions of the base. Most of the restated conditions can be seen as implicit criticism of central party policies: good masses (one of the reasons given in the “Report” for
the failure of the southern Hunan uprising was the failure of the masses there to participate; good party (the chief counterexamples were party emissaries); strong Red Army (part of the incorrect leadership of the party emissaries was leaving too small a force to guard the base); and good geographical location (an argument against the constant tendency of the Central Committee to transfer the military power nurtured at Jinggangshan to some place considered more effective). The oscillating strategic periods of enemy cohesiveness and discord play a greater role in the “Report” because these were completely misinterpreted (or ignored) by the Central Committee’s emissaries with disastrous consequences.

The Dialectic of Center and Periphery

Mao’s tactics and situational analyses are so shrewd in their practical politics that it is easy to overlook their significance for the development of his thought. The spatial dimension they add to his politics is complex and multilayered. Mao’s rural revolutionary strategy was not simply the localization of the revolution, but location was an essential moment in a military, political, and economic dialectic.

The spatial aspect of Mao’s thinking began as a military necessity. Without allies and unable to achieve national revolution, the question of where and how to survive became urgent. The basic solution was to find an area (Jinggangshan) where the remaining strength of the army plus local support would be stronger than local White forces, and then to expand the perimeter of local revolutionary control until the balance of power made possible a final, national challenge to KMT rule. Although Mao did not use them, the concepts of center and periphery are useful for analyzing the logic of this strategy. These terms can be taken in two senses: in the first they contrast China’s established urban center of power with the rural hinterland; in the second they refer to any relationship between a dominating organizational focus and a dispersed area of control.

Mao’s base area strategy differed fundamentally from the territorial politics of the warlords. With the disintegration of the Qing dynasty and the failure of attempts to revive the dominant position of Peking, various political-military forces in China realized the autonomy of their own power, becoming subcenters hostile to the reestablishment of an effective central regime. Their “self-government” was an attempt of local elites to avoid subservience to a central elite. Mao’s base area was not a subcenter; it was an antecedent. Within its borders it overturned the social relationships which were the basis of both warlord and KMT regimes. Externally it threatened its warlord neighbors most immediately, but its chief target was the KMT. Mao built his antecedent by challenging the fringes of regime control with his military power, then, through local social revolution and political education, he won a constituency which would support further military and political expansion. The constituency upon which Mao relied, the masses of middle and poor peasants, were the true periphery of Chinese politics, the productive but passive objects of rural social structure. Their mobilization created a new political force in China which turned the fringes of central control into a battlefront. The most primitive rural protest was the prohibition of the export of grain from rural districts, and this was common in 1926–1927. But this Luddite response was now replaced by a rural revolutionary strategy which turned the regime’s indifference to the peasantry into a source of strength for the peasant movement. The “encirclement of the cities by the countryside” had of course always existed as a geographic fact. But to reverse the direction of domination was a historic achievement.

The center-periphery relationship is also useful for analyzing other aspects of Mao’s political situation. Although Mao was busy creating revolutionary centers in the countryside, vis-à-vis the party leadership he was on the periphery, and they in turn were subordinated to the Comintern. The centrality of hierarchical authority seems to share some traits regardless of whether established centers, revolutionary centers, or subcenters are involved. A center is the organizational identity of a system, but the system’s success depends on its relationship to its environment. If a center is too energetic in safeguarding a particular idea of its system, its directives become rigid, inappropriate, and only partially informed. Moreover, it is easy for comprehensive leadership to exaggerate the importance of the system’s internal regulation. The unique advantage of their position lies in being able to view the entire operation of the system, but they are furthest from its working edges. The converse of the center’s tendency to overcontrol is the subordinate’s reluctance to yield his discretion. He can always tendentiously interpret orders, but he is in turn subject to the center’s personnel sanctions. The contradiction between the center’s au-
authority and the periphery's experience can lead to policy struggles, to factions, and to organizational disintegration.

Mao's obedient but strained relation to Central Committee leadership is evident in almost all of his early base area writing. It is clearest in his "Report," which begins with a narration of the catastrophes caused by outside interference and ends with a request somewhere between a plea and a challenge:

In the future when issuing directives pertaining to matters in this report please be sure to study this report. By no means should you simply rely on the one-sided reports of traveling inspectors.20

The center's improper evaluation of base area communications is matched by the inappropriate style of its directives to the base area:

Also when you give directives relating to military actions, absolutely avoid being too rigid. It would be most suitable if letters from the center allowed us to make determinations according to the circumstances and left us room to maneuver.21

After the first year at Jinggangshan, Mao usually made his own room to maneuver as he deemed necessary. Sometimes he made creative applications of center directives which must have seemed perverse to their authors—as when he accepted a criticism of "ultrademocracy" and went on to explain that its cure was better central leadership.21 Realizing their lack of control, Li Lisan's Central Committee twice gave urgent commands that Mao come to Shanghai, but Mao valued his distance and the orders went unheeded.22

Mao's Interstitial Tactics

Mao's method of exploiting hostilities among warlords was just as important as his logic of the periphery in determining his locational strategy in 1927-1930. The basic premise was that although the base areas were a threat to all warlords, their rivalry for power among themselves limited the utilization of their greater military strength against a common enemy. Mao exploited this situation by the tactic of locating at the interstices of warlord domains. The rough terrain of Jinggangshan was useful militarily, but its location on the border of Hunan and Jiangxi provinces was

just as important. Mao's forces would encroach upon the heartland of neighboring warlords only when the base had become powerful. A warlord's campaign against a border area was limited by two considerations: complete extermination of the border area would involve invasion of another warlord's territory, and if a warlord were significantly weakened by his battles with the communists he could expect to lose in the continuing power struggle with other warlords. These considerations usually led to local alliances against the base, but these were possible only in the absence of greater struggles among the warlords. Coordinating an effort involving several warlords was difficult in any case—and if victory appeared to be in sight or a loss of troops appeared likely, the effort often proved too fragile to be sustained. By analyzing contradictions among the warlords, Mao could estimate the opportunities for expansion and the weaknesses of ententes against him.

Mao's interstitial tactics had an important effect on his locational strategy. On the one hand, they determined the location of the base areas. On the other, that location depended on the circumstances of surrounding powers. Thus Mao's commitment to territory was also relative, although the cost of abandoning an entire base area was very great.

Mao's guerrilla tactics of this period were a reflection of both center-periphery and interstitial logic. The fullest statement of his tactical principles occurs in a letter of 5 April 1929 to the center:

The tactics we have derived from the struggle of the past three years are indeed different from any other tactics, ancient or modern, Chinese or foreign. With our tactics, the masses can be aroused for struggle on an ever-broadening scale, and no enemy, however powerful, can cope with us. Ours are guerrilla tactics. They consist mainly of the following points:

Divide our forces to arouse the masses; concentrate our forces to deal with the enemy.

The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue.

To extend stable base areas, employ the policy of advancing in waves; when pursued by a powerful enemy, employ the policy of circling around.

Arouse the largest numbers of the masses in the shortest possible time and by the best possible methods.

These tactics are just like casting a net; at any moment we
should be able to cast it or draw it in. We cast it wide to win over the masses and draw it in to deal with the enemy. Such are the tactics we have used for the past three years."

The weakness of the urban center's control over the peasant periphery allowed the communists to expand by arousing the masses to revolution. But the relative weakness of communist military forces required their mobility in order to exploit advantages of location and time—and mobility required concentration of professional military forces. The premise of these tactics is that territory can be sacrificed for military advantage. It is thus not surprising that Mao advises a commander in a newly won area to pay special attention to the establishment of independent guerrilla units because these could be expected to become permanent assets of the revolutionary movement, whereas civil institutions depended on the protection of the Red Army. In using both interstitial and center–periphery spatial logic, Mao was using location for larger purposes.

As the KMT consolidated its power in the early thirties, interstitial politics became less important for determining location and center–periphery thinking became more prominent. Nevertheless, since a major method of KMT consolidation was the cooptation of local warlords, contradictions did not entirely disappear. Interstitial tactics were important for determining the course of the Long March, and contradictions within the national power structure were spectacularly demonstrated in the Xi'an (Sian) Incident of 1936.

The Experience of Survival

The subject of Mao's 1930 letter to Lin Biao (known in the Selected Works as "A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire") is "correctly appraising the current situation and the attendant question of what action to take." On this topic, the ultimate nexus of theory and practice, Mao brings to bear the accumulated experience and convictions of his three years of guerrilla life. The letter is more than a summary of the past. Its reformulation gives a new significance to base areas which sets the theoretical context for Mao's concentration on problems of soviet policy and administration after the failure of the attacks on Changsha and Nanchang later in the summer of 1930.

The letter is basically an argument for the policies and strategy which Mao had found successful and for the essential significance of their sine qua non, the base areas, for the Chinese revolution. In it Mao develops for the first time his thesis that the base areas are the legitimate seat of a protracted, rural-centered revolution. This argument is necessary because of the pessimistic attitude about the future of communist-controlled areas which Lin Biao shared with much of the party leadership. Mao's letter was a direct challenge to Li Lisan's rural policy and provoked a strong, hostile reaction from Li. Mao's willingness to confront the center on base area policy is an indication of his self-confidence and also his relative autonomy. The pessimists favored a "relatively more comfortable" strategy of mobile guerrilla warfare not burdened with permanent base areas or the establishment of local political power. Their lack of confidence in the utility of base areas can be explained partly by the defeat of Jinggangshan and partly by the continuing adherence of the party leadership to the Russian model of urban revolution—with their consequent suspicion of the rural, nonproletarian character of the Red Army and even more so of its bases. Mao's argument against this viewpoint is first directed at its theoretical assumption of an urban proletarian revolution and then at its underestimate of the objective conditions for revolution. The first argument is based on a restatement of the strategic implications of China's semicolonial status. The second is based on Mao's successful experience with estimating objective strength, which he documents with lengthy quotations from earlier letters to the Central Committee.

Mao's first argument is a serious attempt to "Sinify" the strategic thinking of the Chinese Communist Party by presenting once again the coherent point of view which he first developed in the "Resolution" of 1928. He accuses Lin of having forgotten China's unique semicolonial status, and he proceeds to develop a complete strategic line from the contentiousness of the ruling class which this implies. Mao expands on his thesis of ruling class fissures by saying that their intensity and scope always increase. He then restates the matrix of principles he had implemented in Jinggangshan and Jiangxi—the great importance of the peasantry and the relationship of the Red Army and guerrilla warfare to the base area. Mao concludes:

Only thus is it possible to build the confidence of the revolutionary masses throughout the country, as Soviet Russia has built it
throughout the world. Only thus is it possible to create tremendous problems for the ruling classes, shake their foundations and hasten their internal disintegration. Only thus is it really possible to create a Red Army which will become an important weapon for the great revolution of the future. In short, only thus is it possible to hasten the revolutionary high tide. 12

This summary statement reveals two related advances in Mao’s theory of base areas. The more general is the idea that his strategies are essential for the present stage of the revolution. Previously he had argued merely that these conditions were sufficient for the survival of base areas. A more specific innovation is contained in the first “only thus” clause—namely, the function of the base areas as a model of Red power whose success would be valuable propaganda for China’s masses. The Mencian notion of propaganda by good example has already shown itself to be an aspect of Mao’s political thinking. 13 but this is Mao’s first statement that a Red area in China could be a general political model. This is a significant development in Mao’s own evaluation of the substantiality of localized communist power. Its effect on his strategic thinking can be seen in his proposal of the conquest of the province of Jiangxi as an immediate revolutionary goal. “Victory in one or several provinces” was a current slogan of Li Lisan’s drive toward a new high tide of urban conquests and insurrection, but Mao’s attention to Jiangxi proceeded from quite different principles. Jiangxi was not a smaller China but a larger base area. Mao’s reasons for proposing Jiangxi are that it is backward, weak, and relatively remote from imperialism. 14 Li argued for seizing heartland: the major cities Changsha, Nanchang, and Wuhan. Mao argues for establishing power on the periphery. Despite Mao’s participation in Li’s last great “take the cities” campaign a few months after this letter was written, Mao’s own thinking had already acquired the foundation for a strategy of protracted struggle centered in communist-governed bases rather than insurrection aimed at cities by whatever means possible.

After arguing for the importance of base areas, Mao begins a second argument against the general pessimism of Lin’s outlook. This argument combines Mao’s characteristic themes of optimistic activism and the necessity of objective investigation. He diagnoses Lin’s depression as a subjective failing caused by the small size of revolutionary forces and defeats due to putschism. Accord-

ing to Mao the objective situation is quite favorable: “A single spark can start a prairie fire.”

An important conceptual innovation occurs in Mao’s description of the favorable national scene:

While the imperialist contention over China becomes more intense, both the contradiction (maodun) between imperialism and all of China and the contradictions among the imperialists themselves are developing simultaneously in China. 15

Mao first used the term “contradiction” to indicate opposition between two groups in viewpoint, interest, or policy in the 1928 “Resolution,” 16 but here he elaborates it into the key concept for center-periphery and interstitial analysis. Mao had used maodun in a pejorative sense of inconsistent or confused, 17 but in these cases the word described a political group rather than the dynamics of a situation. The usage in this passage is not as sophisticated as Engels’ or Stalin’s notion of the irrelevance of opposition (a usage adopted by Mao in “On Contradiction”), but it became an important tool of Mao’s political analysis, culminating in “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People (1956).” The term “contradiction” is only a minor aspect of the role of dialectics in Mao’s thought, however. In this section Mao’s emphasis on the essential interdependence of center and periphery and the connection between local survival and national context reflects an awareness of the interdependence of things which dates back to his earliest writings.

Problems of Revolutionary Leadership

The external conditions of survival in a hostile environment were no more novel and important than its internal prerequisites. With the establishment of base areas, the CCP assumed a whole range of governmental and military responsibilities which were virtually nonexistent before 1928. These problems were new not only to Chinese Communism. No Marxist party had ever faced the political problems of consolidation and construction inherent in governing territory before it resolved the difficulties of tactical weakness and lack of public legitimacy inherent in a struggling revolutionary movement. Mao responded to the practical challenge of the base area by developing policies of mobilization, di-
rection and control, and leadership which were as novel as the problems he faced. Moreover, in his attempt to sustain a Marxist revolutionary movement in a localized, rural setting Mao developed an emphasis on correct leadership which grew into a fundamental contribution to CCP politics and to Marxism. In the previous chapter we discussed Mao's views on revolutionary legitimacy and compared them to the views of Georg Lukacs, Karl Korsch, and Antonio Gramsci. The problem of leadership as it arose in the base areas is a related but far more fundamental problem, and correspondingly our review of its relation to Marxism must go back to Marx and Lenin and their attempts to connect theory and practice through politics. After reviewing Mao's position vis-à-vis Marxism, we will take a closer look at the central problem of base area leadership—that of effective mobilization. Lastly we will consider Mao's critiques of leadership faults, which become "teachers by negative example" of the content of correct leadership.

Mao, Marxism, and Leadership

The claim of Marxism to be scientific socialism rests on its discovery of the direction of history in the contradictions of the present social structure. Orthodox Marxist leadership conceives of itself as the scientific representative of the proletariat—that is, as the knower and hence guide of its revolutionary historical-structural role. As Marx says in the Manifesto, "They [the Communists] fight for the achievement of the immediate purposes and interests of the working class, but they also represent within the present movement the future of the movement." As this statement illustrates, Marx's tendency to emphasize the economic determination of history arises not to avoid the burdens of leadership but to borrow the persuasiveness of inexorable development for the revolutionary cause. But this perspective also allows the problems of leadership to be viewed as matters of detail rather than as substantial social-structural problems.

Toward the turn of the century a schism developed in European Marxism between the revisionists who maintained that the vital point was representing the interests of the proletariat, although those interests turned out to be nonrevolutionary, and the radicals who still believed that the party's mission was to bring about the revolution despite the spontaneous opportunism of some workers. Thus Marx's naive notion of a nonproblematic interaction of scientific leadership and worker's interests fell apart into a passive representation of worker's interests on the one hand, and a revolutionary leadership bound to the proletariat mainly through propaganda and agitation on the other. This second, Leninist conception of the vanguard of the proletariat allowed a remarkable degree of leadership flexibility, but correspondingly it relied heavily for its legitimacy as a proletarian party on the scientific correctness of Marx's structural predictions. This organizational commitment of the Bolsheviks to be the true followers of the correct view of society involved them in a reliance on a dogmatic theology of Marxism in the resolution of policy disputes. Problems of leadership were viewed as problems of tactics which could be resolved by analyzing the current stage of the revolution and making the necessary compromises with existing political forces. Incorrect leadership implied a deviation from the correct line.

Although Mao did not repudiate the importance of either the proletariat or Marxist historical materialism, neither of these concepts was useful to him in constructing the base areas. On the microlevel of base area politics, class analysis through investigation of actual conditions was essential to the determination of policy. But for this period of Mao's thinking, Marxist social science was in the service of revolutionary leadership. The Party Center's efforts to reverse this relationship were regarded as inappropriate and dangerous to survival.

Mao's rural strategy involved an even greater isolation of the party from class roots of any species, but at the same time it stressed an active relationship with the oppressed masses. "Proletarian hegemony" and survival were incompatible at Jinggangshan, but the peasantry did not replace the proletariat as the class referent of the party, even though it became the party's chief source of support. Despite Mao's plea to the Central Committee in 1928 for more proletarians and a detailed account of Russian policies toward rich peasants, the situation posed leadership problems which could not be solved by economic analysis or by reference to Russian experience. Rather than evade this unique leadership problem, Mao produced a new politics and ethic of party leadership, the theory of which was clearly delineated only in the 1940s. From its base are beginnings, however, it was characterized by uniting leadership flexibility and closeness to the masses through mass mobilization. For Mao, "correct" policy was not simply class policy or a dogmatically faithful policy, but one which was appropriate for the circumstances of its application.

Mao believed that arriving at appropriate policy was diffi-
cult but possible. His own labors to achieve this type of correctness and to encourage it in subordinates led to a methodology of leadership which stressed investigation among the masses, objective appraisal of the situation, and avoidance of elitist habits. With these areas of leadership regarded as problematic, Mao, and later Chinese Communism, advanced beyond orthodox Marxism to an awareness of the structural weaknesses of leadership. The “rectification campaigns” which became prominent in the early 1940s were not purges of unsatisfactory cadre but serious attempts to improve their leadership style. The prototype of rectification literature is the Gutian Resolution of December 1929. With his recognition of the situational difficulties of correct leadership, Mao was not vulnerable to the acute embarrassment which European Marxism suffered at the hands of Robert Michels when he demonstrated the oligarchic tendencies of the Marxist parties. But political education, or even the hard lessons of experience, could rectify leadership faults. The target was effective leadership, which in most cases was synonymous with effective mass mobilization.

*Mobilization and Policy Integration*

If mobilization is broadly defined as eliciting cooperation for an end, it is the basic task of social organization. Cooperation can be motivated by identification with the organization and a desire to share in its goal, by rewards for participation, or by sanctions against noncooperation. Each of these motivations—identification, rewards, and sanctions—has its structural implications and limitations. Inducing identification with a public purpose lowers the resource costs of mobilization, but it requires more coordinative effort and also acceptable goals. The organization and its goal must be close to the population; otherwise they would shirk their share of the burden or be indifferent to the outcome. If an organization rewards participation, the resource cost rises, the top leadership acquires greater control of the organization’s purpose, and roles become defined. Relying on control by sanctions is also expensive and defines standards of compliance. All these motivations were involved in Mao’s mobilization effort, but they were employed differently.

One of the most impressive cases of mobilization through identity of interests was the Red Army itself, since in the first year most Red Army troops were mercenaries captured in battle. Mao’s attempt to transform these erstwhile servants of feudal militarism into a revolutionary army involved an integration of party and army as well as soviet, local forces, and army, but it centered on a democratic structuring of the army itself. This was most important for the absorption and motivation of new elements:

Especially recently captured soldiers feel that the camp they are in today is a different world from the camp they were in yesterday. Although they feel that the material life of the Red Army is not as good as that of the White armies..., they feel spiritually liberated. Therefore they can live with the situation. Also, the same soldier fights more bravely today in the Red Army than he did yesterday in the White army because of the influence of democracy (*mingquanzhuyi*). The Red Army is like a furnace in which all captured soldiers are transmitted the moment they come over. In China not only do the worker and peasant masses need democracy; soldiers need democracy even more urgently.

The content of Red Army democracy (literally, “people’s rightsism”) was a whole complex of egalitarian and democratic practices:

The officers do not hit the men; the officers and men eat and dress in the same way and are treated equally; soldiers are free to hold meetings and to speak out; financial matters are completely open; representatives of the soldiers audit the accounts; soldiers handle the mess arrangements and, out of the daily five cents for cooking oil, salt, firewood, and vegetables, they can even save a little for pocket money, amounting to roughly six or seven copper per person per day.

The mass politics of the Red Army in 1928 were as interesting as its economic egalitarianism. The soldiers’ committees (shihung weiyuanhui) which were established at company, battalion, and regimental levels had the duties of supervising the officers, representing the soldier’s interests, participating in the management of the troops, carrying out political training within the army, and directing mass movements among the population. At this time (and contrary to later practice), Mao thought that with the soldiers’ committees there was no need for political depart-
ments at these levels in the army. In fact, political departments had proved detrimental: without them, everyone did political work; with them, however, everyone left political work to the specialists.

Mobilization through identification of interest within the villages was accomplished initially by stressing goals which were of obvious benefit to the village masses. Land reform is the basic example. Although land reform depended very much on party direction for its rate and pace, it was of obvious benefit to the poor peasants and hired hands. Not only could the leadership count on active cooperation in implementing such policies, it could use the shared interest established through distributional policies to argue for less immediate projects such as raising troops for the Red Army.

But enthusiasm is most easily evoked for short-range projects with definite results. The problem of maintaining credibility as the leadership of the masses and for the masses was one of establishing channels of mass participation and politics. Since control over local leaders and open political struggle were completely new to the villages, it was easy for the local soviets to fall into the feudal patterns of aloofness and arbitrariness. But these superior habits produced the cardinal sin of “estrangement from the masses” (fuoli qunzhuang), leading to passivity of the masses and a loss of mobilization potential. The most serious manifestation of estrangement from the masses was “the forcible violation of popular opinion” (qiangjian minyi), the tendency of local government officials to form an exclusive clique and abuse their power.

The middle peasants had less potential for common interests than did the poor peasants because they were more independent economically. After land reform they could not look forward to sharing in any further distributive programs. However, they, too, were victims of the feudal social structure who welcomed liberation, and, provided that their landholding interests were not threatened by more radical land policies, they had much in common with the base area government. Attempts to increase production and lower marketing costs were especially beneficial, and the defense of the base area meant preservation of their improved status. A major attraction of participation for many middle peasants must have been the local positions of authority and prestige left vacant by the rich peasants and landlords. Insofar as personal opportunism was a motive for assuming village leadership, however, the mobilization requirement of closeness to the masses would inevitably conflict with the imagined privileges of office.

Coercive sanctions were reserved for the remnants of the rich peasant and landlord classes. They were not supposed to be used against poor and middle peasants. Nevertheless, many local soviets availed themselves of coercive measures in meeting their locality’s obligations, a habit which was considered both a feudal remnant and a symptom of estrangement.

Since the situation just described remained basically the same into the early years of the People’s Republic of China, the problem of mobilization in the base areas is relevant for postliberation campaigns. Skinner and Winckler derive a plausible life cycle for rural mobilization in the 1950s which stresses the succession of ideological, coercive, and remunerative phases. For various reasons—external pressures, changes in leadership, rapid evolution of policy—the rural policy fluctuations of Jinggangshan and Jiangxi cannot be forced into the later cycle of compliance. Since Skinner and Winckler derive their compliance model from Amatai Etzioni’s theory of complex organizations rather than from a concrete analysis of rural compliance, they would come away empty-handed from Jiangxi. But the greater interest of the poor peasants in ideological compliance and the more remunerative tendency of middle peasant compliance—as well as the serious tensions between the two—were already important facts of life in Jinggangshan, and the resulting complexities necessitated Mao’s rural investigations which are described later in this chapter and in the next. There were rural policy fluctuations before the Long March which were affected by contradictions between poor and middle peasants and between ideological goals and production goals, but no working cycle of compliance emerged. It is my impression that a compliance cycle of mobilization aimed primarily at poor peasants, consolidation aimed at leadership mistakes and stubborn or backward groups, and material welfare aimed at productive individuals and groups developed into an expectation if not a policy during the Yenan period. Skinner and Winckler note differential class responses in their descriptions of individual campaigns, but class is not an integral part of their model. If class appeal were taken into account, the origins and actual workings of the compliance cycle would be more clear.

Mao’s chief organizational discovery of the pre-1935 period was popular mobilization, and essential to the maximum effec-
tiveness of mobilization was a strategy which emphasized policy integration. In general, a meaningful task had to be available for every activist whose heart was stirred by a particular campaign. In Jinggangshan the difficulties of survival were apparent to all and demanded a maximum military effort, but if the Red Army were completely in charge of defense, this interest would express itself in a few volunteers and debilitating anxiety. Instead, the party and masses were militarized: all sorts of local military and paramilitary units were organized, and the importance of civil duties for the military effort was emphasized. This policy allowed a pyramid of maximum support for the military effort, and it also allowed other tasks to borrow the urgency of the defense problem to stimulate their own efforts. However, policy integration placed a considerable strain on the leadership capabilities of intermediate and local cadres, because it demanded an active interrelation of their specific tasks with overall policy.

**Faults of Leadership**

In the second half of the 1928 "Report" and in what is known as the Gutian Resolution of December 1929, Mao provides an extensive critique of leadership faults which gives a concrete picture of correct leadership by specifying its opposite. The report criticizes the nondenominational ways of local soviets; the Gutian Resolution deals with ideological deviations in the party and army.

In the report, Mao gives a favorable description of conditions in the army but is quite critical of government organs: "Every level of soviet has been set up, but more in name than in reality." Mao’s criticism is not that the soviets are not the real organs of power but that they are not what soviets should be. Basically, they lack the new spirit of democratic centralism (minzhu jizhong zhu yi) and estrange themselves from the masses. The soviets still act under the feudal principle of power from above:

Many places do not have councils of workers, peasants, and soldiers (gong nong bing daibiao dahui) and the soviet executive committees at township (xiang), district (qu), and even county levels are elected at mass meetings which are called suddenly, preventing the discussion of problems and the conduct of political training. These meetings are easily manipulated by intellectuals and opportunistic elements. All this amounts to a failure to understand what a soviet is. It is a failure to understand that the councils of workers, peasants, and soldiers are definitely the highest organs of authority, that the executive committee is just an organ for making decisions between meetings... In some localities, there is a council but it is considered to be merely a temporary organ to elect an executive committee.

This basic organizational mistake led to corresponding mistakes in the behavior of the executive committees:

If there is no representative council or if there isn’t a sound one behind the executive committee, its conduct of affairs is often estranged from the views of the masses (tuo quanjzong di yijian), and there are instances everywhere of hesitation and compromise in the confiscation and redistribution of land, of squandering or embezzling funds, and of recolling before the White forces or fighting only half-heartedly.

The origin of this evil is evidently the inertia of previous experience with government: "The evil feudal practice of arbitrary dictation is so deeply rooted in the minds of the masses and even of the ordinary Party members that it cannot be swept away at once." The "easy way" is for the highest official to give an order. Thus the executive committee replaces the representative council, the standing committee replaces the executive committee, the paid officers replace the standing committee—and the party replaces the soviet government. By reducing the popular revolutionary character of the soviet, the isolation from the people that this telescoping of discretionary activity entails reduces the effectiveness of the government’s military support activities. The reason for the persistence of this old political style is first of all a lack of propaganda and education about the new political system, but there is also a more basic need for democratic centralism to prove itself in struggle:

Democratic centralism can be widely and effectively practiced in mass organizations only when its efficacy is demonstrated in revolutionary struggle and the masses understand that it is the best means for mobilizing their forces and is of utmost help in their struggle.

Given the rapidity of developments in Jinggangshan, Mao could expect an opportunity for this proof by experience very quickly.

In contrast to later works, Mao does not direct his criticisms
of soviet government at hostile class elements in the government—
even though he notes that in the beginning the small landlords,
rich peasants, and intellectuals took over the soviet, particularly
at the township level (the lowest level at that time), and that the
oppressed classes, the poor peasants, were not represented.

The leadership problems Mao dealt with in the year between
the Jinggangshan Report and the Gutian Resolution were com-
pletely different from the problems of local government just de-
dscribed. For almost all of 1929 the Fourth Red Army under Zhu
De and Mao was fighting a mobile war against various local pow-
ers in southern Jiangxi and western Fujian provinces. The base
area which later became the Jiangxi Soviet and then the Central
Soviet Republic was not established until August 1929. The Gut-
ian Resolution, a general attempt to identify the ideological prob-
lems of the Red Army, was a response to a critical letter from the
Central Committee, but it was also an effort to reestablish the
army’s morale and cohesiveness.

After a year of hard battle and the disorienting effect of leaving
Jinggangshan, the founding of the new Jiangxi base demanded a
repoliticization of military power, a conscious effort to respond
to a different population, and a struggle against the narrow rou-
tines and subgroup identities which had accumulated with the ar-
my’s professionalization through experience. But the problems
were not completely novel. Most of them relate to the tasks of mo-
bilization and policy integration within a military framework.
Mao’s attempt to rectify these “mistaken ideas” by exposing them
and suggesting specific remedies is the first example of a Maoist
ideological rectification effort. His glossary of faults from this first
effort has become an enduring (although incomplete) catalog of
ideological defects. These faults—“purely military viewpoint,”
“ultrademocracy,” “disregard of organizational discipline,” “Ab-
solute egalitarianism,” “individualism”—are worth presenting in
some detail both as developments in Mao’s theory of leadership
and for the historical light they shed on the Red Army’s situation.

Mao’s analysis of the purely military viewpoint is most not-
able for his political conception of the Red Army’s purpose:

The Red Army does not fight for fighting’s sake but fights in order
to conduct propaganda among the masses, organize them, arm
them, help them, and set up political power. If it departs from these
objectives of mass-oriented propaganda, organization, and armed
political power, then the significance of the fighting is completely
lost and the Red Army basically loses the reason for its existence.”

The purely military viewpoint is an attitude of estrangement from
the masses which leads directly to other distortions: too much im-
portance is attached to winning or losing battles, and the impor-
tance and strength of the army are alternately exaggerated, result-
ing in the opportunism of evading battles in order to conserve
strength or the parasitism of only wanting to do big things. The
cure for these purely military tendencies is political training, but
local party and mass organizations are encouraged to voice their
criticisms of the Red Army, and the party is urged to be more at-
tentive to military work. Finally a need is expressed for an organic
stipulation of Red Army rules and regulations.

Three other mistaken tendencies are most probably pointed
out in direct response to Central Committee criticisms: ultrade-
mocracy, absolute egalitarianism, and roving rebel ideology. Ul-
trademocracy, the desire of the lower levels to decide everything,
aries from “the petty-bourgeoisie’s aversion to discipline.” Mao
shows his creativity in applying Party Center criticisms in his sug-
gested methods of correction. The educational methods point out
the damage to party organization and fighting ability caused by
ultrademocracy and also its petit-bourgeois roots. The organiza-
tional methods of correction are aimed mainly, however, at “the
leading bodies of the party.” There are five organizational solu-
tions. First, the leading bodies must establish themselves as centers
of leadership by giving a correct line of guidance and finding solu-
tions when problems arise. Second, they must be familiar with the
life of the masses and the situation of the lower levels so as to have
an objective base for correct leadership. Third, decision-making
and execution should not be too casual. Fourth, all important de-
cisions must be promptly transmitted to lower levels by means of
reports at meetings. And fifth, the lower levels must discuss direc-
tives in detail in order to understand them and decide on methods
of implementation. The actual thrust of this program is to prevent
the separation of party levels and estrangement from the masses,
as such it is one of Mao’s best statements on methods of leadership.
In the context of the discussion of ultrademocracy, these organiza-
tional correctives imply that the problem is a symptom of isolated
and incorrect leadership rather than an independent ideological
problem of the lower levels.
Mao's claim that absolute egalitarianism is no longer a serious problem and the relatively trivial examples he lists lead me to suppose that its inclusion as a mistaken tendency originated with the Central Committee. Absolute egalitarianism is simply insisting on equal treatment in everything regardless of the need for concentration of resources. The cure is education to the fact that absolute egalitarianism is an illusion not only under present conditions but even under socialism.

In the section on the ideology of roving rebel bands, Mao not only treats the problem as serious but carefully proves that it is curable. Most of the soldiers in Mao's army were vagrants and mercenaries, and traditionally the outlook of these groups was lawless but not revolutionary. If the army were not used quickly to establish a base for urban proletarian power, it might lose its revolutionary character completely. Mao's approach to the problem is typically frontal: he acknowledges the vagrant majority of the Red Army and goes on to observe the general flourishing of banditry in South China. But he proceeds to show that the traditional roving rebel mentality is no longer a class ideology in China but only the remnant of an ideology:

But the large-scale roving rebel activities of Hong Chao, Li Zhuan, or Hong Xianquan are no longer possible in a China which is ruled by imperialism [sic], and particularly in a China of the present period in which advanced weapons (hand grenades, artillery, machine guns, etc.), advanced methods of communication (military telephone and radio), and advanced means of transportation (automotive, steamboat, and railroad) have been introduced. For these reasons the thinking of roving rebels is naturally not able to become the ultimate and powerful view which governs the activities of the Red Army. But its influence . . . is still very great.**

As one might expect, the manifestations of the roving rebel mentality are very similar to those of the purely military viewpoint: inattention to political work among the masses and preference for mercenary recruits. The cure is again education and recruitment of more workers and peasants for the army.

Disregard of organizational discipline (fei zuzhi yishi) includes two relationships—that of a minority in disagreement with adopted policy and that of individuals in opposition. The general rule on opposition is that objections are encouraged before a policy is adopted; they are allowed afterward provided that they are not manifested in work. Criticism should be made within the party and it should not take the form of attacks on individuals. Mao also discusses an extraneous** but interesting problem under this heading: the "compartmentalization" (tesuhua) of a portion of the party membership. This problem resulted from the party's "big mistake" of separating military and political responsibilities so that military specialists did not attend their branch meetings and regular party members did not discuss military problems. Evidently addressing the military readers, Mao says that their excuse is pressure of business but in reality they fear the masses and do not want to approach them. This leads to their estrangement from the masses and estrangement from the party and constitutes a type of functional elite formation which would make policy integration impossible.

Mao's discussions of the tendencies of idealism (subjectivism) and individualism are related critiques of personal characteristics of some party members which adversely affect party work. Idealism is the lack of a realistic attitude and results in the errors of opportunism or putschism and in the proclivity to take and give criticism too personally. Individualism is the pursuit of personal ends to the detriment of party organization and goals. Examples are retaliation, cliquism, passivity in work, pleasure seeking, and an employee mentality. The method of correction is primarily education, but the conditions which encourage individualism are also noted. Proper conduct of affairs, particularly assignments and discipline, is emphasized, as is improvement of the Red Army's material welfare.

The solution to these leadership flaws is political education of the mistaken individuals and organizational reforms to improve the ideological quality of party life. In political education, Mao continues the predilection of his schoolteaching days by emphasizing practicality and recommending the "mental development method" (qi fa shi) of education over the "spoonfeeding method" (zhuru shi).** Mao attacks organizational laxness in the party, but he also criticizes boring meetings ("going to a meeting is like going to jail") and lazy, self-important chairmen.

The Gutian Resolution and the second part of Mao's 1928 report delineate the basic norms of revolutionary leadership in the base area context. The imperatives derive their strength from a close dialectic of self-interest and public service. Mao describes
the necessary behavior for popular mobilization which is the basis of their survival and success. Both true revolutionary identity and survival demand service to the masses. The strenuous attention to the masses which Mao demanded of party, military, and government cadres is both practical and idealistic if Mao's basic assumption of the absolute political power of the mobilized masses is accepted. Any shortcomings which inhibit an intimate relationship between leader and masses reduce one's contribution and stature as a revolutionary and make failure more likely.

By 1930, Mao had developed an ethic of leadership which was to be refined throughout his political career. The chief leadership fault—estrangement from the masses—acquired the subcategories of bureaucratism (complacency of position, reliance on authority to distinguish oneself from the masses) and subjectivism (being too self-centered, not grasping the objective situation), into which many of the specific faults discussed above could be placed. But Mao did not think that a perfect organization would solve every problem; nor was closeness to the masses merely a "human relations" ploy for mobilization. Correct policy was as essential as efficient organization, and closeness to the masses involved a commitment to a popular process of policy formation later formalized as the mass line. The need for the revolutionary organization to learn about objective reality and the needs of the masses was particularly acute after the Red Army's return from the attacks on Nanchang and Changsha in the fall of 1930. The next three sections of this chapter focus on Mao's experience of the objective world of the village.

**Revolutionary Fact-Finding**

Mao and his army arrived back in Jiangxi in October 1930. The new importance of the base area was indicated by the immediate founding of the Jiangxi Provincial Soviet Government, and a new degree of soviet-centeredness can be seen in Mao's writings. His major concern became rural policy and he devoted much time to systematic investigations of life in soviet villages. The most important element in his village-level concern was land redistribution, but his careful investigations of scattered localities showed that this policy and its execution were inextricably enmeshed in the complexities of local political life. In this section we will concentrate on Mao's process of investigation; later in the chapter we will examine the results of the investigations and the problems they posed for rural policy.

**Jiangxi Investigations**

We can surmise that three factors influenced Mao to undertake systematic land investigations in the Jiangxi base. The first factor is that Jiangxi is more fertile and more heavily populated than Jinggangshan. This made the land problem more acute than it had been. The second factor is that after the failure of Li Lisan's urban seizure policy, Mao undoubtedly was expecting a protracted struggle in the existing soviets. Jiangxi could not be consolidated nor could its population be mobilized without an effective land policy. Since he was relatively unfamiliar with the area, Mao had to conduct serious investigations before he could design the cornerstone of soviet policy.

The third factor, whose importance is impossible to estimate, is that the party organs in southern Jiangxi were in large part opposed to land redistribution and opposed to Mao. From December 1930 until the summer of 1931 there was what John Rue has termed a civil war between the pro-Mao and anti-Mao forces in the Jiangxi Soviet (or, from Mao's point of view, between the communists and the Anti-Bolshevik League rebels). As Philip Huang has shown in a study of Xingguo county in Jiangxi, this conflict was also related to the infiltration of local soviet and party organs by the Three Dot secret society. Without a systematic survey of local conditions it would be difficult for Mao to be certain of the reliability of local reports and even the nature of his opposition. For instance, the rebels objected to land redistribution but were in favor of collectivization, claiming in this to represent the interests of the laborers against Mao's emphasis on the peasants. Whether their objection represented an attempt to leap over the bourgeois-democratic stage to the socialist revolution, or whether it was merely a counterattack against serious land redistribution mounted by rich peasants in control of local party organizations, was a question which could only be settled by accurate, firsthand knowledge.

Mao's early investigations alternate between careful notes taken on the reports of local cadres and his own research made during pauses in military operations. The utility of personal investigation is evident from the introduction to his first set of investigative reports:
Doing the Lijiafang investigation enabled me to understand the circumstances of the organization and activities of the two soviet levels of township (xiang) and village (cun) during the land struggle. Before this investigation, my notion of these circumstances was vague. This investigation allowed me to discover the seriousness of dividing land with the village as the unit. In south Jiangxi nine or ten counties distributed land, and the land law announced by the higher governmental levels said that distribution should have the townships as units. Of the workers in high-level organs, most believe that the distribution was carried out by township, and none realized that the actual (shijiu) situation is a completely different matter. Generally division was done by village, and very few were done by township. Using the village as the unit is to the advantage of the rich peasant and to the disadvantage of the poor peasant.]

This investigation was a help to Mao on an important policy matter in various ways: in his personal development as a correct and effective soviet leader; in confirming an existing policy direction, in checking the effectiveness of existing policy; and in highlighting a problem that might call for redistribution in the future. But the Lijiafang survey is not a thrilling piece of investigative reporting; it is one of four very objective, mostly statistical descriptions of location, government, and land distribution in various townships. Among the four townships, Lijiafang is distinguished by its large and expensive township government, very uneven land distribution among its villages (highest is 400 percent of lowest), some coercion in Red Army recruitment, and mild treatment of former White militia soldiers and officers.

The careful notes which Mao took on reports by local leaders have the advantage of covering many more localities than Mao could have investigated personally; the concomitant disadvantage is reliance on responsible persons as reporters. In "The Situation of Land Distribution in Western Jiangxi"—Mao’s notes at an enlarged conference of the West Jiangxi Action Committee and the Jiangxi Action Committee, held 12 to 15 November 1930—this problem is illustrated when one of the reporters singles out for commendation a village which Mao had personally investigated a few days earlier, and Mao appends a question mark to his note. The three major meetings of this conference included a survey of the ragged development of land reform, reports on the extent of rich peasant and landlord infiltration of local party, governmental, and guerrilla units, and examples of the unpredictable complexities of land policy. With the combination of reporting sessions and personal investigation, Mao acquired an experience of the structure and dynamics of rural politics which was difficult to convey to his superiors in Shanghai. It was, however, as good an objective base as could be had for his own discretion in leading the soviet.

Mao’s best and most detailed rural survey resulted from an intensive, week-long discussion with eight Red Army soldiers from a certain border district, Yongfeng, in Xingguo county. The result of this investigative session, the "Xingguo Investigation," was written up in January 1931 and might be called the Hunan Report of the Jiangxi period. Mao applies the same practical-investigative thrust of his earlier classic to the postliberation concerns of the first soviet and arrives at a correspondingly vivid presentation of the party’s rural environment, containing policy-relevant information as well as an ethical imperative for each party member to engage himself in similar studies.

One important difference between the Hunan Report and the Xingguo Investigation is that the party no longer needs to be convinced of the importance of the rural movement or the correctness of its apparently extreme actions. Mao’s target in the Xingguo Investigation is the basic ignorance of rural conditions caused by the dogmatic style of the CCP’s rural leadership. He supports his stress on the importance of local studies by voicing a strong opinion on methods of leadership in the preface:

The determination of practical policies should certainly be based on concrete conditions. Things fantasized in one’s room or things read in carelessly written reports are definitely not concrete conditions. It would be dangerous to determine policy on the basis of plausibility or on reports which don’t correspond to reality. The many mistakes formerly made in the Red areas all stem from a lack of correspondence between Party leadership and reality. Therefore careful, scientific, practical investigation is extremely necessary.

Mao’s own investigation is a model of what he is suggesting, although military necessities caused him to abandon his investigation prematurely. Mao reports on seven major topics and lists four which were not reached. The seven sections of the report are (1) a survey of eight families (of the eight informants); (2) old landlord-related relationships in the district; (3) the various classes in strug-
gle; (4) the present status of land distribution; (5) land tax; (6) the soviet; and (7) rural militarization. The topics Mao would have liked to include were the situation of youth and women, commercial activity and price levels, agricultural productivity after land division, and the cultural situation. Mao's method was to propose an investigation outline and discuss matters until everyone had agreed on what should be written down. He suggests the earnestness of his attempt to find out what is really going on at the local level by mentioning that the sessions were lively and interesting, that sometimes his conclusions were ridiculed, and that most of the eight informants were not party members. This one-location, in-depth approach has the endemic methodological problem that its general applicability remains unproved, but Mao addresses this difficulty with a characteristic Chinese logic: "This district [Yongfeng] is at the conjunction of Xingguo, Ganxian, and Wanan counties. If this district is understood, then understanding Ganxian and Wanan counties is not far off, and the situation of the land revolution in all of southern Jiangxi would be approximately the same."^[45]

The difference in texture between the Hunan Report and the Xingguo Investigation comes from the latter's concrete, even personal, detail. The Xingguo Investigation begins with fifteen pages of the personal fortunes of Mao's eight informants during land reform. He also discusses the activities and fates of the twelve landlords and thirty-two rich peasants in the district and presents the class background for each district-level official and those of one township. Mao maintains a corresponding level of detail when he describes economic conditions in the district before the revolution and every aspect of land reform. In all, the Xingguo Investigation is the most unrestrained display of Mao's love for the idiosyncrasies of real life, a love which few decision-makers or theorists can afford to share. It is also a basic type of cognitive experience of local politics in the soviet; one may presume that other localities would have a mix of similarities and idiosyncrasies like Yongfeng, and one careful investigation broadens the horizons of expectation.

Mao as Social Scientist

Both the factual content and the methodology of investigation exemplified in the Xingguo Investigation are extremely important for Mao's later activities. Besides the investigations already discussed, four other articles are important for deriving a picture of Mao's investigative methodology and its place in his political thinking: "Oppose Book Worship" (May 1930),^[42] his preface and postscript to Rural Surveys (March and April 1941),^[43] and "No Investigation, No Right to Speak, No Correct Investigation, Still No Right to Speak" (April 1933).^[44]

Mao's most emphatic point in all of these works is the inescapable personal obligation of every cadre to investigate his objective social world. The first paragraph of "Oppose Book Worship" makes this point with vigor:

Unless you have investigated a problem, you will be deprived of the right to speak on it. Isn't that too harsh? Not in the least. When you have not probed into a problem, into the present facts and its past history, and know nothing of its essentials, whatever you say about it will undoubtedly be nonsense. Talking nonsense solves no problems, as everyone knows, so why is it unjust to deprive you of the right to speak? A few comrades always keep their eyes shut and talk nonsense, and for a communist that is disgraceful. How can a communist keep his eyes shut and talk nonsense?

It won't do.
It won't do.
You must investigate!
You must not talk nonsense![^4]

The spirit of this paragraph expresses one of the oldest traits of Mao's writing—namely, conveying to the reader a sense of urgency in doing something now. In his earliest published work on physical education, Mao made it clear to the reader that he was condemned to a feeble brain and a vacillating will in a short-lived body if the message to exercise were ignored. In "Oppose Book Worship," Mao makes it clear that one's identity as a good communist demands serious investigation of one's surroundings because a commitment to revolutionary leadership requires study of the objective situation. "Everyone with responsibility for giving leadership... must personally undertake investigation into the specific social and economic conditions and not merely rely on reading reports."^[45] The point can be made more elegantly with a dictum from the "Preface to Rural Surveys": one must be a student of the masses before becoming their leader.

A composite picture of the object of Mao's rage, the "teacher by negative example," can be drawn from Mao's criticisms. One might expect a root problem of laziness, and indeed Mao observes that some comrades "eat their fill and sit dozing in their offices all
day long without ever moving a step and going out among the masses to investigate.” But the question of energy is not primary. Unnecessary mistakes can be made “not because of failure to make careful plans before taking action but because of failure to study the specific social situation carefully before making the plans.” The basic error is not laziness but what Mao calls “idealism”—the belief that one’s mental struggle with a problem can solve it. One might criticize subjective idealism in two different ways. One might emphasize that stubbornness of subordinates results in heresy and dysfunctions in the revolutionary organization. Or one might emphasize that the dogmatism of leadership results in losing touch with reality. This second direction is the one taken by Mao. His target is the ineffective cadre rather than the disobedient cadre. The books whose worship one should oppose are Marx and the party directives.

Mao’s position of course indicates no antagonism toward communist doctrines or the CCP’s authority. Mao’s point is that the correctness of theory and authority is immanent in their practical utility, and this utility is vitiated by dogmatism of believers and subordinates.

When we say Marxism is correct, it is certainly not because Marx was a “prophet” but because his theory has been proved correct in our practice and in our struggle. We need Marxism in our struggle. Hence the study of Marxism should not be a quest for purity but a quest for utility. In the same manner, organizational obedience is not a quest for exactness, but one for maximum coordinated effect:

When we say that a directive of a higher organ is correct, that is not just because it comes from “a higher organ of leadership” but because its contents conform with both the objective and subjective circumstances of the struggle and meet its requirements.

What is considered by the idealist to be the faithful execution of his mission is thus completely redefined:

To carry out a directive of a higher organization blindly, and seemingly without any disagreement, is not really to carry it out but is the most artful way of opposing or sabotaging it.

This view places a great responsibility on each cadre, because he must make his personal judgment of the applicability of doctrine and directives to his leadership situation. In order to be correct, his decision should be based on an understanding of what needs to be done and what can be done. Investigation is the process of acquiring this understanding of the objective situation.

Mao describes his method of investigation in greatest detail in “Oppose Book Worship.” The basic technique is to hold fact-finding meetings of from three to eight persons with concrete experience of the subject of investigation. The investigator should prepare a detailed outline and stimulate discussion on its points, taking notes on the answers. The basic ingredient in a successful investigation is described in “Preface to Rural Surveys”:

These cadres, the peasants, the xiucai [old-style scholar], the jailer, the merchant and the revenue clerk were all my esteemed teachers, and as their pupil I had to be respectful and comradely in my attitude; otherwise they would have paid no attention to me, and though they knew, would not have spoken or, if they spoke, would not have told all they knew.

The best description of one of Mao’s fact-finding meetings is the opening paragraph of the Xingguo Investigation described earlier.

From a different perspective, Mao’s justification of investigation as essential to revolutionary pragmatism sets the horizons of “correct” investigation by specifying its utility. An investigation which is not useful for informing the revolutionary movement is a waste of time. Mao is not interested in pursuing “truth”—that is, data (social fact) and laws (regularities of social fact)—for its own sake:

Of late [1930], the comrades in the Fourth Army of the Red Army have generally given attention to the work of investigation, but the method many of them employ is wrong. The results of their investigations are therefore as trivial as a grocer’s accounts, or resemble the many strange tales a country bumpkin hears when he comes to town, or are like a distant view of a populous city from a mountain top. This kind of investigation is of little use and cannot achieve our main purpose.

With the practical goal of a social revolution conceptualized in terms of a Marxist paradigm, the informational goals of investigation are to a great extent predetermined:
Our chief method of investigation must be to dissect the different social classes, the ultimate purpose being to understand their interrelations, to arrive at a correct appraisal of class forces and then to formulate the correct tactics for struggle, defining which classes constitute the main force in the revolutionary struggle, which classes are to be won over as allies, and which classes are to be overthrown. This is our sole purpose.11

The emphasis on fundamental class analysis is particularly strong in "Oppose Book Worship" because in 1930 the basic questions of class alliance, especially what to do with the rich peasants, were a subject of hot debate. Although the context is completely different, this research interest is strongly reminiscent of Mao's 1926 articles on the importance of the peasantry. By the time of the Xingguo Investigation attention had shifted from basic revolutionary strategy to the effects of government policy. What is present in all the Jiangxi investigations (and, less explicitly, in the Hunan Report) is a self-conscious determination of research interest by Mao's immediate problem. But predetermination does not lead, as one might expect, to a debilitating narrowness of perspective in investigation. The necessity of systematic investigation presupposes a social reality which is penetrable but not self-evident. Alert investigation is essential because of its vital informational role in determining concrete revolutionary potential. Thus there is a codetermination of revolutionary purpose (informed by doctrine and authority) and social situation (discovered through investigation). This basic outlook is most explicitly formulated by Mao in "On Practice" (1937).

What has been presented so far is an individual model of the role of social investigation. But beyond the personal need to know one's own objective context there is an organizational need to have coordinated knowledge of a larger objective framework:

A Communist Party's correct and unswerving tactics of struggle can in no circumstances be created by a few people sitting in an office; they emerge in the course of mass struggle, that is, through actual experience.14

As suggested here, the party's own history is a major education in objectivity and correct tactics. But it must also strive to understand its present environment. A grasp of current conditions presupposes a different level of investigation—namely, the gathering of statistics. The article "No Investigation, No Right to Speak, No Correct Investigation, Still No Right to Speak" was written as an explanation for two accompanying questionnaires (on landholdings and population by class) which all cadres were supposed to fill out in their areas. In describing the project Mao shares the perennial dream of practical social science: "If we can now fill in these two questionnaires with correct statistics based on strict attention to reality, then we will be able to solve many of our problems, especially many current practical problems of land distribution."15 Of course, Mao's desire to clarify policy dilemmas by recourse to "iron reality" (like William James' "brute facts") has many potential pitfalls in its execution, most centering on the pollsters. Mao therefore exhorts the cadres to acquire a deep knowledge of this type of work, to distinguish categories clearly, and to fill in only real quantities. He reminds them: "If every point is not grasped clearly during the investigation and instead you are in a jumble, then this will necessarily lead to a blurring of class distinctions and the statistics will lose their true value."16 It must be noted, however, that Mao's own definition of rich peasant status is quite vague: "a man for whom exploitation provides a significant portion (xiangdang bufen) of income." Only in the second stage of the Land Investigation Movement of 1933, when the success of the movement hinged on the interpretation of "a significant portion," did Mao finally provide an exhaustive distinction between the middle and rich peasant classifications.17 In this Mao resembles many another social scientist whose project has been weakened by vagueness in a key concept. In any event his attempt to obtain a comprehensive description of the soviet area and to involve every cadre in social investigative work demonstrates a respect for the existing situation which is an important residue of his early base area experience.

The Villages, the Party, and Social Revolution

The general sketch of rural classes and their attitudes toward revolution which Mao proposed in early 1926 remained quite accurate for the basic dynamics of rural politics. The middle peasants, poor peasants, hired hands, and vagrants were the natural mainstays of the revolution; the landlords and rich peasants were its targets and opponents. But to evoke such natural support depended on the party's rural policies, which in turn demanded a
fine understanding of village interrelationships and the effects of redistribution in the base area. The arrival of the Red Army and the overthrow of the traditional village elite and its landownership base transformed class relations, sometimes in unexpected ways.

The Peasant Environment

Among environments for revolution, that of revolution among the peasantry was the least understood in 1927. Surely some of the motivation behind Qu Qiubai’s directive to proletarianize the peasantry was a desire to force the unfamiliar rural situation into familiar urban relations. Because of his insistence on the centrality of the peasant question for the national revolution and his earlier peasant movement experience, Mao was far better prepared for rural work than most of his colleagues. But the problem of creating a political-military force out of rural conditions was very different from that of inducing peasant participation in a movement which had already shifted the provincial and regional balance of power.

The peasantry had long been a source of frustration to revolutionaries. Despite its numbers and degree of oppression, it is prone to a conservatism which allows it to remain immobile or to be duped by reactionary political forces. To take an illustration from Zhejiang province in 1926:

[Due to the depredations of warlord wars] people can’t make a living, and therefore the peasants are very suspicious of and even curse the republican form of government. All the evils caused by the warlords and the bureaucrats are seen as republican evils. Thus although common opinion is not for restoring the Manchu emperor, it does generally hope for the emperor with the true mandate to emerge and put the situation in order, and then the empire will attain the great peace. They especially don’t understand the significance of our party [the KMT/CCP]; on the other hand they are not hostile to it."

The situation described here is that of a population gravely affected by developments in the national political economy but failing to defend its own interests. It is not the complexity of rural class relations which causes inertia. Although there is more than one type of rural class structure, there is in any of them than there is in a corresponding urban setting. So far as class is concerned, the fundamental difference between rural and urban settings is that economic interdependence in the countryside is far less impersonal. As William Hinton has described in *Fanzhen*, the land reform cadres in the late 1940s had to educate the villagers to a consciousness of classes—not that the villagers did not remember and resent every instance of oppression, but hitherto they had blamed it on Mr. Chen (the bad landlord) rather than on the landlord (Mr. Chen). For all their numbers and oppressive conditions, the peasants tend to remain isolated in their personal worlds of exploitation rather than form a politically conscious class. To use Marx’s excellent metaphor, the peasantry constitutes the mass of the nation in the same way that potatoes put into a sack constitute a sack of potatoes."

From this general description, it follows that a modern revolutionary movement attempting to use the peasantry as its main force would have their political education as its central task—not the replacement of one ideology by another but an original conceptualization of politics by the villagers. This education can only take place at the local level and through the process of political struggle. Unless village affairs are integrated into the world of national politics, the village will remain as external to the new society as it was to the old. To nationalize peasant politics, there must be a localization of modern political leadership.

The village orientation of rural revolution implies that the liberation of each village is an individual event, and the success of deepening social revolution in the villages relies on the participation of each village’s inhabitants. Although by defeating the armed forces of the landlords the Red Army also overthrew landlord power in the villages, this in itself did not usually produce a social transformation in the villages. The village poor were still intimidated by the prestige of the remaining rich peasants and landlords—and by the possibility of the return of the White forces.

Only with the encouragement of the persistently egalitarian land policy of the base area did the poor and middle peasants emerge to struggle with the remnants of the old hierarchy and the opportunists. To proceed from this basic achievement of rural mass power to the development of a mass political system took even model villages the entire life span of the Jiangxi Soviet.

Village Social Structure

In both Jinggangshan and Jiangxi, there were social entities of some significance which cut across class lines. Both places had strong clan organizations, and at least Jinggangshan had an ethnic
problem. As Philip Huang has shown, secret society members involved in smuggling Xingguo chickens for Guangdong salt were a major force in Xingguo after landlord power had been weakened. Moreover, in many cases class membership was difficult to determine, and some individuals did not act according to their class background. Nevertheless, it is evident particularly in the Xingguo investigation that rural class structure was by far the most important determinant of rural social structure. Thus the most appropriate description of base area social structure is by class, comprising a sort of composite update of Mao's 1926 "Analysis of Various Peasant Classes."

**Landlords.** Mao reports extreme concentration of landownership in Jinggangshan (60-80 percent) and considerable concentration in Xingguo (40 percent), and the major presence of landlords in Mao's 1928-1930 writings as leaders of antirevolutionary local forces. In the four townships of Yongfeng district in Xingguo, most of the men of the twelve landlord families escaped or were killed, although two joined the revolution and became government officials. The major form of landlord exploitation was rent, which ranged from 50 to 60 percent (the lower rent being for fields subject to drought and flood). As a group the landowners were not directly involved in usury, although some lent large sums of money to rich peasants at 15 to 18 percent interest and these in turn parceled it out to poor peasants at 30 percent. Moreover, three-fifths of the clan-owned temple lands, which comprised 10 percent of all land in Yongfeng, were managed by "bad gentry" (tisheng) whose own rental fields were insufficient to make a living. In all these occupations, the landowners were targets of the revolution. Their land and temple lands were confiscated and debts were canceled. The landlords disappeared as a class with the revolution.

**Rich Peasants.** This class posed the most complex problems for the base areas. Rich peasants were defined as those who depended significantly on both their own labor and on exploitation in the form of hiring, rental, or loans. Their landholdings were 30 percent of the land in Yongfeng, although they comprised only 5 percent of the population. But their most conspicuous form of exploitation was moneylending. Eighty percent of all money loans were made by rich peasants to poor peasants. Grain loans were handled by the temples and relief granaries at a lower interest rate, but these loans were difficult to obtain in the spring shortage period. The rich peasants preferred to sell almost all their surplus grain and make cash loans for its purchase. Unlike the temples, relief granaries, and pawnbrokers, they were willing to let interest mount on a delinquent debtor rather than foreclose.

As the Red Army approached, most of the rich peasants sided with the landlords. In Yongfeng, twenty-three of thirty-two rich peasants were counterrevolutionary. But the greater presence of the rich peasants in the village, their entrepreneurial habits, and their intimate involvement with village affairs made them a much more potent political adversary of land reform within the village than the landlords. In the power vacuum immediately following the Red Army's arrival, many could use their connections, prestige, and qualifications to secure important offices in the revolutionary government and the party.

**Middle Peasants.** Since the middle peasants were independent farmers, their oppression by the feudal system was only indirect. Their economic advantages from the revolution were in general not vital. Most increased their land, debts were canceled, oxen cost less, and there were no more marriage, death, or perfumed paper expenses. But their political advances were more important. From a prerevolutionary position outside the basic power structure of the village, they came to occupy 40 percent of local government positions in Yongfeng.

The reaction of the middle peasants to the Red Army was completely different in Jinggangshan and Xingguo due to a basic difference in land policy. The early land policy (prescribed by the Central Committee) was to confiscate all land, including that of the middle peasants, and redistributed shares were not really owned by the peasants who received them. This policy led to a village division between landowners and nonowners, and as a result all the "intermediate classes" (which Mao at this time described as small landlords and owner-peasants) obstructed soviet work and went over to the Whites. In new areas in Jinggangshan owner-peasant land was not confiscated, and there the owner-peasants and poor peasants struggled together against the "local bullies and evil gentry." In Yongfeng this policy had been maintained from the start and thus the middle peasants participated just as well as the poor peasants in the revolution.

**Poor Peasants.** Before the revolution, the poor peasants depended on rented fields and loans for survival and were in no position to be active in the social and political life of the village. They
were the most generally benefited class in the revolution. Not only did they receive land and have debts canceled, but their shortage of grain was made up by a division of the stores of the landlords and counterrevolutionary rich peasants. Moreover, the price of grain went down after the revolution. Having been rescued from an existence which was marginal in every respect, it is not surprising that the poor peasants eventually became the principal pillar of rural governmental power and the leading class in the countryside. But attaining this central position involved struggle against the upper class and vagrant elements who became important elements in the local organs which were set up immediately after the revolution.

Farm Laborers. The hired farm workers, the village proletariat, were so poor and despised before the revolution that in the first year they had improved but not transformed their condition. Mao uses marriage as an index of prosperity. Rich peasants all had at least one wife. Ninety percent of middle peasants were married, as were 70 percent of the poor peasants and 10 percent of the vagrants. But only 1 percent of the farm laborers had wives—and even after a soviet decree that everyone should get married they had a difficult time finding wives. But this was an incidental problem. With the revolution, hired laborers got land, but they had to borrow tools and oxen from better-off relatives. Long-term work disappeared after the revolution, and it is a sign of the low bargaining power of the hired laborers that they did not demand a raise even with a 30 percent decline in part-time work. They were still outside the political structure of the village. There was not a single hired hand in a position of governmental authority in Yongfeng district, a fact explained by their social disabilities. According to the middle and poor peasants, they “can’t read, can’t talk, aren’t enlightened, and aren’t familiar with public affairs.”

Artisans. Trades which catered to the conspicuous consumption of the wealthy classes were ruined by the revolution, and those artisans either became peasants or left the soviet area. Even traditional crafts like carpentry were disrupted seriously. The demand of underemployed artisans for a share in the land distribution was met with some hostility by the peasants. In one case two hundred artisans in a town were denied land by surrounding peasants. Even in a completely rural district like Yongfeng, eighteen crafts were represented and there was a confrontation over whether artisans should receive land. It was decided that they could receive land, but if they worked over a hundred days a year, half the land would be returned to the soviet. The artisans were cognizant of their more or less proletarian status and had organized trade union branches in rural areas.

Vagrants. This colorful group of bandits, gamblers, beggars, fortune-tellers, Daoists, and others, sometimes designated “lumpenproletarians,” had an importance completely out of proportion to their numbers in the early base area years. In the first year at Jinggangshan, they made up the majority of the Red Army. In Yongfeng, a little over 1 percent of the population were vagrants, but they held ten local government posts. The most plausible reason for the early prominence of vagrants is that in contrast to the rest of the rural population they were risk-takers. Mao optimistically reported that since vagrants received land, their previous occupations thereupon ceased. Their loose ways were sometimes transferred to local party and government operations, however, where for instance only good-looking women were recruited for government work.

The Party

It would be unhistorical and unrealistic to ask the question, “Faced with such an array of economic situations and political attitudes, what was the party to do?” The party had first to commit itself to the task of armed survival and rural revolutionary leadership; only then could it discover the social structure and potential of the villages through a difficult process of policy experimentation. This was a prolonged and painful identity crisis for the cosmopolitan, proletarian-oriented CCP, and the threats of militarization, ruralization, and localization which the center perceived were real. What should be surprising to historians is not that the Central Committee balked at accepting this new starting point for the revolution, but that Mao was so quick to perceive the revolutionary legitimacy and essential requirements of a protracted base area struggle. He was helped in this transition not as much by his Marxism as by the objective necessities of survival and his basic revolutionary-populist approach.

Although praetorianism has never really been a problem for the Chinese Communists, the shift in 1927 to a primary reliance on military strength for survival and expansion was a challenge to many aspects of the party’s identity. Qu Qiubai’s directive to Mao in September 1927 that “troops and bandits are merely a subsidi-
ary force for agrarian revolution is not simply indicative of a traditional Chinese (and CCP) distaste for the military. The KMT’s subservience to the military forces of the Northern Expedition had led it to blunt and finally abandon its social revolutionary program. That the Red Army remained politically reliable and submissive despite the centrality of military matters was a considerable accomplishment. The major reasons for this success I think are two: the political and social transformation within the army, and the unity between the army’s political tasks in the villages and the development of its own military support structures. The principles of political education, equality, and democracy tended to create a revolutionary army rather than an army in service to the revolution. Moreover, the army’s support of village revolution was not a political obligation extraneous to its own welfare; it was, simultaneously, the establishment of its own logistical, paramilitary, and recruitment resources. Both these factors were strained by the year of mobile fighting in 1929, and in the Gutian Resolution Mao explicitly brought the army back to its internal and external political-military integration. Mao’s political conception of the military was part of his reason for rejecting Li Lisan’s and Lin Biao’s roving guerrilla strategy in 1930.

The party leadership had another qualm with Mao’s rural efforts: the influx of peasants into the party organization and the resulting dilution of its proletarian character. At the Sixth Party Congress in Moscow in the summer of 1928, the complaint was made that “now the party organization is in danger of being separated from the proletariat” and the first item of evidence was “peasants now outnumber worker comrades at a ratio of over seven to one.” Proletarian hegemony—the scientific forecast of Marx and the path to power of Lenin—seemed unlikely in a rural setting. In what sense could the party remain the vanguard of the proletariat? This question was never directly addressed by Mao, who thus avoided a major debate on party theory, but at the expense of clarity in a basic concept. The CCP’s stress on the industrial proletariat was eliminated not by Mao but by the successive failures of policies derived from it. Mao himself stressed the petit-bourgeois and sometimes even feudal origins of the ideological problems of the base area and the Red Army, and while at Jinggangshan he requested that workers be sent to him to strengthen the proletarian element there. But Mao’s operative class orientation was toward the oppressed. He expected the continuation of the political struggle after the petit-bourgeois revolution of land division to come basically from the poor peasants and to be directed at opportunists misdirecting local policy. He expected leadership to serve this continuing struggle and the interests of the party by remaining close to the masses. A mass-line flexibility thus eased out faithfulness to directives or knowledge of historical materialism as the final determiner of policy. Leadership became more important for Mao than discipleship.

The specific task of the party in the land revolution was to provide correct policies and to facilitate the deepening of the revolution. The party was not supposed to dominate the soviets or supplant them as decision-making bodies. Besides promoting the correct line in all matters, the party was to avoid harmful conflicts such as clan wars and the localization endemic to governments. After the general pattern of rural dynamics was known, the party could facilitate the quick movement from one stage of the revolutionary process to the next. But the obligation of closeness to the masses, both in order to avoid dogmatic mistakes and as an ethically correct orientation, remained the basic premise of leadership.

Social Revolution

One argument for flexibility and pragmatism in leadership was the unexpected character of social revolution in the countryside. Three problems in particular demanded innovative leadership from Mao: directing the role of the Red Army as midwife of the rural revolution, balancing protection of the “intermediate classes” with the redistributive needs of the village poor, and guiding the development of rural revolution from initial insurrection to a functioning democratic centralism.

The role of the Red Army in establishing the Jinggangshan and Jiangxi base areas belies both orthodox Marxist and more recent theories of rural revolutionary dynamics. The principle of the reversal of exploitation behind the theory of class struggle would lead us to expect that the most oppressed classes would be the most revolutionary. Arthur Stinchcombe applies this principle to rural areas by predicting that family-size tenants (in China’s case the poor peasants) would be rebellious because of the clear sacrifice of most of their income in rent, the unequal distribution of farming risks, and the remoteness and apparent superfluity of the landlord. But the initial role of the rural proletariat (the farm work-
ers) was insignificant, and even the poor peasants, who comprised 60 percent of the population, were not originally in control of the revolution. More recently the thesis has been proposed that middle peasants are most likely to lead a rural revolution precisely because their relative independence from direct exploitation gives them more freedom of action. But the early base area insurrections were not predominantly middle peasant revolutions. In the first insurrections at Jinggangshan, the middle peasants were allied with the rich peasants and small landlords against the revolution. In November 1930, Mao heard reports that 80 percent of the party of Ruijin county were landlords and rich peasants, as were 38 percent of the Shangyou cccp, including a White militia captain. Evidently the necessary condition for the establishment of a base area was the Red Army.

But the Red Army was not a sufficient condition for rural revolution. As Alavi has observed, “The land reform was implemented by peasant committees and not by a communist bureaucracy.” The Red Army’s destruction of the military power of the landlords and the initial wariness and confusion of the classes most benefited by their overthrow led to a power vacuum which was filled by opportunists and not yet discredited members of the old power structure. Presumably the Red Army’s effectiveness in propaganda could make its job of midwifing local insurrections more effective, but it lacked the personnel and the detailed knowledge of local conditions which would have been necessary to supply outside leadership for the first stages of land distribution. But the insurrection was only the beginning of the social revolution in the village.

The most urgent practical task of base area leadership was designing policy which was appropriate for the village social structure, consonant with the party’s ideological goals, and efficient for maximizing village support. As early as the Jinggangshan Report, Mao explicitly preferred a comprehensive, mobilizational approach to more radical but less effective majoritarian approach.

It was obvious that successful revolutionary policy must take into account the needs and desires of the masses. If the Red Army relied solely on its military superiority to require compliance, it would greatly raise its cost of administration and reduce its level of village support. But there were alternative criteria for determining the popularity of policy: one stressed the amount of effective popular support which the policy could mobilize; the other stressed its congruence with the preferences of the majority of “citizens.” In many cases these criteria do not diverge; a policy preferred by the majority can usually generate considerable active support. But with the issue of land distribution in Jinggangshan, the distinction between Mao’s mobilized masses democracy and a more formalistic majoritarian democracy resulted in a major policy divergence. The issue was whether all land should be confiscated for redistribution. Since the majority were poor peasants, their preference could be assumed to be the majority preference. But majority rule did not turn out to be the most feasible land policy because it would have alienated the intermediate classes. The most obvious problem occurred when communist control waned:

In a revolutionary low tide the most difficult problem of the base area is keeping a firm hold on the intermediate class. The main reason for betrayal by this class is that it has received too heavy a blow from the revolution.

When a region was retaken by the White armies, even the small landowners would lead the troops to the houses of the revolutionary peasants. Hence, as Mao put it, in bad times the poor peasant class became isolated troops (gu jin).

The effect of an anti-middle peasant land policy in normal times was hardly less serious, for it drove the owner-peasants into a powerful collusion with the small landlords which frustrated the mobilization of even the poor peasants. This anti-communist alliance was effected through the clan system, which was dominated more by the intermediate classes than by the big reactionaries. In short, a land policy that was too radical (although in the interests of the majority) produced an opposition too large to be overcome in good times and a tool for the thorough eradication of communist influence in bad times.

This experience led Mao to a nonmajoritarian, although not undemocratic, criterion for policy. If there is a force present which could, if alienated, prevent the mobilization of popular power, their nonalienation becomes a decisive policy guideline. This remained for Mao a fundamental principle, the domestic counterpart of his alliance politics. For Mao, the phrase “overwhelming majority” is not a mere figure of speech or a quantitative proportion: it is the plurality which is needed to over-
whelm. The masses should never become isolated troops; the enemy should always be "a handful." The party leadership from 1932 to 1934 did not heed this lesson, but it reappears as a basic principle of Mao's politics in the Anti-Japanese War.

The problem of guiding the social revolution in the villages out of the initial stages to a truly mass government was not finally solved until 1933-1934. The contradiction between an extreme suspicion of local officials and a desire to rely on the masses was quite frustrating. Mao first applied the criterion of class background to purge local party membership in 1928, and this standard increasingly became his chief "quality control." But class background was determined at the local level, and as the disadvantages of being a landlord or rich peasant increased, many of them were redesignated by willing officials. Well over 13,000 disguised landlord and rich peasant families were uncovered during three months of the Land Investigation Movement of 1933. Other methods of control involved general meetings to investigate progress (like the one Mao attended in November 1930), deadlines for implementing various policies, and inspections. The basic problem was to encourage the poor peasants and farm laborers to struggle for a deepening of the revolution. But this was a difficult mobilizational task because the existing local leadership was directly in control of the village. Although Xingguo later became a model county, Philip Huang reports that when the KMT reoccupied Xingguo in April 1931 during their Second Encirclement Campaign against Jiangxi, substantial numbers of poor villagers aided the counterrevolutionary forces. It is likely that in most localities the political struggle evolved in a zigzag pattern with little effective central coordination until 1933.

Land Policy

The central policy concern for base area leadership, and a major policy concern for party leadership in general, was land policy. Land policy remained in flux from 1927 until the Soviet Land Law was proclaimed in December 1931. In part this flux was caused by power shifts and conflicting interpretations of the rural revolution, but even Mao's land policy underwent considerable development as base area experience required the modification of some preconceptions and as its complexity required a corresponding level of detail in application.

Conflicting Land Policies

Especially in 1927-1928, there was a cacophony of land policy suggestions, reflecting the chaos of the times and the novelty of the issue for the party. True to his earlier moderation in the pursuit of rural interests, Chen Duxiu suggested in November 1927 that Sun Yat-sen's slogan of "land to the tillers" was "too profound for the masses to understand." He suggested the "four nots": not to pay rent, not to pay taxes, not to hand over grain to the government, not to pay debts. The policy of the Central Committee under Qu Qiubai was more radical but confused:

In order to carry out thoroughly the agrarian revolution, the insurrection must undertake to confiscate the landholdings of all the big and medium landlords (total confiscation is the factual outcome), slaughter all village bosses and the evil gentry and reactionaries, and confiscate their properties.

Qu quickly moved to a more consistent policy of total confiscation and revolutionary terrorism, a policy which created the problem, discussed earlier, of a hostile intermediate class in Jinggangshan. The peasant policy adopted by the Sixth Party Congress in Moscow in 1928 was considerably more realistic. It stipulated that "equal distribution of land should not be applied forcibly in areas where the middle peasants constitute a majority." Although this policy was not as liberal as the one Mao was already applying to the new areas of Jinggangshan, its prudent tone and emphasis on alliance with the middle peasants was a welcome relief from Qu's strident radicalism. As with Qu, the Sixth Congress did not have a clear position on handling rich peasants. It expected them to be hostile, but it suggested that when possible "the CCP should endeavor to absorb rich peasants into the struggle against warlords, landlords, and gentry."

While the Sixth Congress's more prudent view of the rural revolution was welcomed by Mao, its openness to collaboration with rich peasants was exploited by Li Lisan in order to maximize support for his urban insurrections. In his "Land Law" of June 1930, Li made only the rental lands of the rich peasants liable for confiscation and allowed redistribution of land according to labor power. Like Qu and the Sixth Congress, he considered the redistribution a temporary measure and forbade the sale of land.
while encouraging collective farms. These measures caused a rich peasant, pro-Li party faction to flourish in Jiangxi.

Li's policies met with strong opposition on two fronts: from the Comintern, which had since the Sixth Congress decided on an anti-rich peasant policy that allowed the sale of land, and from Mao, whose experience in running base areas had also brought him to a stronger stand against the rich peasants. The Comintern had already expressed a change of viewpoint in a letter of 7 June 1929. This turn against the rich peasants coincided with Stalin's decision to liquidate the kulak (rich peasant) class in the Soviet Union. By September 1930, three months after Li's policy was proposed, the Comintern had already engineered changes which gave up the idea of state cooperatives, permitted the confiscation of all rich peasant land, and also allowed the purchase and sale of land.

Mao's reaction to Li Lisan's land policy was even prompter than that of the Comintern. A resolution adopted by groups under Mao's influence in June 1930 opposed Li's just-published land law with a thorough analysis of the counterrevolutionary nature of the rich peasants and the necessity for a vigorous policy in dealing with them. Although this document was obviously not written by Mao, it is in line with the direction his land policy was taking and with the results of his investigations later in the fall. The Futian Incident of 8 December 1930 dramatized the antagonism which had developed between the pro-Li, pro-rich peasant faction of the Jiangxi Provincial Action Committee and the pro-Red Army, anti-rich peasant forces led by Mao. Eventually, when the Stalinist faction of Russian Returned Students (the "Twenty-eight Bolsheviks") developed their Chinese version of radical antikulakism, even Mao's policy was condemned as pro-rich peasant. By following a fairly constant course, Mao managed to be to the right of Qu Qiubai, to the right and left of the Sixth Congress, to the left of Li Lisan (in land policy only), and then to the right of the Twenty-eight Bolsheviks.

**The Development of Mao's Land Policy**

Mao's own land policy in Jinggangshan and later in Jiangxi shows the tension between his accumulating experience with land policy and his obligation to implement that of the Party Center. The basic principle of his land policy was distributive equality, and policy developments were by and large attempts to make this equalization more effective.

The primary documents for the study of Mao's Jinggangshan land policy are the report of 25 November 1928 and a "Jinggangshan Land Law" dated December 1928. As we have seen, in the report Mao discusses the alienating effect on the intermediate classes of confiscating all land, he had already changed that policy, presumably from September 1928 when new areas began to be acquired. But the land law, dated after the report, still stipulates that all land be confiscated. Since the law is claimed by Mao, we must assume that it is misdated.

The land law has some traits which are characteristic of Mao's approach to policy making. The two most striking traits are the amount of discretion allowed to the local units in applying it and the equality of distribution. Almost every important stipulation lists one principal (zhuti) method or standard and one or more alternatives which could be used in special circumstances. The principal standard for land distribution was according to population with everyone counted equally. The justification for this standard (printed in the law) is that all need to live. Few families were without young or old, and those unable to do fieldwork were nevertheless still doing valuable work for the soviet. The alternative of giving those able to work twice as much land is also allowed. Another stipulation to be noted is that soldiers and officers in the Red Army and Red Guard, as well as workers in public organs, received shares of land and the government hired people to work it for them. The land law applied in Xingguo county in April 1929 differs from the Jinggangshan law in only one item: the restriction of confiscation to public and landlord land. True to current Party Center policy, neither law allowed the sale of distributed land.

The Xingguo version of the Jinggangshan land law was most probably the formal model for rural work until a new and much more detailed land law was promulgated in early 1930. The new law provided for the confiscation of rich peasant land. Land and many other productive resources were to be distributed equally to all regardless of age or sex, including the dependents of reactionaries who remained in the village. All debts were canceled and a system of progressive taxation was established. The most innovative feature of this law is its principles of redistribution. The first principle of "taking from those who have much and adding to those who have little" (chou duo bu shao) is the basic adjustment for quantitative equality. The second principle, "taking from the fertile and adding to the infertile" (chou fei bu shou), adjusts for a
mixed blessing for any of them, although they all profited more than they lost.

Not only did land redistribution sharpen the class struggle in the villages, but its complications created unexpected areas of contention. The major complication was caused by the intersection of the agricultural cycle by land redistribution. When a redistribution occurred at a time other than the winter months between fall harvest and spring fertilization, the question arose whether compensation should be given by the new owners to the previous owners for the work they had already invested in the current harvest. Those who lost land in the redistribution, generally the landlords and rich peasants, sought to mitigate their losses by demanding a share of the crop as compensation for their investment. The official policy was “No reimbursement: divide fields, divide shoots,” but it is a symptom of the village-level power of the rich peasants that most villages actually gave a discounted reimbursement.

The question of how to divide planted fields was the greatest of the policy issues polarizing rich and poor peasants after redistribution was completed, but it was not the only one. The basic conflict was between the desire of the poor peasants to equalize all property and the relatively successful counterdrive of the rich peasants to limit the rural revolution to the more or less conceded matter of landownership. The expressions of this conflict were not always obvious. For instance, after the land redistribution the rich peasants were opposed to allowing rental of land and the poor peasants were in favor of it. This reversal of traditional attitudes was caused by the following situation. After land was divided, many poor peasants and hired hands in particular did not have sufficient implements or manpower to work their expanded holdings. With their surplus productive power (tools and labor), the rich peasants controlled an urgent seller’s market, and they used the antirent propaganda of the communists against their newly land-rich, labor-poor, and tool-poor neighbors. If rent were allowed, the rich peasants preferred a sharecropping arrangement to a set rent, since their profit would not depend so much on intensive cultivation and more land could be rented and worked. The policy which Mao suggested as appropriate for this situation comes down squarely on the side of the poor peasant: first, arrange for the use of the surplus tools of the rich peasants by the poor; second, when land is rented to rich peasants, there is a set rent of not less than 50 percent of the normal harvest; third, no refusal to rent. The village government could forcibly distribute lands to be

Complications of Land Policy

Setting the guidelines for confiscation and redistribution of land did not by any means solve all land policy problems or exhaust Mao’s leadership responsibilities in this regard. Important complications involving land policy developed from two sources: the inherent complexity of rural conditions and, more important, the disruption caused by land distribution itself.

The first complication resulted from the discovery that village productive resources were not simply fields. Thus the question of how to divide mountains from which cooking oil could be obtained, firewood sources, ponds (large and small), tea plantations, mulberry trees, and so forth was much more complex than any Party Central directive had imagined. Mao’s principle was that all things which could be divided should be; but the specification of this principle led to many complicated sections of land laws and extra distribution committees in the villages. Moreover, the economic situations of individual villagers were more complex than the class designations in the laws suggested. This problem is especially evident in the family histories of Mao’s eight informants in the Xingguo Investigation. The land reform was not an un-

qualitative equality of holdings. With only the first principle, rich peasants were inclined to give away their worst fields and retain their best ones as their redistribution share. As Mao noted in his Xingguo Investigation, rich peasants have very good fields, buy only very good fields, and take only good fields as pawn. With the second principle in effect, there was real equality in landholdings. The major remaining inequalities were in farming abilities, labor power, and farm tools.

The two principles of redistribution both reflected and shaped a tendency of land reform to develop in three stages. The first redistribution, done just after the insurrection, was usually characterized by irregularities caused by the initial village leadership. The second division usually attained quantitative equality. The third and most difficult division aimed at qualitative equality. Not all villages followed this three-stage pattern. Often qualitative equality was not achieved despite several divisions, but in one case the first division was qualitative. Sometimes land redistribution was completely outside this framework: the first land division in one locality gave young and old one and a half units, a policy which was criticized because it was based on traditional notions of filial piety.
rented. This last item is a symptom of a serious difficulty in maintaining production. In the Jiangxi Soviet, prerevolutionary levels of production were not regained until 1933, and in November 1930 Mao notes the widespread problem of abandoned fields.18 Certainly military devastation caused by the many shifts of the Red-White battlefield accounted for some of the lost production, but this experience helps explain Mao’s policies after the Long March, which protect the rich peasant economy.

In general, complications necessitated a greater specification of Mao’s land policy, but no new principles were added to the economic standard of thorough equalization of holdings and the political standard of reliance on mass struggle combined with a suspicion of rich peasants. This relative stability in land policy was soon upset by the arrival in Jiangxi of the Central Committee under the new leadership of the Twenty-eight Bolsheviks and the reconstitution of the Jiangxi Soviet as the Chinese Soviet Republic in 1931–1932. These developments left Mao still in charge of administering land policy—but a land policy formulated by party leadership and based on principles significantly different from those he had already evolved in base area work.

Conclusion

From 1927 to 1931, the development of Mao Zedong’s political thought accompanied the development of his practical success as leader of a localized political-military force. Mao’s first theoretical task was to explain the survival of his group after the disasters of 1927. As Mao developed the political-military strategy of base areas from his guerrilla experience, he produced more general norms for correct leadership. Finally, in the large and unfamiliar territory of the Jiangxi Provincial Soviet he faced more involved problems of revolutionary administration. Mao’s leadership role during this period was unique: he was subordinated to central party leadership and at times his command was superseded by their plenipotentiaries, but usually his base area and military command were sufficiently remote from Shanghai to allow the comprehensive discretion necessary to the integrated guerrilla policies he developed.

It seems paradoxical that the period of greatest creativity in the development of Mao’s politics should come at a time when he was most isolated from international and national politics and from the leadership of the CCP and Comintern. But the feeling of paradox stems mainly from the viewer’s expectation of an intellectual source for an intellectual change. Mao’s development of a rural revolutionary strategy was perfectly natural within the practical context of survival. Since Mao’s political innovations were worked out as solutions to the practical problems at hand, he did not self-consciously assert their originality within communist theory. Indeed, given his subordinate position in the dogmatic hierarchy, it was to his advantage to avoid the appearance of originality. Mao claimed to be dealing with the actual problems of the base areas from an objective vantage point informed by experience and investigation. Thus, he argued, he had arrived at correct policies.

Mao’s strategic innovations during this period were based on continuities in his political values. In the mobilization politics of the base areas one finds the same conviction of the supremacy of mass power which was first expressed in his May Fourth writings. In the 1928 “Report to the Central Committee” one finds the same concern for aggregating popular enthusiasm which underlies the 1919 “great union of the popular masses” proposal. Moreover, Mao’s emphasis on practical effectiveness is very much in evidence during this period, the most obvious instances being his criticisms of idealist high-level leaders who were unconcerned about the effectiveness of their directives. The attention to revolutionary organization and ideology which was the basic development of the national revolutionary period of Mao’s thought is also very much in evidence. Mao’s moral demands on party members are classically expressed in the first part of the Gutian Resolution, and Marxist class analysis structures his investigations and policy. Despite the remoteness of the base areas, Mao was still operating within the framework of national and international party leadership. The two new organizations of the base area period, the Red Army and the soviet governments, were not organized with the same ideological and organizational discipline as the party, but with their more popular character they were expected to serve the same ends and observe the same principles.

The basic contribution of the early base area period to the development of Mao’s thought is the practical combination of revolutionary populism and organization in a context of localized political-military hegemony. This combination led to the development of a rural revolutionary strategy outside the expectations of Marxist theory or cccp leadership. The apprehensiveness of Party Central leadership concerning Mao’s activities in the countryside had some foundation: Mao’s new strategy was not simply an ap-
plication of existing theories to a new environment. His approach to policy and its correlative values constituted a new but latent paradigm for Chinese Communist politics.

Only Mao's success at developing a peasant movement out of his Jinggangshan beginnings has obscured the unique circumstances of base area construction. It was not the mixture of radical urban intellectuals and peasants of all classes which had produced the wildfire growth of the peasant associations in 1926-1927; the naivete of the first and the trust of the second were finally destroyed by the 1927 failures of the Autumn Harvest Uprising and the Canton Commune. Nor was it the smooth infiltration of the villages under the banner of national defense which characterized the Anti-Japanese War. In Jinggangshan and Jiangxi, military advantages of location, the partial politicization of the peasantry and the army through the Northern Expedition, and the exploitive structure of village life were all necessary elements of base area creation. Exclusive attention to any one of these factors would not have produced a viable base. Correspondingly, Mao's solution to the problem of survival in his protracted rural revolution was an undifferentiated emphasis on guerrilla warfare, political education, and egalitarian redistribution.

Not only was the Red Army necessary to the establishment of the base areas, but the militarization of politics within the base area was necessary for the survival of both the army and its base. Abstracting one-sidedly from this aspect of the base area situation, it is not too dissimilar from that of any major bandit or minor warlord, and Mao's chief innovation would appear to be the militarization of Chinese Communism. Such an interpretation overlooks the equally essential role of political education in the base area. Not only the politicization of the military, but also the encouragement of the struggle of the lower classes in the villages, gave a specific political content to communist military power. The Red Army had political functions, and the enthusiasm of its erstwhile captives and the valor of peasant recruits depended on political motives. Particularly in the villages political education was the central task, because a consciousness of the structure of exploitation was necessary in order to move from the personal vendettas of the initial insurrection to a mass-participant system for continuing the revolution. Mao's approach to local political education was neither completely tutelary nor completely formal-democratic. Self-education through struggle was a more important vehicle than central administrative guidance. But Mao was not majoritarian in either an elective or a polling sense: elective assemblies were too malleable by opportunists, and paying sole attention to the desires of the village majority of poor peasants could prove self-defeating. The aim of Mao's mass politics in the early base area period was not legitimacy but mobilized effectiveness. The legitimacy of his mass politics was guaranteed by his mobilization from the bottom of the social ladder in building his "overwhelming majority." Although this approach means that politics is determined by the interests of the last member of the coalition rather than by its core, it does not contravene the interests of the masses but attempts to realize their opportunities. The mobilization criterion for policy expresses a shift of attention in Mao's communism from problems of revolutionary legitimacy to those of mass leadership. His methodology of objective leadership through mobilization and his ethic of avoiding estrangement from the masses developed in conjunction with the new focus.

Political education and economic redistribution were intimately linked in the base area. We have seen that egalitarianism played a significant role in the army, but its most important arena was in land policy. The ultraegalitarianism of the primitive anarchists described by Eric Hobsbawm seems to have been absent, probably because of the army's role in the insurrections. In Jiangxi, land division started out unequal and moved toward quantitative and qualitative equality. Presumably this equalizing process would involve a struggle between the land-losers and the land-gainers, but equal division should not produce a class war to the death since it provides for everyone. Although the early Jiangxi period was too short and unstable to bring to a head the conflict between the leveling tendency of distributive politics and the concentrating tendency of production economics, we can suppose on the example of Yanan and the People's Republic of China (and even of some later Jiangxi models described in the next chapter) that egalitarian distribution would have eventually required the formation of cooperatives in order to regain productivity. In Mao's view, egalitarian redistribution was the real end of oppression within the village. From this base the political-military revolution could continue.