The general thesis of this study has been that Mao's political thought evolved in a dialectical interaction of theory and practice and became a characteristic political viewpoint by the time of the Long March. More pointedly, my claim is that the interaction of theory and practice with the goal of effective revolutionary action is the basic characteristic of Mao's own pattern of development and the main trait of his political thinking. The novelty of Mao's political paradigm for Chinese and Marxist politics became evident only when it was authoritatively and comprehensively elaborated in the 1936–1945 period. But Mao's emphasis on the primacy of practice should be a warning not to begin the study of his political thought with its formulation. My intention has been not simply to present a prehistory of Mao's political thought but to take the first step toward seriously understanding, evaluating, and using it. The study is not complete because Mao's politics continued to develop, but I hope that it is not partial in the sense of leaving out of consideration an essential aspect of his political thinking.

The previous chapters of this study have presented in detail the development of Mao's thought in its practical political context. This concluding chapter delineates the significance of Mao's experience before the Long March for his later politics and the coherence of his implicit paradigm. After reconsidering Mao's relationship to Marxism and to Chinese political culture, I wish to define the limits of a practical foundation of a political paradigm.
campaigns of 1933, particularly the Land Investigation Movement, Mao grasped the fundamentally positive principle of politics through nonbureaucratic mass campaigns. The structural implications of this leadership method were realized in the model of small-unit soviets stressing mass mobilization and active participation. The principles of popular mobilization, which were almost spontaneous in the threatened intimacy of Jinggangshan, were elaborated into stable axioms and methods of organization. Many policy details—for example, work teams, methods and principles of class analysis, thought struggle—became valuable additions to Mao’s arsenal of governmental techniques. More important, the attention to the proper initiation of a major campaign which is clear in the Land Investigation Movement set a pattern of emphasis on cadre motivation and mobilization, self-restraint on the part of top leadership in order to provide encouragement rather than enervating control, and the establishment of authoritative guidelines and regulations only after a considerable body of experience has been gathered.

This model of the policymaking and implementation process allowed the relationship between Yanan and the anti-Japanese base areas to become a productive dialectic of base area creativity and Yanan’s authoritative coordination rather than the strained relationship of ideological tribute and real independence which existed between Yanan and the Soviet Union. This process was also essential to the domestic policy processes in Yanan, as is particularly clear in the case of the Zhengfeng (Rectification) Movement. In short, many of the political novelties of the Yanan period are in content developments from earlier Jiangxi innovations. But they are transformed because of Mao’s comprehensive leadership, his self-consciousness and self-confidence in application, and the new context of the Anti-Japanese War.

The same claim of continuity in a transformed context can also be made for each earlier period of Mao’s thought in relationship to the one succeeding it. The policy innovations of the csn period can be seen as a return at a higher level of organization to the principles of maximum mobilization evolved in the survival politics of the base area period. Closeness to the masses, self-government, integrated policy—these were principles whose importance and whose methods of implementation had to be rediscovered in the csn environment, but they were present in his earlier politics. Similarly, Mao’s base area politics rested on his analysis of the revolutionary potential of the countryside and the importance of land revolution which had been developed in the pursuit of a truly revolutionary national policy during his Guangdong period. Again, Mao’s party and alliance politics of 1923–1926 presupposed the continuity of his May Fourth activism, practicality, and populism, and these have their roots in Mao’s earlier experiences. The basic innovations of each period were always essential assumptions of the following one and had diminished though less distinct importance for the whole of Mao’s career. The Zunyi Conference is an excellent synecdoche for the movement of Mao’s politics: the introduction of a new stage of his political thought is accomplished by using his tested principles of guerrilla leadership in criticizing the military mistakes of the Twenty-eight Bolsheviks.

It is thus tempting to search for the true origins of “Maoism” in his earliest experiences, but this is an inadequate approach from two points of view. From a theoretical viewpoint, this approach rests on the assumption that the principles of continuity in Mao’s political thought retain their whole significance when they are abstracted from the actual course of Mao’s politics. This assumption is of course an alternative open to the researcher, but it has the disadvantage of being in disagreement with Mao’s theoretical predispositions. Not only does Mao himself insist on the unity of theory and practice; as we have seen, he typically generalizes from experience rather than implementing preconceptions. From a historical viewpoint, an approach which tends to distill the significance of a continuity of thought or action into its first instance presupposes an inaccurate model of Mao’s political development. His political thought did not simply accrete through time, each succeeding layer being more determinate and superficial than the last. Each general recasting of his political activities created a new world of significance for his political thought. In each phase studied, the present situation is as important as past experience in determining the shape of his politics. Hence each innovation has historical roots in experience which condition its applicability in different circumstances. For example, the experience that the May Fourth enlightenment did not transform Chinese politics produced a new context of politics which can be seen as an application of Mao’s principles of practicality and revolutionary populism to new circumstances. But it should also be remembered that this application gave a new meaning to practicality and populism for Mao—and his new practicality and populism were unac-
ceptable to some who had been his coworkers in the earlier period. The change in referent transforms the significance of the term.

If the unity of theory and practice is seen as a central element in Mao’s thinking, the rootedness of his political thought in the practical tasks at hand ceases to be a frustrating obstacle to interpretation and becomes the key to a precise understanding of Mao’s intentions. It is important to study the phases of development chronologically from the beginning because only with this approach is all of the relevant policy experience available to the researcher. Such an approach does not preclude generalizations about Mao’s political thought, but I think it can make the difference between naїve and responsible generalizations.

The Implicit Paradigm of Mao’s Politics

Although Mao himself did not formulate his political paradigm at the end of the csm period, his political development reached sufficient maturity by that time for us to delineate an implicit paradigm of his politics. This is a useful task because it gathers up the commonalities of his political development thus far into a single picture. Moreover, Mao’s later formulation of his political paradigm occurs at a new stage of his development, and in order to separate the true innovations of his post-1935 political thought from his generalizations on earlier experience, we must attempt a 1935 synthesis. In the following paragraphs we will analyze Mao’s implicit political paradigm at three levels: the paradigm of personal example, the strategy of revolution, and the paradigm of politics.

In discussing the contribution of the first half of Mao’s life, it is important to recall that a paradigmatic model is not only a grand intellectual scheme which subsumes particulars. It is also the textbook case, the repeatable experience which shows how to act properly under the paradigm and at the same time demonstrates its utility. For a political paradigm the exemplar is the correct political actor, in our case the model revolutionary. In Jiangxi the collegiality of the Twenty-eight Bolsheviks did not permit the lionizing of any individual leader, and if it had, Mao would have been an unlikely candidate. But despite a relative lack of publicity, his leadership style undoubtedly had some influence on his comrades, and traits which were much publicized later were already clearly present.

Mao’s most remarkable personal characteristic as an activist was his concern for effectiveness. Complemented by extraordinary dedication and energy, Mao’s orientation toward concrete results shaped his political participation from the May Fourth period on. Mao was not an opportunist, but he did aim for goals which he thought were attainable and he sought to mobilize broad support for them.

Directly related to Mao’s practical orientation was his concern for an accurate, objective grasp of the political situation. This concern is evident in the detail of his May Fourth writings and his early CCP writings, but it develops into an explicit exhortation for personal investigation in 1926–1927, when the CCP began to ignore what Mao perceived as the revolutionary potential of the peasantry. In emphasizing investigation, Mao stresses a basically cognitive concern—how to know correct policy—with allowing the question to become either formaliistically methodological or introspectively epistemological. Investigation is a practical activity; its criterion is effectiveness.

Like all forms of policy analysis, Mao’s investigations and recommendations involved values, and these are an essential part of his personal paradigm. Mao’s chief political value was the importance of serving the interests of the masses. In many of Mao’s writings, this principle merges indistinguishably with his emphasis on effectiveness. The bond between these two is Mao’s conviction that the mobilized masses will be the prevailing political force. Hence any policy against the interests of the masses will be ineffective. Belief in the power of the masses and commitment to their interests survived the disappointment of May Fourth hopes and the defeat of the 1927 peasant movement, but these failures did lead Mao to depend less directly on the power of mass spontaneity and to pay more attention to revolutionary organization. The interests of the revolutionary organization, party, Red Army, or soviet government do not, however, displace those of the masses. A criticism of legitimacy is implied in Mao’s 1926–1927 term “the really revolutionary party” and his later obsession with avoiding “estrangement from the masses.” Both phrases indicate that professional revolutionaries are not the autonomous purveyors of revolution but are primarily the organizers of mass efforts.

Mao’s revolutionary strategy is intimately bound up with his political values. Although his anarchist-utopian expectations in 1919 of a bloodless transformation of society were soon dashed,
his conviction that the largest "union of the popular masses" ultimately prevailed remained a basic premise of his politics. This is most obvious in Mao's fascination with numbers. In proposing a peasant strategy in 1926, Mao considered that the number of peasants was proof of their political potential. He does not explain why China’s history has been a history of elites, but he is confident that the present problem is one of mobilization: "395 million people, organize!"

Class struggle was one of Marxism’s major contributions to Mao’s idea of revolution. The notion of the class structure of political economy provided a universal and presumably scientific scheme for explaining social grievances and organizing for their elimination. However, it is evident in his 1926 articles on peasant classes that Mao tends to use class analysis for categorizing the misery of different groups and their revolutionary potential. What interests Mao is class struggle rather than the relationships of production.

Mao’s revolutionary strategy is centered on popular mobilization, but it had also to cope with the superior power of the counterrevolutionaries. This lesson was learned gradually and painfully. For many of Mao’s generation, becoming a communist was a recognition of the necessity of revolutionary organization. The passing of the May Fourth Movement proved that the new China would not be born spontaneously. Professional revolutionaries must operate in a hostile political environment to bring about a revolutionary situation. Individual dedication was not enough; organizational discipline and an orienting ideology were also required for coordinated and effective prerevolutionary work. Alliances were a principal means of reducing resistance by pursuing limited and achievable common goals. But if the revolutionary organization compromised mass interests for the convenience of an alliance, it lost its legitimacy and even if successful it could not achieve a real revolution.

The basic strategic lesson of the 1927 disasters was that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.” Mao’s response to the necessity of a strategy for survival was an integrated combination of guerrilla warfare and revolutionary base areas at the rural fringes of warlord and KMT control. The idea of a rural-based revolution, a remarkable innovation for a Marxist, did not originate as a theoretical innovation but as a practical necessity. Yet Mao’s guerrilla strategy was a natural development from his view of rev-

olutionary legitimacy because it was based on the mobilization and politicization of the oppressed peasantry, the overwhelming majority of China’s population. This is the basic dimension of a complex of center–periphery logic in Mao’s guerrilla strategy: the periphery of established Chinese politics—the middle and poor peasantry in the countryside—became the center of revolutionary politics. Mao’s strategic thought underwent considerable development after the Long March, but it retained its rural revolutionary foundation despite reorientation toward national defense against Japan.

In order to sustain and legitimize his rural revolutionary strategy, Mao had to develop a paradigm of base area politics which could mobilize peasant support for the revolution. Originally the important elements of the political paradigm were a policy of egalitarian redistribution of resources, a cadre ethic emphasizing closeness to the masses, and a military-political structure which integrated mass support. With Mao’s lengthy and specialized governmental experience as chairman of the CNS, the politics of mobilization became more systematic and institutionalized. Particularly important was the development of the campaign structure for major policy targets and the focus on grass roots politics. By the end of the CNS, Mao had identified the major role of revolutionary government as serving the people. The mass line of policy interaction between leadership and masses lacked only an official formulation.

Competing Foundations of Mao’s Politics

I have presented the development of the implicit paradigm of Mao’s politics as the result of an ongoing interaction between his political environment and his attempts to improve it. But it is also evident that the theory in this interaction of theory and practice is overtly Marxist theory and that Mao’s environment of practice is Chinese. It is thus possible to juxtapose Marxist and Chinese political culture as alternative sources of Maoism or to prefer one as more basic to the other. Cogent arguments can be made for each of these competing foundations. In my opinion, however, both positions are mistaken in their common assumption that Mao can be reduced to his sources, because this assumption implicitly denies that Mao made major innovations within both Chinese and Marxist contexts. Confusion occurs because Mao was content to leave
his relation to Marxism and to Chinese political culture an unclear
dialectic.

In recent studies relating to Mao, those emphasizing his Chi-
inese roots have been the more interesting. Wolfgang Bauer, for
instance, ends his grand examination of Chinese conceptions of hap-
piness with a stimulating analysis of traditional cognates of Mao's
ideas. A more culturally limiting thesis about the basis of Mao's
politics is Richard Solomon's Mao's Revolution and the Chinese
Political Culture. His argument is a psychological one that
China's political culture encouraged social dependency and there-
fore Mao's contentious personality made him a natural leader.
This claim aroused immediate protest from many China scholars.
Some felt that Chinese political behavior was not as homogeneous
as Solomon had portrayed it; others believed that a subrational
explanation of Mao's thought and its success was unnecessary.

A more plausible explanation of twentieth-century develop-
ments through their traditional roots was advanced by Thomas
Metzger in his Escape from Predicament. He greatly improves
on Solomon's psychological thesis by describing the aspects of in-
derdependence and even moral autonomy present in traditional un-
equal relationships. Metzger does not argue that the Chinese were
psychologically bound by behavioral patterns but that they were
conceptually bound by their Neo-Confucian intellectual heritage.
The bounds of twentieth-century development, including Mao,
were set by an optimistic rejection of the personal moral dilemma
which Metzger sees as a central assumption of Neo-Confucianism:

My argument is that, to a large extent, it was the indigenous,
intense, centuries-old desire to escape from a metaphysical, psycho-
logical, political, and economic predicament which led many Chi-
inese enthusiastically to devote their lives to the overthrow of tradi-
tionally revered institutions and the adoption of strange and
foreign ways.

Metzger's method of analysis is to concentrate on the clichés of
thinkers rather than on their self-conscious innovations. He does
this with the shrewd reflection that the bits of common wisdom
accepted by a group of thinkers are as much a defining aspect of
their intellectual world as the problems they dispute.

The major difficulty with Metzger's methodology and inter-
pretation for our purpose of trying to understand Mao is that it

presumes there was no real origination of political ideas in
twentieth-century China. It is true that many Chinese held views
having elements in common with Mao and the CCP. To take a ran-
dom example, in the first volume of the Yenching Journal of Social
Studies (1938) there are articles praising direct field research for
social science and a sociocultural theory of knowledge. Moreover,
the moral dilemma which Metzger finds in Neo-Confucianism
does seem to have faded in its fourth century. Surely it is facile
to interpret these similarities as primarily the result of running in
the same direction from an inherited predicament. To "escape"
into the manic-depressive intellectual milieu of China's last hun-
dred years is rather like curing a cold by catching pneumonia. The
fact that twentieth-century Chinese thinkers thought in the twen-
tieth century is probably more important in explaining shared per-
ceptions.

In the new and urgent world of the twentieth century what
counted was what people did politically, not common environ-
mental or cultural residuals. To stress what Mao and Taiwanese
conservative philosophers have in common is to miss the vastly
greater significance of their differences. Escapism may be the key
to the philosophy of Tang Junyi, Metzger's favorite conservative
philosopher, but Mao's practical political engagement involved
him and eventually the People's Republic of China in new intel-
lectual and moral predicaments which constitute new chapters in
the development of China's rich tradition of secular ethics. Many
clichés of China's new public ideology are drawn from the period
covered in this book, but they have originated, as we have seen, in
the practical experience of revolutionary politics and the struggle
for survival.

As Stuart Schram has pointed out, the discussion of Mao's
Marxism has usually been strained to an unnecessary shrillness be-
cause it is an issue of personal ideological importance to the schol-
ar. Consequently the tension which one feels in the Wittfogel-
Schwartz debate on Mao’s Marxism is not completely due to the
intellectual excitement of the exchange, and many of the contri-
butions to Modern China's series of articles on the subject seem
to shed more heat than light. The two polar facts of the discus-
sion—that "Mao was not Marx" and that "Mao claimed to be a
Marxist"—are equally irrefutable. Yet the proponents of each side
each side has more difficulty understanding Mao than claiming in
effect that were Marx Mao, he would be Mao, while those on the other extreme claim that it is quite Maoist, although un-Marxist, to claim that Mao is a Marxist.

Surely it would be more useful to ask the questions "what did Marxism mean for Mao?" and "what does it mean to say that Mao was a Marxist?" I will postpone answering the second question because it is more appropriately asked vis-à-vis Mao's later formulations of his thought. The first question, however, can be answered for the period we have covered. The primary impact of Marxism on Mao's politics was that it provided a theory of social dynamics and a professional revolutionary organization. The Marxist contribution to Mao's thought is most clear in the 1923-1927 period, but despite later developments the theory of class struggle and the importance of the party remain basic aspects of his politics. In comparison to Marx, Mao's idea of class was more immediately centered on the question of political potential. In comparison to Lenin, Mao's idea of the party involved a far greater degree of interdependence with the masses. Interdependence was already evident in Mao's idea of the legitimacy of the really revolutionary party in 1926; during the base area period it developed into the policy interdependence later known as the mass line. The main source of the conflicting interpretations of the foundations of Mao's thought is the complexity of his intellectual environment, but there was also a theoretical ambiguity in Mao's politics which was sometimes intentional. Mao's practical orientation contributed to his theoretical ambiguity in two ways. First, Mao considered theoretical problems only insofar as the situation demanded. During the period under consideration Mao used theory but he did not attempt to generate a complete theoretical structure consistent with the developing novelty and maturity of his practical politics. The challenge of analyzing Mao's political thought before the Long March is not that of understanding his conceptualizations but conceptualizing the consistencies of his politics. This is not only a problem for the early period of Mao's thought. I think that Mao's politics never received a thorough theoretical formulation. His political thought continued to exist in an unclear dialectic with the political situation and the ideological hegemony of Marxism-Leninism.

A second practical reason for Mao's theoretical ambiguity was that in order to be effective he had to seem obedient to his superiors and diligent in his Marxism no matter how creatively he was applying their respective orders and principles. Early in life Mao had cited the Confucian classics against his father (a use they were not intended to have), and there are later cases of his clever use of ideology for legitimation. One example is Mao's description of ultrademocracy in the Gutian Resolution of 1929 in which he inverts a complaint of the Party Center against the periphery. Another example is a 1933 attempt to identify "Bolshevization" with "involving the masses" (qunzhonghua). Here Mao attempted to capture the Bolshevik label which had been used by the Twenty-eight Bolsheviks to indicate ideological discipline and efficiency for his new tendency toward mass campaigns and comprehensive local government. Typically, Mao's specious usages are not vague "Fourth of July" statements; he carefully specifies the referent and then uses the label. He stretches the concept to fit a new practical context in what amounts to a subtle process of redefinition. This tendency to develop through new definitions rather than through new concepts requires the researcher to take seriously the practical context of terminology. It also eventually produces a polysomy of basic concepts which frustrates efforts to build a concise ideological structure.

The Limits of Practical Revolution

The historic significance of Mao's revolutionary paradigm is that it broke the bottleneck of modern Chinese history by developing a political program appropriate to Chinese conditions and yet cognizant of the transformative potential evident in the modern West. The foundations for reconstituting China had to be worked out in practice, and Mao's orientation of populist empiricism enabled him to generate many of the policy innovations which later characterized the successful Chinese revolution. Mao was not the lone genius whose formula saved China; it was rather his concern for effectiveness and his willingness to learn from the masses which minted the revolution in his image. But a practical paradigm has its limitations. The effectiveness of such a paradigm results from its appropriateness for existing conditions, but its success changes those conditions and undermines its own appropriateness. This basic limitation can be seen in different areas: in changes in policy, in power relationships, and in political goals. By 1958 the limitations of Mao's original political paradigm had become as important as its strengths, and a new crisis of appropriate political leadership began to emerge.

The first kind of limitation is related to the flux of reality and
the necessity of theoretical guidance. The task of policy adjustment must be confronted constantly by practical leadership if it is to retain its effectiveness. The second kind of limitation is caused by the structural problems that emerge when a practical paradigm becomes authoritative, as did Mao's after the Long March. Mao did not confront these problems directly, but their presence can be observed in the course of his leadership. A third kind of limitation emerges with the success of Mao's political paradigm in 1949. Having broken the practical bottleneck created by precarious, isolated intellectualism, a new bottleneck developed—namely, the lack of adequate theoretical guidance for the new forces of Chinese society. The old goals of survival and revolution had been secured, and the constant refrain of Chinese intellectual modernization—zou nei tiao lu, which road to take?—could be asked for the first time as a practical question. From 1957 to 1976, Mao attempted to answer this question with the techniques and values of his successful prerevolutionary experience. Not only was the context of prerevolutionary China different, however, but the role of Mao's political paradigm had changed from that of practical guide to that of ideological standard.

Mao was quite conscious of the first kind of limitation—the transitoriness of any attainment in practical understanding or effectiveness. Two major problems of practical leadership with which Mao had to cope were contextual changes which made experience less relevant and the necessity of a theoretical orientation before action. These problems demanded constant flexibility and attentiveness because they transcended the routine difficulties of leadership.

A basic problem with empirical politics is that present and future developments change the salience of data in unforeseen ways. The apparent solidity of investigation can become seriously misleading if a major shift occurs between the context of observation and the context of application. A major experience of this sort for Mao was the 1926 peasant movement. The optimism of the Hunan Report was based on a month of firsthand investigation into the activities of peasant associations. But the wildfire growth of the associations occurred in a favorable political and military climate, with the change of climate in mid-1927, the "mighty storm" of the peasant movement was disappointingly weak.

Mao was well aware of the problem of contextual invalidation of experience, and his treatment of it in "On Practice" is penetrating. Without flexible alertness to changing circumstances, experience can become narrow empiricism, as subjective and misleading as its opposite, dogmatism. Since prediction involves the assumption that contexts will be similar, Mao was usually cautious in his expectations. Consciousness of the limits of experience prevented Mao from being complacent when entering a new strategic stage. A new stage either demanded basic rethinking and re-investigation, as in 1936–1937, or it required learning from the experience of others, as with the 1949 emphasis on learning from the tnse.

Besides the problem of contextual invalidation, practical political leadership cannot escape the primacy of theory in the process of thinking. Rational action must be based on theoretical orientation. Experience can modify or even challenge a theoretical orientation, but orientation sets important parameters for experience. Broad investigation of the experience of others vastly reduces the problem of orientation, but investigation itself is an action and has its own interpretive framework. Mao's cognizance of this problem can best be seen in the Xingguo Investigation, in which he emphasizes the importance of personal investigative work and notes that most of his informants were not party members. But a comparison of Philip Huang's research on Xingguo with Mao's study shows certain limits of Mao's investigative interest, and a close reading of Mao's exhortations to investigate also reveals an emphasis on revolutionary effectiveness rather than on investigation for investigation's sake.

Mao was particularly eloquent on the larger problem of the essential but not absolute role of theory in "Oppose Book Worship." His basic principle was that the justification of theory is its usefulness. The slogan "No investigation, no right to speak" captures Mao's contempt for abstract ideology, and it was understandably set upon by the Twenty-eight Bolsheviks as an example of Mao's peasant empiricism. But Mao's critique of the practical pretensions of theory was a critique of dogmatic behavior, not an alternative political paradigm. During the Jiangxi period, Mao remained a practical subordinate of dogmatic leadership and eventually saw his administrative gains lost to the Fifth Encirclement and Suppression Campaign.

The second kind of limitation of a political paradigm is caused by the structural tensions inherent in authoritative leadership. In my opinion Mao was quite aware that this kind of limi-
tion posed constant political problems, but he never confronted it in principle as he had the first kind. There were three major structural problems with the authoritative role which Mao’s political paradigm assumed: first, the adjustment from being a subordinate, implementational paradigm to being a directive; second, the political cross fire in which the intermediate leadership was caught; and third, the tension between the political utility of an image of infallibility and the need for flexibility.

Surely a major reason for the ease with which the Twentynight Bolsheviks took command in Jiangxi and an explanation why their influence lingered in Chinese politics until 1941 was that Mao was not anxious to assume the role of general leadership. To solve one’s allotted problems is a very different labor from charting the general direction of a movement. Mao made the adjustment brilliantly in the 1936–1942 period, but even in the authoritative formulation of his thought he is loath to move beyond discussion of the task at hand. This reluctance led to the problem of the unclear dialect of Mao’s thought and Marxism which I alluded to earlier. Although Mao claimed supreme political authority, his ideological claim was to have correctly applied Marxism. The resulting ambiguities in the ideological role of the Thought of Mao Zedong not only cause headaches for observers of China but confound the ideological dimension of Chinese politics itself.

Another area of painful ambiguities was the role of the cadre, the organizational link between Mao and the masses. On the one hand cadres were enjoined to behave like Mao, to act like “general commanders,” flexibly adjusting directives to local conditions. On the other hand, they were subordinates expected to execute orders. Above all, they were expected to act correctly. As in the biblical parable of the talents, Mao granted remarkable discretion to cadres and then held them accountable for their results. Popular mobilization required this approach, and it worked if organizational objectives were clear. The standards for judging effectiveness, however, particularly after 1949, were often ambiguous or conflicting. Certain aspects of Mao’s organizational leadership then tended to expose subordinates to uncontrollable personal risk. Until the Cultural Revolution this risk was mitigated by Mao’s belief in the inevitability of mistakes and Liu Shaoqi’s systematization of inner-party discipline. But the attempt in the Cultural Revolution to solve forcibly the problem of intermediate leadership destroyed the mutual trust which made ambiguous responsibility viable.

Another structural problem of authoritative leadership which became especially acute with the Cultural Revolution was the contradiction between Mao’s political image as leader and the necessity to adjust policy according to mistakes. As an individual Mao could experiment, make a mistake, analyze the mistake for subjective weakness and objective misinformation, and correct his action. But Mao was the leader of an organization; to admit a mistake might adversely affect morale and legitimacy and therefore create an additional problem. On the other hand, a false image of infallibility could create cynicism and distrust of official reports. The problem of image versus honesty became serious with the Great Leap Forward. At this time Mao compromised by maintaining a public image of infallibility while admitting his mistakes to cadres. With the factional commitments of the Cultural Revolution and its heavy reliance on his image, however, Mao’s mistakes forced him into a more consistent position of infallibility.

The third kind of limitation of Mao’s political paradigm was created by its success. After 1949 the old problem of China’s theoretical imagination outrunning her political development was replaced by a new one: her political innovations and achievements were outrunning conceptualizations. The immediate solution was to rely on Leninist-Stalinist theories of the socialist state and on Soviet Russia’s experience and help with the transition to socialism. But ideological borrowing was no solution to the problem. Chinese conditions were different; Russian experience was not all positive, and twenty-two years of base area government would not be completely irrelevant to the problems of the People’s Republic of China. Moreover, it could be expected that China’s new stage needed creative policy innovations as well as adjustment of existing models.

As with the other two kinds of limitation, Mao showed awareness of these problems in his politics. The return to Russian tutelage was a recognition of the inadequacy of guerrilla expertise for the problems of socialist construction. Certainly Mao’s private comments on the Russians in the 1950s show that he was not surrendering blindly to their advice. Mao’s sponsorship of the Hundred Flowers Movement in 1957 and his emphasis on democratic centralism in the early 1960s demonstrate a strong concern for mass creativity and his anxieties about CCP bureaucratism and defensiveness.

Nevertheless, Mao’s encouragement of creativity was shaped by his own experience of policy innovation and his conviction that
the masses would be educated through struggle. As Mao put it in 1957, "Marxism is a wrangling ism, dealing as it does with contradictions and struggles." Mao's idea of a political forum was not one with guarantees of freedom of speech in the Western sense, but a forum where one had the freedom to risk his political future on the conviction that his contribution would eventually be judged a "fragrant flower" rather than a "poisonous weed." This was a risk Mao himself had often taken, and he heartily recommended it. It was, however, unrealistic to expect this kind of openness to be an adequate encouragement to creativity in a socialist state. Mao had enjoyed the practical freedom to innovate in a chaotic and fragmented China; the political and ideological consolidation of the PRC foreclosed such ventures. Revolutionary effectiveness no longer functioned as a practical criterion of truth. It became an ideological standard of truth—revolutionary effectiveness now meant Mao's idea of revolutionary effectiveness.

The independent course which China took under Mao's helmanship from 1957 to 1976 involved many innovations and also wide oscillations in policy, but Mao's active roles in the Great Leap Forward and in the Cultural Revolution constitute in large part the current image of Mao. The link between this image and Mao's early career as described in this book is strong; the values and methods of Mao's later politics were an affirmation of his earlier political experience. But it is important to note that in his last twenty years Mao was active in phases of ideological leadership and passive in more practical phases. The first twenty years of his politics were exactly the reverse. The last limitation of Mao's political paradigm, ironically, was its appropriateness. The practical solution of the problems of one phase could not simply be transmuted into the ideological solution of the problems of the next. The foundations of Mao Zedong's political thought held firm, but the different context produced by its own success changed its significance.

Notes

Sources

Chen Cheng, reels 1–21
A microfilm collection produced by Hoover Institute Microfilms in 1960. It comprises CCP publications captured by the KMT general Chen Cheng when he defeated the Chinese Soviet Republic in Jiangxi (the "Kiangsi Soviet") in 1934. Despite haphazard arrangement it is the most valuable resource for Western studies of the Jiangxi base area from 1930 to 1934.

Keio, reels 1–9
The Keio microfilm collection was produced at Keio University in 1963 for the Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, Berkeley. It comprises documents on Chinese politics, focusing on the CCP, from 1920 to 1932. The collection includes rare periodicals and monographs, as well as Gendai Shina no kiroku [Record of modern China], a Japanese Foreign Office file of articles from Chinese newspapers on domestic politics from 1924 to 1932. The Center for Chinese Studies has prepared an excellent handbook for the materials: Guide to Early Chinese Historical Materials: The Keio Collection (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, 1972).

M21 1–10

SR
Mao Zedong, Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tse-tung (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1971). Compiled in 1965, SR is primarily a collection of highlights from SW, but some works, including "Oppose Book Worship" (1930), first appeared here.