CHAPTER I
The Study of Chinese Politics

THE SETTING OF CHINESE POLITICS

The Revolutionary Setting. Politics in China are the product of a prolonged revolutionary era, spanning at least the period between 1911 and 1949 and including not one but three forceful overthrows of the political system. The first revolution in 1911 displaced an imperial system that had endured for centuries. The second, culminating in 1928 with the establishment of a new central government under the control of the Kuomintang (KMT), replaced the disunited "warlord" rule of early republican China with a more vigorous, organized, and centralized system of single-party domination. The third revolution of 1949 brought the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to power, inaugurating the present Communist system.

Even this delineation, broad as it is, does not define the scope of China's revolutionary era. Successful efforts to overthrow national political institutions and elites establish the decisive peaks of a revolutionary process, but they do not necessarily mark the limits of the process itself. In the case of the Chinese revolution, it is probably best to date the initiation of the process from the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), an upheaval so disruptive in its impact and goals that it may be regarded as "revolutionary in character" and "the beginning of the end of Confucian China." Moreover, despite the Communist victory

of 1949, the revolutionary era lasted until the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which erupted in 1966 and dominated the subsequent decade, was clear evidence of continuing revolutionary features in Chinese politics. Mao and his supporters insisted that this campaign was truly a "revolution"; indeed, their propagandists called it "the greatest of revolutionary mass movements," one which "has no parallel in the history of mankind." 12 Without necessarily accepting the accuracy of this claim, it is testimony to Chinese perceptions that their times are revolutionary.3

The revolutionary setting of Chinese politics is, for the external observer, a source of both fascination and frustration. The richness and power of Chinese civilization have long held a peculiar fascination for outsiders. To that attraction is now added the recognition that one of the most dramatic events of human history has occurred, and is still unfolding, in modern China. The politics of revolution defy easy understanding or generalization, however, regardless of the student's interest and enthusiasm. Later in this chapter, we discuss some debates about how to interpret the Chinese revolution, but a few more concrete problems deserve mention here.

Political upheaval and social change, are, of course, the essence of revolution. It is obvious that modern Chinese politics have been unstable, that political and social changes have come so rapidly during the course of the revolution that descriptions at one point in time have seldom held true for long. It is not so obvious, perhaps, to recognize how often these changes have violated preconceptions about what was "possible" in China. Consider only a few examples of propositions seriously held by at least some observers during recent decades. At various times it was thought that Communism could never triumph in a family-dominated society like China; that China after World War II would be a firm American ally; that ideological bonds made the Sino-Soviet alliance unbreakable; that the authority of the CCP could not be seriously threatened from within; that the conflict that developed between the United States and China in the 1950s was irreconcilable; that China would never again welcome foreign economic activity within its borders. All of these propositions were plausible at one time, but all proved false. The lesson is that analysis of a revolutionary era calls for special care in evaluating the conventional wisdom of the times.

Second, a revolutionary setting raises the stakes of political competition, transforming many differences into struggles for political and human survival. The "agreement to disagree" is not impossible in such a setting, but it may be a luxury and a risk. When the outcome of political struggle is seen as decisive for both personal careers and long-term structuring of society, participants who hold firmly to their ambitions and ideals will not hesitate to extend the "rules" of the game. The use or threat of armed force then becomes central in the political process, as it was in China throughout the 1911-1949 period. The army's declining role in Chinese politics between 1949 and 1958 was a concrete sign of the decline of revolutionary politics. Its rising political role after 1959 and into the Cultural Revolution—first symbolic, then as a threat, and ultimately in deployment against other organized political groups—was equally concrete evidence of a revolutionary revival. By the mid-1980s the army's political role was at its lowest ebb since 1949, perhaps since the mid-nineteenth century, as China entered its postrevolutionary era.

Finally, the prosaic yet unavoidable problem of source material and corroborative evidence must be raised. It is not easy to acquire knowledge about the dynamics of Chinese politics. Data on contemporary China are drawn largely, although by no means exclusively, from official Communist sources that are subject to severe limitations and restrictions. This is not simply a post-1949 problem that flows from the CCP's effort to maintain a closed communications system. The production and preservation of reliable source material probably suffers in any revolutionary situation. Archives may be lost, destroyed, or sealed; key participants may be silenced; independent sources may be suppressed while official sources become overtly propagandistic;

Footnotes:
13. Indeed, Deng Xiaoping has described the post-1978 reforms as a "second revolution"; see Beijing Review, vol. 28, no. 14 (April 8, 1984): 5. However, we view the death of Mao as the end of the revolutionary era because Deng's reforms do not have the anti-institutional, critical and disruptive features normally associated with a revolution. For insightful analysis of the postrevolutionary character of post-Mao politics, see Lowell Dittmer, "Ideology and Organization in Post-Mao China," Asian Survey, vol. 24, no. 5 (March 1984): 489-509.
the acquisition of data generally, whether by scholars or officials, assumes a low priority and becomes immensely difficult in a society disrupted by internal war and revolution.

Chinese publications and data have risen in both quantity and quality since 1976. Coupled with the greater openness to foreign travelers and residents and the opportunities for foreign research in China, this trend produces much more information about China from a variety of sources and perspectives. Nonetheless, there are still many gaps and contradictions in sources on modern Chinese politics, raising important methodological issues about how to use the raw data that comes to us from Chinese publications, emigrants from the Chinese mainland, foreign journalists, and other sources. The student of Chinese politics must remain conscious of source limitations and how they affect interpretations of the subject.

The Historical Setting. The Chinese revolution occurred in a society renowned for the quality and longevity of its culture and political tradition. In Chapter 2, we will consider how some important characteristics of the Chinese political tradition influenced revolutionary history, while noting here the expectations of greatness that this tradition has left in the minds of Chinese and foreigners alike. Historically derived images have an intangible quality, but their importance with regard to China is unmistakable. Indeed, in modern times they have led repeatedly to exaggerated estimates of China’s influence and capabilities. They appeared in a dangerous complicity with which the Manchu emperors responded to intensified Western pressures beginning in the late eighteenth century. Perhaps equally misguided were the Western traders and missionaries on the other side, who foresaw a commercial or religious conquest of China that would alter the shape of world history. The United States in World War II nourished what were at that time illusory visions of China’s world status. Cold war American fears about China’s domination of Southeast Asia, its influence in Africa, or its military threat to the North American continent drew more on the image than the reality of Chinese power. The Chinese, too, have tended to attach global significance to their actions, as in the earlier quote about the Cultural Revolution. Although political rhetoric naturally exaggerates hopes and fears, China’s tradition is an important influence on expectations about the nation’s future.

In more practical terms, the student of Chinese politics must grapple with historical references simply because they pervade Chinese political discourse. The Chinese frame of reference is strikingly self-centered and historical. Comparisons are mainly with the past—with the empire, with the KMT, with “before Liberation” or “before the Cultural Revolution” or “since the Gang of Four”—rather than with other systems. Well-known figures from the past provide analogues for contemporary heroes and villains. Examples and metaphorical images draw heavily from the historical and literary traditions.

This tendency to load contemporary political discourse with references to the past is partly a cultural characteristic, partly a function of the closeness and relevance of the traditional system. Many of the leaders who governed the People’s Republic of China (PRC) until recently were born before the fall of the empire in 1911. Mao and his senior colleagues knew imperial society firsthand and received part of their education in the traditional style. Younger leaders were recruited into politics before 1949 and are well aware of traditional ideas and social patterns that persisted after 1911. In short, the historical setting continues to serve as a reference point for evaluating contemporary programs and goals.

The International Setting. The international setting provides a third vantage point for introducing the study of Chinese politics. The PRC’s area of 9.6 million square kilometers (about 3.7 million square miles, a bit larger than the United States) makes it the world’s third largest state; its population—1.086 billion at the end of 1984—is by far the world’s largest, comprising over one-fifth of the global total (see Appendix B.2). Economic growth since 1949 has been cumulatively strong despite a severe economic crisis in the early 1960s. Official Chinese statistics

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record the following average annual growth rates for 1952 through 1982, in percentages: national income 6.6; population 1.9; total social product 7.9; industrial output 10.7; agricultural output 3.8 (see Appendix B.3). Because of pricing and accounting differences, foreign observers usually deflate industrial output, thereby lowering the overall growth rate. Nonetheless, the Chinese economy more than quadrupled between 1952 and 1980. By the early 1960s, it was the largest economy in the Third World and the ninth largest in the world as a whole, exceeded only by the seven largest industrial market economies and the Soviet economy. We might think of the PRC economy, one scholar has suggested, as roughly comparable to those of Japan and the USSR twenty years earlier. The PRC's current level of development, great north-south extent across temperate zones, varied topography, and rich mineral and energy resources, give it the potential to become a major force in the world economy within a few decades. Projections are hazardous, but there is good reason to believe it will realize this potential.

The territory of China dominates the East Asian area, sharing borders with the Soviet Union, Pakistan, India, Vietnam, Korea, and other countries and in proximity to Japan and Southeast Asia. It occupies the center of a region of great strategic importance where much of the world's population is concentrated. Diplomatically, the PRC has been a member of the United Nations and its Security Council since 1971; in 1983 it had diplomatic relations with over 120 countries, compared with 25 countries which maintained formal ties with the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan. PRC armed forces exceed 1 million, with over 3 million in the army. China detonated its first nuclear device in 1964, orbited its first space satellite in 1970; missile delivery capabilities are growing, although they remain far behind those of the superpowers. The PRC is a major regional power, a potential global power, and an important actor in international politics. Its diplomatic recognition by the United States in January 1979 removed the last formal barrier to full international participation.

This is an exceedingly simplified view of China's international setting, one that stresses the country's weight in the global scales. It must be qualified by several points. First, the PRC's economic power reflects its size, not its level of development. Despite a strong growth record and three decades of rapid industrialization, China remains unevenly developed and still heavily dependent on its agricultural sector. In terms of per capita GNP (about $400), it is among the poorer countries of the world. More to the point, it has a precarious food-population balance that complicates growth strategies. The basic problem is that only about 15 percent of the land is suitable for agricultural use, with most of the rural population—which is about 85 percent of the total population—concentrated on the cultivated one-sixth of China's land surface. Chinese officials observe that their economy must support one-fifth of the world's population with only 7 percent of its cultivated land. To support industrialization and feed its population, China must keep agricultural growth ahead of population growth. It has done so, but with little surplus. Grain production per capita fell far below peak levels of the 1950s during the crisis of the early 1960s and failed to reach new highs until the late 1970s (see Appendix B). Reduced population growth in recent years—approximately 1 percent in 1983 and 1984—has helped, as has a surge in agricultural production brought about by new agricultural policies (the "responsibility system") adopted after 1976. These trends have alleviated the food-population problem, although serious food shortages could still arise as a result of successive harvest failures or another severe economic crisis. In any event, China's long-term economic development requires a technical revolution in agriculture. Current efforts to promote agricultural growth by increasing material incentives for rural households have not settled arguments about how to combine technical transformation with socialist principles.
There are other trouble spots in future PRC development. Rising consumer demands may disrupt a development pattern that assumes a large-scale investment under state control. Transportation and housing have lagged behind other sectors, and there are persistent energy shortages despite China's impressive potential in this area. Scientific and technological backwardness is a major obstacle to future economic and military development. The growth strategy of the 1980s places increasing reliance on foreign trade, technology, and capital, which poses delicate political issues for Chinese elites. An unwieldy bureaucracy tends to perpetuate inefficiencies and resist reforms. In short, China's growing importance in the world does not mean development will be easy, automatic, or free from serious internal strains and conflicts.

Second, China's current cooperative involvement with the international system contrasts with the international conflicts and insecurities that have characterized most of the PRC's existence. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, it perceived the United States as a major threat to its security because of American intervention in the Korean War in 1950-1953 and Vietnam in the 1960s, U.S. military security treaties with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the SEATO and ANZUS countries, and diverse American efforts to contain and isolate China. American support enabled the ROC to hold the China seat in the UN and to receive diplomatic recognition from a majority of UN members until 1971. A serious territorial dispute with India led to a brief border war in 1962, followed by years of strained relations between these two Asian powers. Chinese fears of Japanese rearmament were strong in the 1960s. Above all, the intensification of the Sino-Soviet conflict after 1960 made China the potential target of both the nuclear superpowers. Border fighting with the Soviet Union in 1969 underscored the USSR's emergence as China's major enemy and was a major factor leading to Sino-American rapprochement in the 1970s. Since then, and especially since Mao's death in 1976, China's foreign relations have been more peaceful (the major exception being fighting on the Sino-Vietnamese border), with a steady growth in international contacts and trade, primarily with capitalist countries (see Appendix D).

The earlier period of relative isolation and insecurity remains important, however, partly because it combined with themes of self-reliance and revolutionary militancy to influence a political generation, partly because some specific issues remain unresolved. The PRC still has unsettled territorial claims to Taiwan, to Indian and Soviet border areas, and to island groups in the East and South China seas. Military action on these issues is currently unlikely but cannot be excluded from long-range forecasting. As a militarily backward power trying to catch up, China is suspicious of international agreements to limit armaments and nuclear tests. Its foreign trade is still relatively weak, as evidenced by estimated trade figures for 1983 of $40 billion (in U.S. dollars), compared to an estimated $45 billion for Taiwan and $35 billion for Hong Kong. Most significantly, perhaps, improved Sino-Soviet relations have not ended the security threat on China's northern frontier. The PRC is seriously inferior to the USSR in both conventional and strategic capabilities and must continue to give this issue high priority in both domestic and foreign policies.

Finally, to think of the PRC as having "joined the club" is to invert the image of China as a revolutionary force in global politics, an image that dominated both Chinese and foreign views in the 1950s and 1960s. Increasingly over those years, the PRC presented itself as a self-conscious opponent of the world power structure, as a champion of Third World countries and national liberation movements. The ascendancy of the Maoist model within China, especially in the Cultural Revolution, attracted great interest as an alternative to both Western and Soviet developmental models. This is not the place to assess the actual distinctiveness of the Maoist model, but it is essential to note that the Chinese themselves, and many foreign observers, are accustomed to thinking of the PRC as an opponent of and an explicit alternative to the world of the superpowers—a force for

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The Study of Chinese Politics

radical change that would necessarily challenge rather than accommodate the existing order. This image complicates the position of current PRC leaders who have, since the death of Mao Zedong in September 1976, intensified China's global interactions in their pursuit of national security and access to the foreign trade, technology, and capital necessary for continued development.

The revolutionary, historical, and international settings pose formidable challenges to the student of Chinese politics—whether beginner or old hand. The student must try to understand the breadth and rapidity of change in China's revolutionary era, while acknowledging the relevance of patterns rooted in an imperial order two millennia old; must take account of the partisanship that pervades both Chinese and foreign sources on the revolution, while making use of this substantial and valuable body of literature; must grasp the uneven character of China's development, in which intractable problems and backward sectors coexist with impressive social and economic advances; must puzzle over China's efforts to find security and support within the international order, even as it struggles to transform that order and escape its restraints; and must comprehend the dialectics of the PRC's movement toward a way from Maoist, Soviet, and Western concepts of development. These challenges enhance the fascination of the subject and also help to explain why foreign observers have argued so much about what issues and models students of Chinese politics should emphasize. Let us more closely examine how this debate over issues and models has kept shifting as students have tried to keep up with the changing realities of revolutionary and postrevolutionary China.

ISSUES IN THE HISTORY OF CHINESE COMMUNISM

For some time after 1949 the major debates and generalizations about Chinese Communism revolved around questions relating to its historical background, seeking thereby to identify the essence of the new regime. There were many reasons for this historical orientation. History and historians held a special place in Chinese studies, while political scientists in the field were relatively few. The newness of the Communist government and the inadequacy of information about it discouraged a thorough examination of post-1949 events. So far as Americans were concerned, political considerations intruded by eliminating contact with the mainland and diverting American attention on the question of why China fell to the Communists. In time, all these considerations lost some of their force, and studies based directly on post-1949 politics began to grow rapidly. Nonetheless, debate on the character of the Communist Revolution, relying heavily on pre-1949 data for proof and documentation, dominated early efforts to generalize about the Communist system. This debate divides roughly into three major themes or controversies: Maoist independence versus Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy; Chinese versus foreign influences; the sources of Communist victory in 1949.

Maoism Versus Orthodoxy. The controversy over "Maoism" is the most explicit, controversial, and enduring debate about Chinese Communist politics. When the China Quarterly—the foremost Western journal of contemporary Chinese affairs—began publication in 1960, Maoism was the subject of lead articles in the first two issues, the choice was an accurate indication of what seemed to be the most important controversy in the field. Without attempting to present the views of particular writers, the general thrust of the argument can be stated simply.

Supporters of Maoism argued that Chinese Communism, as shaped by Mao Zedong's leadership and represented by his writings, contained distinctive, deviant, or heretical forms of Marxism-Leninism and hence was politically and ideologically independent of Moscow. Those who argued for Chinese "orthodoxy" and rejected the "Maoism" label found no significant deviations by Mao from Marxist-Leninist doctrine and strategy, and they saw the Communist Revolution in China as politically and ideologically dependent on Moscow. In reality, of course, the argument has been an exceedingly sophisticated and tortuous one. Still, as suggested by the simplified version stated above, it posed a fundamental political question that was crucial to an understanding of the post-1949 regime: were the Chinese Communists independent revolutionaries or were they...
not tied to Moscow, or were they simply the leaders of the Chinese branch of a movement centered in Moscow?

The Sino-Soviet conflict resolved the question of China’s political independence in favor of the “Maoist” position. Despite substantial Russian influence in China during the 1950s, the CCP soon demonstrated its political and ideological autonomy, with Maoism gaining wide acceptance in the West (the word Maoism is seldom used in China) as the most appropriate term for the distinctive Chinese brand of Marxism-Leninism. The post-1949 triumph of Maoism naturally strengthened the arguments of those who had emphasized its pre-1949 roots. The Maoist debate began on two broad fronts, however. First, the exact timing and extent of Mao’s early deviation from Soviet doctrine remains in dispute, with arguments focusing on the intricacies of revolutionary strategy and CCP-Comintern relationships in the 1927–1935 period.

Second, and of more current interest, has been an ongoing discussion about who are the orthodox Marxist-Leninists. Granted that a significant doctrinal gap exists between Chinese and Russian Communists—the earlier denials of the gap having been silenced—is it Maoism or Soviet socialism that is now true to the parent doctrine? The Russians and some Western analysts, although far from agreement, see Soviet socialism as more orthodox and Maoism as a deviation tending toward some variant of anarchism, subjectivism, bourgeois nationalism, or Trotskyism. The Chinese and other Western analysts—again not in agreement—see Maoism as closer to Marxist values and Leninist revolutionary themes, with the Soviet Union exhibiting

a heretical tendency toward bureaucratism, imperialism, and all-around revisionism or capitalist restoration. This is a fascinating debate, infinitely more complicated than these remarks suggest, and now further complicated by post-Mao reversals of some of the Cultural Revolution policies believed to be at the core of Maoism. In this context, earlier assertions about the essential similarity of Chinese and Soviet socialisms have revived, although the distinction between the two when China was under Mao’s leadership seems secure.

Chinese Versus Foreign Influence. As the Sino-Soviet split cooled the controversy about the CCP’s relationship with the Soviet party, a related but more subtle question came to the fore: did the victory of Chinese Communism represent a conquest by foreign ideas (Western if not Russian) that would destroy the Chinese tradition, or did it represent the beginning of a new “dynasty,” foreign in some aspects of its style but faithful to traditional patterns of rule? Despite occasional allusions to a CCP “dynasty” or to Mao as “emperor,” serious discussion of this theme has avoided polarization around a literal acceptance of either of the two positions. The view that the Communist Revolution is essentially antidirectional and a vehicle for spreading values foreign to China is more common, although it seldom appears without qualifications; it has strong support, of course, in the self-image that the Chinese Communists project. Arguments on the other side have been presented succinctly by C.P. Fitzgerald, who has pointed out strong similarities between Communist and traditional Chinese patterns of rule. He has emphasized in particular the idea of a “world sovereign authority,” state management of a balanced economy, and the establishment of an orthodox doctrine to order society and provide a standard for recruiting elites.

Obviously, contemporary Chinese politics show a mixture of indigenous and foreign influences. The real value of this debate


12See Wilson, ed., *Mao Tse-Tung in the Stages of History*; and “Symposium on Mao and Marx,” *Modern China*, vol. 2, nos. 3, 4 (October 1976); and vol. 3, nos. 1, 2, 4 (January, April, October 1977). This “symposium” contains articles and comments by several scholars holding different views on the question.

is not to prove one perspective right and the other wrong but to establish what the mixture is. Since the prevailing tendency is to focus on the changes accomplished and sought by CCP elites, it is healthy to heed the reminders of those who assert the “Chineseess” of China. John Fairbank has been a temperate but persistent spokesman for this view, urging caution in concluding that the tradition is weakened or destroyed, despite what ideology and official directives might imply, and insisting that Chinese history still provides some explanations for Chinese behavior. The analysis in later chapters will identify many areas in which the influence of the Chinese past is still evident.

It is worth noting that debate over the proper role of Chinese and foreign influences is not simply a Western intellectual gloss of no interest to the Chinese themselves. To the contrary, China's intellectuals and politicians have addressed this question explicitly ever since the late nineteenth century, offering different formulae on how to use things foreign and Chinese in the reconstruction of their system. Recent Chinese diatribes against the Gang of Four for irrationally praising things Chinese and opposing things foreign are a striking resurrection of this theme. Chinese efforts to explain their difficulty in building socialism by reference to a long tradition of “feudal authoritarianism” and a very short exposure to capitalism and modern democracy, and their assertions about China's need to learn from advanced countries in achieving modernization, are other examples of a renewal of interest in the positive aspects of foreign influence on modern China. It seems that Chinese as well as Western views are shifting toward a more complex assessment that sees mixed benefits and liabilities in both Chinese and foreign influences on the revolution.

**Sources of Communist Victory.** The third major controversy about the history of the Communist Revolution involves the sources of the CCP success in its struggle with the KMT. What

16 The most provocative thesis has been Chalmers Johnson's study of Communist growth during the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). Johnson argues that the CCP's leadership of nationalist peasant resistance to the Japanese invader was responsible for the party's emergence as a contender for national power, the Communist Revolution derived its main strength from nationalist appeals, not from a program for socioeconomic change. It is clear that the Japanese invasion permitted the CCP to strengthen greatly its position relative to the KMT; the nationalist legitimacy that the party acquired during the war was indispensable for the attraction of popular support and neutralization of opposition that led to ultimate victory. Japanese actions and Communist response were probably decisive in the timing and staging of the CCP's conquest of the mainland.

However, there are other factors to be considered in defining the basis of Communist victory. KMT weakness as well as CCP strength, especially the mix of political and military capabilities on both sides, influenced the final outcome. The Communist's commitment to social and economic change, particularly their promise of land redistribution, was a source of popular support and revolutionary recruitment during many periods of party history. Organizational skills and personal behavior of CCP members played a major role in expanding the party's influence, regardless of the specific issues that made a locality vulnerable to Communist penetration. The CCP's ability to address more traditional peasant economic needs and concepts of social justice illuminates the seeming paradox of a Communist revolution based more on peasantry than proletariat. And because of its peasant base, the movement interacted with and was influenced by many traditional forms of rural organization and protest.
None of these factors denies the importance of the Japanese presence and the CCP's nationalist appeals to resist it, but they show that the Communist Revolution was a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be labeled neatly as either a "national" revolution or a "social" revolution. The same can be said of the post-1949 period, in which themes of national independence and reconstruction have continued to blend with themes of radical social and economic change.

These debates about the essence of Chinese Communism have raised important questions about the post-1949 system without providing definitive answers. Neither the questions nor the difficulty of answering them is unique to China, of course; students of the Bolshevik Revolution have grappled with similar issues, without notable success in resolving them. The problem, as suggested in this chapter's introductory paragraphs, is that the essence of revolution defies simple definitions. In the Chinese case, the initial "either-or" questions have yielded, as scholarly studies have multiplied, to recognition of the complexity of the questions posed. This is probably a healthy development. In any case, it helps to explain the inconclusiveness of efforts to classify the PRC's political system, a topic to which we now turn.

MODELS FOR THE CHINESE POLITICAL SYSTEM

During the 1950s, controversy over historical issues began to wane, and a substantial body of literature on post-1949 politics emerged. One striking characteristic of this literature was the absence of a dominant model as a guide for analysis and the considerable diversity in efforts to classify the system. Initially, there was an inclination to call the PRC a totalitarian system or at least to group it with other Communist systems. This gave way to greater interest in treating China as a "developing" system, shifting away from European-centered models and emphasizing China's similarities to Third World countries. There has also been a pronounced tendency to classify the system on its own terms, to identify a Chinese or Maoist model that might stand alone as a type.

The Totalitarian Model: It is not surprising that theories of totalitarianism were attractive to students of Communist China. The theories developed largely from studies of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, leaving the Soviet Union as the principal model of totalitarianism in the postwar years. When China proclaimed its intention of following the Soviet model—while Stalin was still alive—there was a natural tendency to assume that China had incorporated the totalitarian model. Moreover, Chinese Communist political behavior and institutions displayed sufficient "fit" with the model, particularly in the drive for ideological conformity and the monopoly of power by a single party, to defend its assumed applicability. Despite widespread acceptance of the term and implicit use of the model, no full-scale analysis of "Chinese totalitarianism" appeared. There was reluctance to apply the totalitarian model systematically to all aspects of the Chinese system.

One reason for this reluctance was the emergence of important discrepancies between the People's Republic and the model. The clearest and most representative statement of the totalitarian model laid out six "basic features" of the "totalitarian dictatorship": an official ideology; a single mass party led typically by one man; a system of terroristic police controls; a technologically conditioned monopoly of communications; a similar monopoly of all means of effective armed combat; and central control and direction of the entire economy through bureaucratic coordination.1 However, in China it seemed that Mao Zedong's leadership...
of the CCP was not comparable to the dictatorships of Hitler or Stalin; controls rested much more on psychological pressures of indoctrination and persuasion and on close personal supervision by cadres rather than on police terror; central bureaucratic planning and controls were less salient, especially after 1957, than in the Soviet Union. Moreover, theorists of totalitarianism had identified the phenomenon as a reaction against or perversion of the modern Western state, one that "could have arisen only within the context of mass democracy and modern technology." While the Chinese revolution occurred in such a context in the global sense, it was not directly aligned with this particular historical pattern.

The totalitarian model's application to China was also inhibited by questions about its inherent validity that came to the fore in the 1960s. Working mainly from developments in the Soviet bloc following de-Stalinization, critics argued that the model had been overly influenced by the excesses of particular personalities (e.g., Hitler and Stalin); that it could not account for pluralistic phenomena within the assumed "monolithic" totalitarian state; and that it failed to differentiate adequately among different types of systems (e.g., fascist and Communist states) that might display some of its characteristics. As alternatives, they suggested abandonment of the model, limitation of its application to the few historical examples that approximated it, or major revisions to accommodate variations within broadly ideological and authoritarian single-party states. In any case, the growing challenge to the model's credentials made it progressively less attractive as a guide for rigorous analysis of the Chinese system.

As the totalitarian model lost ground, the comparative study of Communist systems began to attract students of China. Although this approach is now common in studies of Soviet and East European politics, it has not acquired a dominant place in the China field. Very few scholars have the skills and inclination to carry out a rigorous comparison of European and Chinese Communist systems. Moreover, the Sino-Soviet conflict and the debate over totalitarianism have left a reservoir of skepticism about assumptions of similarities between the two great Communist powers. There is great value in including China in comparisons of Communist systems, but much of that value lies in demonstrating the extent of variations within the category.21

"Developing Country" Models. The intensification of the Sino-Soviet conflict in the 1960s coincided with the growth in Western academic circles of a vast literature dealing with problems of development. While neither China nor any other country is typical of what are so loosely called "developing" or "underdeveloped" areas, it is understandable that students of China began to explore this literature for conceptual guidance and possible models. Modern China's credentials for inclusion in this group are substantial. Its experience with Western (and Eastern) imperialism, its preindustrial agrarian economy, and its revolutionary confrontation with traditional institutions have generated most of the problems broadly associated with the developmental process. Of course, there is no single model for a developing political system, nor even agreement on the definition of terms like development and modernization, but the literature suggests several categories of systems with which China might be grouped and which illuminate important features of Chinese politics.

One category derives from broad historical outlines of the modern era and groups China with a relatively small number of other countries that began modernization under the influence of the Western example but without direct foreign control. Their traditional governments were sufficiently effective to resist overt colonization and hence embarked on modernization with significant continuities of national tradition, territory, and population.22 This continuity provides protection against the crises of personal...


22W. E. Black, The Dynamics of Modernization: A Study in Comparative History (New York: Harper, 1966), pp. 139–69. The other countries that Black places in this "pattern" are Russia, Japan, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Thailand. Black is, of course, aware of the truly formidable differences among these countries in their experiences with modernization.
and national identity that have occurred in other transitional societies but may produce an "authority crisis" when modernizing elites eventually destroy the traditional authority system.\textsuperscript{23} Another perspective emphasizes the level of economic development, indicating that China is most appropriately grouped with countries of roughly equivalent economic circumstances. Some proponents of this approach argue that "Communism is a phenomenon of underdevelopment" and that Communist movements "share numerous characteristics with non-Communist modernizing movements."\textsuperscript{24} This category, then, includes both Communist and non-Communist systems whose politics reflect similarities derived from common economic problems.

China also corresponds to a system that appears in nearly all typologies of developing countries, variously referred to as mobilization system, movement regime, neo-Leninist mass party system, or radical or totalitarian single-party system.\textsuperscript{25} The type varies in its definition by different writers but contains the following core elements: a single political party that monopolizes political power and penetrates all other politically significant organizations; an explicit official ideology that legitimizes and sanctifies revolutionary goals; a determination to politicize and mobilize the citizenry, characteristically through party-led mass movements. The mobilization system, as used by David Apter, clearly has something in common with the totalitarian model, but it places the dominant political party in a significantly different context. Whereas the totalitarian model projects an image of an impenetrable, monolithic, bureaucratic, and technologically competent regime, the mobilization system operates in a fluid, unresolved struggle to transform a "transitional" society. The latter seems closer to Chinese reality, identifying the social context more accurately and emphasizing the open struggle to mobilize the population behind the radical, futuristic goals of elites.

The modernization and development literature, like the totalitarian model, has nourished certain assumptions about Chinese politics and development. In terms of specific models, however, it has had little impact. China scholars have gone window-shopping in it—citing a reference here, testing a hypothesis there—but few have adopted any of the general approaches within it. For one thing, the literature itself is too loose and sprawling to be of much help; by the 1970s, it was also the target of much criticism for its ethnocentric biases and empirical weaknesses.\textsuperscript{26} Moreover, despite Chinese departures from Soviet Communism, the role of ideology and party in the PRC and its revolutionary origins set it apart from the great majority of non-Communist Third World countries.

One response to this dilemma is to combine the two general perspectives discussed thus far, that is, to classify the PRC with other Communist systems in terms of basic structures, while noting that the developmental issues with which it must deal are closer to those of the Third World. Generally, this is the approach followed in the core volume of the series to which this book belongs. Almond and Powell label China and other Communist systems as "penetrative-radical-authoritarian" systems, thereby distinguishing them from both democratic systems and various nondemocratic systems that have not attained the level of mobilization and penetration that Communist systems have. They also group China with a few other Communist and non-Communist Third World countries that pursue an "authoritarian-technocratic-mobilizational" developmental strategy. Labels like these are a loose fit because, as we will emphasize in


The Study of Chinese Politics

chapters 3 and 4, the PRC has experienced periods of more or less intensive application of the variables cited; that is, it displays these characteristics sequentially or cumulatively rather than all at once over its entire history. Nonetheless, the basic point is well taken: China shares many systemic features with Communist countries and many developmental strategies and problems with Third World countries.

The Chinese Model. In the absence of consensus on the applicability to China of totalitarian, Communist, or developing country models, most China scholars in practice have treated the Chinese political system as sui generis. They have included in their works many references to other bodies of literature, but they have assumed that the system they study is sufficiently distinctive to provide the basis for a separate model. The tendency is a natural one in the China field, encouraged by the sinological tradition to look upon the study of China as a discipline unto itself. Indeed, there has been some resistance among China scholars to the intrusion of social science or comparative concepts, so much so that others have suggested that some of the problems of the field lie in its lack of receptivity to external conceptual guidance.25

However, the most vigorous criticism in the 1970s of Western studies of Chinese politics was that they failed to take the Chinese model seriously, that they had imposed their own ethnocentric assumptions and values on Chinese reality, thereby misunderstanding and misinterpreting the Chinese revolution and the Maoist system emerging from it.26 What are we to make of these seemingly contradictory points? Have Western scholars assumed the validity and utility of a Chinese model or not?

The issue stems largely from Maoist policies that dominated Chinese politics from the mid-1950s through 1976. These policies


Those who regarded the model with reservations or hostility did so for a variety of reasons. Some argued it served largely as rhetoric or window dressing that concealed the harsh realities of Chinese life and politics. In this view the model was basically myth even though some policies flowed from it and some idealists seemed to believe it. Others thought Maoism was both believed and practiced but that it could not produce long-run development. They believed the model was utopian in espousing that self-reliance with emphasis on populism and ideology over planning and expertise could achieve development in an increasingly technological, interdependent world. Still others observed the model starting to achieve some of its goals but disagreed sharply with the value of those goals. They insisted that Maoism demanded too high a price in human terms for whatever gains—either ideological or economic—it might achieve.

On the other side were those who admitted varying degrees of uncertainty about the real function of Maoist rhetoric, the thoroughness of the model's implementation, the effectiveness of Cultural Revolution policies in achieving their goals, or the normative value of the model, but who sympathized with the spirit of the model and believed it was achieving some positive results. In this view, the critics displayed ethnocentric or ideological biases that led to willful or unconscious distortion of Maoism precisely because it challenged the orthodoxy of liberalism, Western or Soviet-style development, or the ethics of a materialistic, industrialized civilization. Those critics in turn regarded the sympathizers as naive or poorly informed at best, willing tools of Maoist propaganda at worst. Of course, most students of Chinese affairs did not take rigid positions for or against the model but distributed themselves somewhere along the spectrum suggested, sometimes changing their views as the politics of the Maoist period unfolded. Nonetheless, it is clear that the Chinese political passions unleashed by the Cultural Revolution had their counterparts among foreign observers, most of whom accepted the premise that China was following a path of its own and could be understood only on its own terms, even as they disagreed about which foreigners were able to pierce their cultural blinders and see China as it really was.

In the years following Mao's death, new perspectives have changes the terms of debate about the Chinese or Maoist model.
1980s; this emphasis on negative aspects of PRC performance and prospects was not so much a reflection of deterioration in Chinese conditions as a reaction to rose-colored images of Cultural Revolution China or at least an earlier tendency to interpret available data in a favorable way. Paradoxically, these pessimistic reports came at a time when the CCP was trying to correct past abuses and was adopting the kind of development policies favored by many foreign observers. There is no doubt that the new stage in Chinese politics has brought a welcome new realism to foreign studies of China. That realism is most likely to fulfill its promise if it avoids the stereotypical images that frequently intrude on earlier debates.

DIVERSITY AND CHANGE IN CHINESE POLITICS

This survey of the setting of Chinese politics and a few of the issues and models debated by those who study the subject has introduced the reader to some of the change and diversity that characterize the politics of modern China. It would be a mistake to conclude that generalizations about Chinese politics are impossible, that no model fits the system, or that the system defies classification. In Chapter 4, after examining PRC political history, institutions, and ideology, we will suggest how the Chinese system might be classified. We argue that China does not fit easily into any single category and that the student must keep several issues and models in mind for the most fruitful exploration of different eras and topics.

One important transition is from revolutionary to postrevolutionary eras, a transition that occurred (if a date is needed for reference) with the death of Mao. CCP politics have taken different forms in the pre-1949 revolutionary movement, in the Maoist effort to “continue the revolution” within the framework of a socialist state after 1949, and in the post-1976 period with its pronouncement that the era of revolutionary mass struggle was basically over. Post-1949 history includes three major periods, each represented by different models reflecting its primary features or goals: a Soviet period and model from 1949–57, in which the CCP set about building socialism under pronounced Soviet influence; a Maoist period and model from 1958–1976, dominated by an attempt to redirect Chinese politics toward revolutionary goals as Mao defined them; and, from 1976 to present, a new period and model defined by a drive for socialist modernization that has reversed many Maoist policies, restored some features of the Soviet period, and taken some fresh initiatives that resemble the externally oriented development strategies adopted by many nonsocialist developing countries. If there is a “Chinese model,” it is not synonymous with any one of these periods but must accommodate the range of variation among them.

The setting of Chinese politics is a source of some stability or predictability because it establishes the “givens” or raw materials with which Chinese elites must work, but it does not determine particular political outcomes. The combination of revolutionary, historical, and international forces creates certain transcendent problems or questions that must be addressed over and over again: what is the proper balance between revolutionary progress and institutionalization, between traditional and modern culture, between foreign and native methods, between interdependence and self-reliance, between material and spiritual goals? Answers to such questions never seem wholly original because Chinese statesmen and intellectuals have been grappling with them for over a century. In other words, the setting seems to provide precendents or analogues for almost everything that happens in contemporary politics. Nonetheless, historical development changes the political context, so that debates on these long-standing issues constantly reveal new variations of old arguments.

The student of Chinese politics must also be sensitive to cultural, social, and regional diversity in China. In general, China and the Chinese must be examined as a unit; however, when the politics of this society is viewed more closely, its extraordinary diversity becomes apparent. Culturally, it is divided between Han Chinese, who constitute about 93 percent of the PRC population, and some 55 minorities who total about 67 million people (just under 7 percent of the population) and inhabit roughly half the country’s territory. The Han Chinese speak many different dialects or languages, although all are taught a single national language. This linguistic differentiation frequently carries other cultural and social differences as well.

There are important variations between regions, social strata, and urban and rural areas in terms of productivity, wealth, resources, education, demographic patterns, and other indices of social change (Appendices A and C). Within regions there may be sharp differences or conflicts among local communities based on kinship, ethnicity, or other communal ties. Historically, these local communities have usually commanded stronger Chinese loyalties than has the central government, and they have proven very resilient in maintaining their solidarity in the face of official efforts to penetrate or disband them. National policies are seldom applied uniformly throughout the country or, at any rate, seldom produce uniform results. Old associations or customs may survive beneath official pronouncements of change or may influence the social patterns that replace them. The most challenging and rewarding task for the student of Chinese politics is the search for generalizations that recognize and incorporate these multiple elements of diversity and change.

CHAPTER II

The Origins of the Communist Political System

The People’s Republic of China, officially proclaimed on October 1, 1949, is still a relatively new political system. Its primary origins lie not in the remote past but in a more recent history in which many of today’s political elites were participants. The most direct influences on Chinese Communism—the revolutionary setting, Soviet Communism, and the CCP’s own pre-1949 history—are largely twentieth-century phenomena. However, China’s premodern political tradition is also directly relevant. Nor all agree that the People’s Republic is a “nation imprisoned by her history,” but few deny that its origins encompass more than the twentieth-century upheavals that brought Communism to power. Since all societies are in some measure a product of their past, a pertinent question is whether the Chinese political tradition exerts an unusual influence on the present. There is good reason to believe that it does, despite the difficulty of offering comparative judgments on such a question.

The longevity and supreme Sinocentrism of the traditional political system are the primary sources of its impact on the present. No system that prevailed for so long and with such a high degree of autonomy could fail to extend its influence beyond its formal institutional life. Even if new institutions