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. Not all agree that the People's Republic is a "nation imprisoned by her history,"[1] 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

could escape the old patterns, traditional values and behavior would endure for an indefinite period of time. The Sinocentric belief that the best possible society was immanent in Chinese experience, that foreign ways might be absorbed but must never replace the essence of Chinese culture, naturally reinforced the longevity of the traditional order.

Extraordinary concern for the study and writing of their own history is perhaps the most tangible evidence of how the Chinese have perpetuated the influence of their past. In imperial times, the study of history was more than a scholarly enterprise to record and impart information; it was also a means of moral and political instruction, providing statesmen with material to guide and legitimize their political actions. The inclusion of classics of history among the standard texts covered in the examinations (through which officials were chosen and degrees awarded) ensured a common body of historical knowledge among scholars and bureaucrats. Moreover, the tendency to cast political discourse in terms of historical events and personalities did not die with the end of the imperial system in 1911. Despite marked differences in vocabulary and interpretation required by a Marxist approach, the Chinese Communists remain highly sensitive to the political uses and implications of Chinese history and have continued “to find legitimation in China’s past for the domestic and external developments of her most recent present.” Historical “knowledge,” admittedly subject to varying interpretations, was and remains part of the basic framework of Chinese political perception.

The actual closeness in time of the traditional order reinforces this deliberate retention of national historical experience. The imperial system ended only in 1911 with the collapse of the Qing (Ch’ing or Manchu) dynasty. Of the ninety-seven regular members of the Eighth Central Committee of the CCP, elected in 1956–1958, all but one were born by 1912; some of the most senior Communists, including Mao Zedong, actually served in the military forces that were mobilized against the Manchu government in 1911–1912. For these men, knowledge of the imperial political system included personal memory as well as historical study. Since certain aspects of the traditional social order necessarily survived the fall of the Qing, personal knowledge of it is still held by a significant proportion of the Chinese population or is in any case no more than a generation removed. One might still argue that China is no closer to its traditional past than any number of other non-Western developing countries. That is not quite true, however, since the traditional order for most of these countries was overlaid by a colonial regime that brought significant political alterations. Very few non-Western political elites of the twentieth century have experienced such an intense confrontation with their own tradition.

Finally, we must put to rest the notion that the influence of the past is measured only by the continuation or replication of older patterns. Too often the question of contemporary China’s relationship to its political tradition centers only on the extent to which aspects of the former perpetuate or resemble those of the latter. In fact, the influence of historical patterns appears in reactions to them, and even rejection of them, as well as in their continuation. For example, the Communists’ hostility toward the bureaucratic style must be understood in the context of the Chinese bureaucratic tradition; the revolt in recent decades of many Chinese intellectuals against the style and substance of their culture is meaningless if considered outside that cultural tradition. These and many other examples show that deviations from the past may nonetheless be in part produced by it and thus represent a link rather than a rupture with Chinese history.

In considering the origins of the present political system, it is not possible to describe adequately the historical background

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and developments that led to its establishment. Instead, four major sources of influence on Chinese Communism will be discussed, not in an attempt to do them historical justice but rather to isolate certain factors that have particular importance for the present. The four sources are the Chinese political tradition, the revolutionary setting, Soviet Communism, and the CCP’s pre-1949 history. Needless to say, the origins of the Communist system do not fall neatly into these four categories. The most salient characteristics of contemporary Chinese politics are those that derive from more than one source or have been reinforced by a variety of experiences.

THE CHINESE POLITICAL TRADITION

Few terms of social analysis are more arbitrary or loaded than the word traditional. The usage here refers primarily to China of the late Qing period, roughly the nineteenth century. In fact, the imperial system at this time was different from earlier periods. It was certainly not representative of the best of traditional China, since a process of dynastic decline was evident throughout the nineteenth century. One could argue, in short, that late Qing China was no longer traditional. On the other hand, some elements characteristic of this period survived well into the twentieth century, suggesting that traditional should not refer exclusively to the era of imperial rule. Moreover, the Chinese political tradition actually contained a variety of traditions; any attempt to discuss it as a unitary phenomenon inevitably slights some of its regional and temporal variations in favor of others. Acknowledgment of these qualifications is sufficient, since discussion here will be at a very general level. We wish only to identify major characteristics of the Qing political system that have an unmistakable connection with both earlier and later periods and hence are central in the Chinese political tradition.

They are not necessarily permanent or immutable, but they have in fact shown great endurance.5


Elitism and Hierarchy in Political Authority. The imperial political system was fundamentally elitist in its structuring of political authority. The distinction between ruler and subject, official and citizen, was sharp in both theory and practice. The theory held that certain men were entitled by their virtue, acquired through education, to wield political authority; those lacking virtue were correctly assigned to the status of subjects. In practice, a two-class polity of elites and masses resulted. The elite included officials of the imperial bureaucracy and the degree-holding scholars or “gentry” from whose ranks officials were chosen. They were identifiable not only by office and degree but also by special forms of address, garments, insignia, and legal privilege. Educational accomplishment, measured by degrees attained in the various levels of official examinations, was the primary means of entrance into the elite, although degrees could also be acquired through purchase or recommendation. The elite-commoner boundary was blurred at the local level by wealth, since large landowners and rich merchants had obvious resources for political influence. However, the fact that wealth permitted a person to purchase a degree or to make the necessary investment in education, or was acquired because of degree-holding relatives, meant that elite status remained intimately associated with the holding of a degree. The number of gentry (referring to degree-holding scholars and officials) increased greatly during the nineteenth century but remained very small relative to the population. Even in the latter part of the century, the gentry and their families constituted less than 2 percent of the population. Broadening the definition of gentry to include wealthy families without degree-holding members would raise the absolute number significantly but still include only a few percent of the total population.

5Mancall, China at the Center: 300 Years of Foreign Policy (New York: Free Press, 1981); Richard J. Smith, China’s Cultural Heritage: The Ch’ing Dynasty, 1644–1912 (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983); and Frederic Wakeman, Jr., The Fall of Imperial China (New York: Free Press, 1975).


7Ibid., pp. 137–41.
This sharp distinction between a small elite entitled to authority and the mass population not so entitled was a basic characteristic of traditional Chinese politics. Supplementing it was a hierarchical structure of authority throughout society that created an intricate network of superior-inferior relationships. In general societal terms, the authority structure interacted with other political and economic considerations to produce a relatively complex system of social stratification. Of particular interest here is the way in which it cemented the elite-commoner distinction and ordered political relationships within each of these two general groupings.

Within the political elite, the emperor stood alone at the top of the hierarchy, holding absolute power over all his officials and subjects. Although the actual exercise of imperial power might vary with the ability and personality of the sovereign and his ministers, his real and symbolic status as the ultimate locus of political authority was unchallenged. The bureaucracy was divided by ranks and grades, fixing each official's position in a hierarchy descending from the emperor. Beneath the officials were degree holders not selected for official position, also ranked according to the kind of degree held.

Ordinary subjects, who constituted most of the population, did not fall into the bureaucratic or degree rankings. However, where this explicitly political hierarchy left off, a highly complex structuring of social relationships took over, having profound implications for the political system. Norms governing kinship relations and obligations set the basic pattern of authority. In simplest terms, authority within a family or larger kinship group was held by the eldest male within generational lines; the older generation held sway over younger ones, and elder males were superior to females and younger males of the same generation.

In large lineages containing numerous families and several generations, the resulting relationships became incredibly complicated. The point, however, is that the system did locate ultimate authority in a single person within a kinship group and placed all those beneath him in a hierarchy that called for obedience to those above and expectations of deference from those below. Politically, of course, the family or lineage head was subordinate to the hierarchy extending downward from the emperor, thereby bringing those beneath him into an ordered relationship with political authority.

The authority structure in traditional China was neither absolute nor perfect. It was not absolute because it left open some relationships of equality (between nonrelated friends or persons holding the same status, for example) and could not always prevent noncompliance with the norms. It was not perfect because it contained conflicting obligations, by far the most important of which was the conflict between political loyalty to the imperial system and familial obligations. What did one do when official and parental desires were in conflict, or when an official's obligations to kinsmen challenged his duty to the emperor? In theory, imperial absolutism gave a clear political answer, but the norms of familial obligations were strong enough to prevent a final resolution. In practice, then, political authority tried to minimize the conflict by avoiding it. Whenever possible, familial obligations were legitimized and made part of imperial edict. For example, officials were granted leave for observance of mourning rites, and heavy penalties were enacted for crimes against kinsmen. The bureaucracy rotated its officials regularly and assigned them away from their native places to avoid conflict of interests. Perhaps most important, officials tried to co-opt local elites so that directives came to the population through the medium of, rather than in competition with, the local authority structure.

This use of the local structure necessarily diluted the political system's direct impact on the population. Political authority was extremely remote from the ordinary subject; its effects were felt largely through a person's immediate superiors, in whose status nonpolitical determinants were paramount. Nonetheless, the pattern of hierarchical authority was dominant at both elite and popular levels; any kind of social action, whether perceived
as political or not, had to occur within its framework. As a result, the rupture of authority that came with the collapse of the old political system had a traumatic effect on all social relations, and attempts by the Chinese to reconstruct their political system usually have employed elitist and hierarchical authority structures.11

The CCP, too, has held an elitist conception of political leadership, and it established, after 1949, a highly structured and authoritarian system. However, authoritarianism in post-1949 China has been in persistent contradiction with populist themes that have challenged and modified its impact. Although modern populism is largely a product of the revolutionary period, it also draws on a traditional tendency to romanticize popular rebellion against political authority.

Autonomy of the Political System. The authority structure of traditional China gave the political system supreme power, since it placed the emperor and his bureaucracy at the apex of the hierarchy. Equally significant was the political system's autonomy or relative independence from external influence or restraint. Theoretically, the imperial system had an organic relationship with Chinese society. Supposedly modeled on the family, it was to serve society by maintaining order, performing religious functions, and preserving the virtues of the past. Nor was it isolated from its environment, since its national and international responsibilities required a wide range of actions and contacts. Nonetheless, there developed over time a set of institutions and attitudes that made the system incapable of recognizing any legitimate external influence on its actions. It was in a very real sense a law unto itself, self-perpetuating and self-regulating, entering into its relationships with domestic and foreign entities on its own initiative, without regard to their own recognized superiority. There were, to be sure, violations of its autonomy through domestic resistance and foreign penetration. The Qing government itself was headed by a foreign imperial line imposed by the seventeenth-century Manchu conquest of China. Accommodation with outside forces was still the exception rather than the rule for a government that guarded so jealously both the symbols and reality of its autonomy.

One important aspect of the system's self-governing status was its handling of political recruitment and advancement. The imperial bureaucracy set the standards by which political elites were recruited, managed the examinations and dispensation of office that formalized elite status, and decided internally on matters of assignment and promotion. Individuals could prepare the way for a political career by acquisition of knowledge or wealth, but formal certification came only from the government. Once in office, a man had no recognized constituency that might dilute his service to the emperor. There was no concept of political representation, although a quota system in the examinations encouraged a certain distribution of degree holders among the provinces. Just as it denied external claims to influence or representation, the regime acknowledged no legal or institutional limitations on its actions. Particular interests had no right to be heard or protected, no "constitutional" guarantees against the exercise of imperial power. The government could initiate, manage, regulate, adjudicate, and repress as it saw fit. Elites did admit a moral obligation to provide just and responsive government, but its enforcement depended on the political recruitment process, which allegedly chose only men of superior virtue, or on the bureaucracy's own mechanisms of internal control and supervision; that is, it was an obligation enforceable only by elite self-regulation. In short, the traditional political system was relatively free to accumulate and exercise total power.19

Since the present Communist system also maintains a high degree of autonomy in its relations with society, it will be useful for comparative purposes to mention briefly some qualifications on this point. In fact, the government of imperial China did not make the fullest possible use of its potential power. Subject to important conditions, it allowed some local politics in which it


19The most thorough and theoretical development of this point is Karl Wittfogel, Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957), esp. chap. 4.
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did not insist on direct control, and it tolerated some penetration of particular interests into the bureaucratic process. As we noted earlier, official authority did not bear directly on the population but was brought to it through local intermediaries—the gentry and other lower-ranking authority figures. The institutional basis of this situation was the limited extent of the imperial administrative system, which stopped at the *zhou* (chou, department) or *xian* (hsien, district or county) level. Each of these lowest units—of which there were in late Qing times approximately 1,500 with an average population exceeding 200,000—was the responsibility of a single official known as the magistrate. Although the magistrate had a staff of assistants, the enormity of his job required him to seek formal and informal assistance from prominent local persons and organizations. In effect, he governed his district largely by supervising the actions of the local power structure, intervening with whatever measures seemed appropriate (from informal advice up to and including military force) to maintain order and secure compliance with imperial orders.

The resulting relationship is difficult to categorize. It most assuredly did not produce village democracy, since the local power structure was governed by rigid norms of authority and status. It was not truly administrative decentralization, although the magistrate did have considerable power in a unit of significant size, because all local power was conditional on higher approval; neither the magistrate’s authority nor that of lesser figures could stand for a moment against the absolute authority of the center. Nor was it really local autonomy, since the government insisted on its right to intervene at any time and for any reason in local affairs. It was an operating arrangement, undertaken largely for reasons of administrative efficiency and conservatism, in which local authorities were encouraged to control their own areas provided they did so effectively and without violation of imperial requirements. The gentry and other wealthy individuals, large lineages, merchant and craft guilds, sects, and secret societies could thus exercise great power over their subordinates and members and possibly some influence with the magistrate. They could do this, however, only as long as the magistrate viewed the results as beneficial and, above all, as long as their power did not become competitive with that of the magistrate. Administrative efficiency always yielded before the requirements of imperial control and security.

The penetration of particular interests into the official bureaucracy is probably less significant. To a large extent, we are simply noting and indeed repeating a fairly obvious point. The ideal of government by a disinterested, educated elite, chosen through examinations without reference to class or wealth had a profound practical impact on traditional China. Yet it was never a complete description of reality. Wealth did play a role, since officials as well as official status could be bought. Personal obligations and loyalties, especially to close family members but also to those of the same clan, locality, or school, could subvert an official’s impartiality. The system tolerated these discrepancies within bounds because it had little choice; it was, after all, staffed with men who held values that could support such discrepancies. However, in acknowledging that private or particular interests could find their way into official politics, we should also note how the autonomy of the political system affected their expression.

In the first place, the system was emphatically hostile to the expression of such interests. Toleration was not to imply legal or moral acceptance, and pronounced partisan activity carried the risk of repression and severe punishment. The result was a tendency to keep special interest politics out of government, or else to submerge it deeply in the bureaucratic framework. At the local level, individuals and organizations might compete with each other and seek the favor of the magistrate, but heavy pressure on or within the government invited repression. Officials also had opinions and interests that they sought to advance; but again, attempts to organize large numbers in a noticeable party or appeals for support from groups outside the bureaucracy risked the charge of “factionalism.” Hence, minor issues were con-

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*The following discussion draws mainly on Tung-ch’iu Ch’i’s *Local Government in China Under the Ch’in* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962); Kung-ch’uan Hsiao, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960); and John K. Wai’s *The District Magistrate in Late Imperial China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972).*

*For illustrative accounts of how imperial absolutism condemned and repressed “factionalism” without necessarily eliminating it, see W. T. de Bary.*
tained at the local, largely nonofficial level, while major issues were expressed in a bureaucratic framework that abhorred organized political competition.

We may refer to the resulting form of competition as bureaucratic politics. The first condition of bureaucratic politics is that the protagonists must themselves be officials, the more highly placed the better, who reject or conceal any large-scale organizational backing, although they claim to speak in general terms of popular support for their proposals. Interests lacking influential official spokesmen are in effect denied expression except at the lowest level. Second, political struggle itself is carried on by maneuvering within the bureaucratic hierarchy, in which questions of rank and personal influence become all-important. The objective is not to gain support from the largest number of colleagues—which may help but which runs the risk of punishment for factionalism—but rather to get a favorable decision from the authoritative office for the case in question. Secrecy and gossip, friendships and enmities, decisions expressed in changes of personnel, and small coalitions competing for the favor of superiors are, then, the stuff of bureaucratic politics.

The relevance of these points for an understanding of the Communist system is unmistakable. Like their imperial predecessors, the Communist elites have followed their own standards in recruitment and policy, rejecting claims to representation or recognition of partial interests within the government. Competing political organizations or factions, at any level, are anathema to them, and bureaucratic politics have been the prevailing mode of competition. The Communist system has gone much further, however, in extending its authority directly to the mass level, thereby reducing sharply even that limited "local autonomy" allowed under the Manchus. At the same time, expansion of the bureaucracy's size and responsibilities has complicated control of officials and their factional activity, which has often been a severe problem; and political mobilization of the masses has weakened governmental autonomy in the face of societal pressures and demands.

Ideology as an Integrative Force. From ancient times, the Chinese tradition contained a number of philosophical-religious schools of thought. Confucianism, Taoism, legalism, and Buddhism all left their mark, albeit unevenly, on Chinese culture and society. It was Confucianism, however, that became the official ideology of the imperial system. Based on a written and widely studied body of ideas, it was defined as the supreme standard of morality and thus profoundly influenced behavior in all social relationships. The Confucian ethic was exceptionally significant for the political system, since it was the standard by which qualifications for elite status were judged and by which the behavior of officials was controlled. Officials were appointed mainly on the basis of superior performance in examinations that tested their knowledge of the Confucian classics. Study of the classics and mastery of the Confucian style of thought and expression were normally essential to appointment. Although some might gain office without it, internalization of the ethic was crucial for continued service and promotion.15

The legitimacy of political authority was said to rest on observance of this moral doctrine, not on wealth, status, power, or representation of special interests. Confucian ideology thus became an integrative force that justified political rule, defined the purposes of the state, provided the common values of the elite, and harmonized diverse interests in society. To the extent that it was propagated and accepted, it would bring society and officials together in common loyalty to rightful imperial authority.

The insistence that political authority was morally derived and was represented by guardians of moral doctrine was basic to the operation of the imperial system. Given the absence of institutionalized checks on government power, what was to

15For a general account of the examination system, see Ichisaburo Miyoshi, China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China, trans. by Conrad Schirokauer (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), first pub. in Japanese in 1963.
prevent the abuse of power and to guarantee that the government would truly serve society? Confucian ideology provided the answer: good men, not institutional restraints, are the guarantee of good government. This is not to say that rules and regulations were lacking, since the traditional system had highly formalized standards of status and procedure. However, formal regulations were devices for ordering bureaucratic procedures and clarifying imperial wishes; they supported the system's operation but did not in themselves determine the quality of rule. To ensure justice and wisdom in political decisions, the Chinese tradition relied on the personal quality of the office holder rather than on regulations or institutional structure.

No Chinese statesman, ancient or modern, assumed that all men were equal in virtue or that officials would invariably follow the doctrine correctly. Quite the contrary, the Confucian ethic held that men developed different levels of virtue and that the ruler's task was to see that the truly virtuous were the ones who governed.6 It was perfectly appropriate, then, for the highest authorities to test and supervise their subordinates continuously; to expect continued study and self-cultivation; to reprimand the deviants and laggards; and to force "correct" decisions on those who failed to see the light. Since ideological rectitude that legitimized authority was a product of learning, not "given" by class or wealth, the system placed great emphasis on education and indoctrination. Instilling or restoring virtue in the minds of men was the road to a good society.

The extent to which this fundamental principle was realized in the practice of traditional politics is questionable, but belief in its validity and the attempt to implement it through the examination system and other institutions made it basic in Chinese political attitudes. The indispensability of official ideology, carefully defined and studied, remains central to Communist views of government, although the substance of contemporary ideology differs significantly from that of the past. Indeed, the CCP has gone far beyond imperial elites in exploiting the integrative benefits of ideology.

In imperial times, the Confucian ethic exerted its greatest influence on the elites themselves, whose study of it made them well aware of their role in the political system. Commoners, however, were poorly integrated into the traditional polity, which was remote and authoritarian. Aware of popular indifference and resentment, Qing authorities tried to indoctrinate the population in what they regarded as the virtues of worthy subjects—filial piety, respect for elders and superiors, peaceful and industrious conduct, and observance of the law. Through lectures, ceremonies, and schools that extolled the tenets of imperial Confucianism, they hoped to bring the masses into their ideological orbit, to instill positive loyalty and obedience to imperial rule. Neither the effort nor the result was impressive, however. The Chinese countryside remained an "ideological vacuum" in which most inhabitants were "neither positively loyal to the existing regime nor opposed to it" but were simply concerned with the problems of their own daily lives.15 The Communists, on the other hand, have been relentless in the ideological indoctrination of the common people as well as the elite. While acceptance of the substance of Communist ideology appears to be uneven, its vigorous propagation has brought most Chinese into a new consciousness of their membership in the political system.

THE REVOLUTIONARY SETTING

The Communist system has emerged directly from a revolutionary period that was not of its making. The onset of the Chinese revolution antedated the formation of the CCP. It had been in progress for decades before the party became a major force in Chinese politics and began to shape its direction. Any analysis of contemporary politics must emphasize the fact that Communist China is a product of the Chinese revolution, not its creator.

The CCP's emergence in the midst of an ongoing revolutionary process brought both assets and liabilities. On the negative side, fragmentation of the political order made it difficult to seize national power at one stroke and even more difficult to consolidate rapidly a new regime. The times prohibited an easy transfer of power, as by a palace coup, requiring instead a prolonged


15Hsia, Rural China, chap. 6, quotations from pp. 253–54.
struggle to create power as well as to seize it. The ongoing revolution also meant that the Communist elites could not define the issues wholly as they chose; powerful movements were already in existence, and to some extent the Communists, like their competitors, had to sink or swim with the tide.

On balance, however, and with the advantage of hindsight, the revolutionary setting of modern China was plainly an asset to the Communist cause. The basic condition of this period was a near total collapse of the traditional order. Actually, the imperial system demonstrated remarkable endurance. Already declining in the early nineteenth century, the Manchu dynasty suffered heavily from accelerated Western penetration after 1840 and from the Taiping Rebellion of 1850–1864. Its apparently imminent demise was forestalled, however, by a partial revival in the decade following the rebellion, when a few energetic officials tried to refurbish the old system and gained a measure of Western cooperation for their efforts. Decline soon resumed, with new Western pressures for privileges and concessions, joined now by the first thrusts of Japanese imperialism and the stirring of more radical reformers at home. The last few years of the century were disastrous. A humiliating military defeat by Japan in 1894–1895, vast new leases and cessions to the Western powers in 1897–1899, and foreign suppression of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 followed by the exaction of yet more indemnities and privileges, left the central government economically, politically, and morally bankrupt. Still it held on, embarking at last on a series of reforms that suggested China might yet enter the modern world through the medium of a revived constitutional monarchy. But the reforms accelerated the rate of change and increased demands on the imperial government. In 1911, a number of provinces rebelled under the banner of republicanism; in 1912, the last Qing monarch yielded to the establishment of a new Republic of China.

It soon became clear that there was no viable replacement for the Manchu government. Unlike Japan, where nineteenth-century political elites had forged a compromise between innovative policies and traditional political symbols, China had rejected the old political order without anything approaching consensus on a new one. The prolonged life of the imperial system had permitted the national crisis to deepen immeasurably even while it restrained and fragmented the counter-elites who promoted new approaches. The Revolution of 1911 left as its legacy a thoroughly discredited political tradition that offered no guidelines for a successor and a political vacuum that encouraged further national disintegration. Nominal national leadership was up for grabs, accessible to any group that could muster more force than its opponents. However, real power and authority required an elite who offered a credible response to the national crisis. In a situation that demanded new leaders and policies, the Chinese Communists’ credentials were as good as their competitors, and ultimately better. Organized well after the Qing collapse and totally immersed in the revolutionary setting, the CCP necessarily oriented itself toward the major problems of the times. In the process, it became an agent of the Chinese revolution as well as its future master. It is essential, therefore, to look briefly at three themes that have dominated the revolution from its inception down to and including the present.

National Independence. Nationalism was the “moving force” of the Chinese revolution, a unifying theme that brought diverse objectives together in the concept of national regeneration. Perhaps its clearest manifestation was a desire for national independence from foreign influence and control. No other issue was so easy to define in terms of concrete targets and abstract objectives: struggle against foreign opponents to regain national independence and equality. From 1900 to about 1925, virtually all political movements that generated significant

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popular support—the anti-Manchu struggles, the frequent boycotts of foreign goods and enterprises, the great strikes and demonstrations of May Fourth (1919) and May Thirtieth (1925)—appealed directly to resentment of the foreign role in Chinese affairs. National independence remained a prominent issue in the Nationalist Revolution of 1926–1928 and in the early years of the KMT government, and with the Japanese invasion of 1937 it again became the paramount national objective. Although China largely regained its independent status in the postwar years, its conflicts with the United States and the Soviet Union have continued the legacy of earlier anti-imperialist struggles.

China was never a full-fledged colony, retaining throughout its modern history formal diplomatic recognition as an independent state. As noted earlier, this fact sets Chinese experience apart from that of most non-Western countries. Both Chinese and foreigners recognized, however, that Chinese “independence” was only nominal. Sun Yat-sen, leader of the early Chinese nationalist movement, called his country a “hypoc-olony,” by which he meant that China was in fact a colony of many countries rather than of one particular power. Mao Zedong and others used the term “semi-colony” to describe China’s condition, with the qualification that outright occupation by foreign powers (e.g., Japanese control of Manchuria after 1931) had transformed certain sections into full colonial status. Whatever the proper term might be, by the early decades of the twentieth century, China had unquestionably lost a large measure of its independence and sovereignty.

By the 1920s, the territorial sway of the old Chinese empire was significantly reduced. A number of tributary states that had formerly recognized some degree of political dependence on China (Burma, Vietnam, Korea, and Outer Mongolia) were lost. Outright cessions gave the island of Hong Kong to the British, Macao to the Portuguese, Taiwan and the Ryukyus to Japan, and vast areas on the northern and western frontiers to Russia; Tibet [Xizang] was drawn away from Chinese influence; Manchuria was soon to become a victim of Japanese conquest. Within China, some foreign powers claimed large spheres of influence in which they held special economic and military rights. Scattered along the coast and inland waters in cities opened for trade were numerous concessions, or leases to the powers, which the concessionaires administered as their own territory. In these areas, foreigners were guaranteed the right to live, trade, manufacture, and hold land—rights protected by the principle of extraterritoriality that made foreign residents subject to their own rather than Chinese legal jurisdiction. Christian missionaries had unrestricted rights to propagate their faith anywhere in China. Commercial privileges, particularly a fixed limit on the Chinese tariff schedule, gave foreign businessmen important advantages.

The treaty system that established these conditions was of fundamental importance. Needless to say, the Chinese government entered into these treaties under duress; but once sanctioned by treaty, the various privileges could be altered only by the consent of all parties. More importantly, the beneficiaries could, and did, invoke principles of legality and national honor to enforce them. Especially after the Boxer settlement of 1901, the foreign powers maintained military forces in China to defend their citizens and interests. Their instruments of defense were not limited to military force, however. Foreigners controlled collections of Chinese customs and the salt tax, the most stable sources of central revenue, and provided key staff in the postal, telegraph, and railroad systems. Their role in governmental operations helped ensure that China would meet its treaty obliga-

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[See notes 1-3, 5, and 6 for the sources cited in note 5 of this chapter and Albert Feuerwerker, The Foreign Establishment in China in the Early Twentieth Century (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies, 1976).]
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gations, including payments on a staggering foreign debt built up through frequent loans and indemnities.

A few major points follow from this all-too-sketchy outline. From 1900 to 1928, the central government of China was too weak and dependent on the foreign powers to take actions against these other nations. The new KMT government established in Nanjing (Nanking) in 1928 was stronger and more vigorous in seeking equalization of its status, but it fell far short of the goal of national independence; the Japanese advance was soon to put more Chinese territory than ever under foreign control. In addition to subverting the government's authority, foreign influence was prominent in the major cities and in the more modernized sectors of the Chinese economy. Imperialism never had a direct impact on all or even most areas of Chinese life, but its effects were highly visible and tangible to urbanized laborers, intellectuals, and businessmen who were influential in defining national political issues. Whether it really damaged the handicrafts and land system of the traditional economy and retarded modern economic development remains open to question. What is not in dispute is that most politically conscious Chinese believed that foreign economic activities had a negative effect on Chinese development, and virtually all Chinese who were exposed to the foreign presence resented its forced and privileged penetration of their country. The leaders of the CCP absorbed the resulting anti-imperialist attitudes, used them in their rise to power, and have continued to nourish them since 1949.

National Unification. A second theme of the Chinese revolution has been national unification under a single, central political authority. In a limited sense, this goal was as obvious as the drive for independence. The problem was simply a division of power among several competing groups: the solution was for one group to attain sufficient power to establish a durable central government and to subdue its rivals. This simplified view was an understandable response to the domestic political situation that emerged in the wake of the Revolution of 1911. The basic condition of the times was warlordism, a term that refers most precisely to the years between 1916 and 1928 when control of the central government in Peking (Beijing) shifted frequently from one military leader to another, but which in a broader sense may refer to the chronic political and military disunity that prevailed in China from before 1911 to 1949.

A warlord was a military leader "who established and maintained control over territory by the use of his personal army"; that is, he had a territorial base over which he exercised political and military control by virtue of an army loyal to him rather than to some higher leader of government. Warlordism developed when the central government lost its ability to control regional military leaders, leaving a field of warlords who fought among themselves for regional and national supremacy. The seeds of warlordism lay in the regional armies recruited to subdue the Taiping Rebellion. The declining Manchu government never fully regained control over these forces, which grew in numbers and strength. When the last Qing emperor abdicated in 1912, leadership of the new "republican" government passed quickly to Yuan Shikai (Yüan Shih-k'ai), who commanded the loyalty of China's most powerful army and thereby maintained a semblance of unified national control until his death in 1916. Yuan's death opened the gates for the heyday of warlordism, in which no single warlord ever controlled more than a few provinces or


was able to maintain an official government in Peking for more than a brief period. The victory of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces in 1928 brought a significant change, since the KMT represented a much more broadly based movement with genuine programs for national administration and development. The Nationalist movement, however, had won a military victory by striking alliances with some of the warlords, not by eliminating them. As a result, only a few provinces in the Yangtse Valley of central China were solidly under Chiang's control. In fact, his government faced virtually continuous rebellion or threat of rebellion from the residual warlords until the Japanese invasion. It faced as well an armed Communist movement, which, though militarily weak and quite different in character from the warlord armies, magnified the extent of national disunity.26

The evils of warlordism need little elaboration. The existence of multiple and shifting centers of power made a travesty of attempts at national government. Taxes multiplied at the local level to finance the warlords, while the central government was politically and financially impoverished. Foreign powers capitalized on this weakness, trading diplomatic recognition for economic opportunities and supporting those warlords who would favor them or oppose their rivals. Wars and troop movements exacted an enormous cost in lives, military expenditures, looting, and property destruction.27 For any concerned Chinese, the consequences were simply intolerable, appearing all the more shameful in view of China's tradition of civilian rule under an all-powerful central government. Hence there existed the desire for unification at all costs, with an understanding that military power was absolutely essential to the process. The Chinese revolution would not be complete until one government ruled all of China, having eliminated all possible military resistance.28

But forceful establishment of a secure central government could only be a first step toward a genuine national unification.

26Ibid., pp. 1–6.
27Ibid., pp. 20–30.

Unity and security were essential, however, so were governmental effectiveness and legitimacy; although warlordism highlighted the former needs, it also exposed the latter. Military unification alone could not replace the imperial political system, which had combined with its monopoly of force a national administration operative through the bureaucratic-scholarly-familial hierarchies and a legitimate political authority based on imperial Confucianism. The traditional administrative mechanism and its ideology fell with Manchu reforms, the Revolution of 1911, and subsequent changes in Chinese society and ideas. The reunification of China thus required nothing less than a new polity that could meet the demands of a modern nation-state. In administrative terms, it required a new system of political recruitment and of handling an expanded range of governmental activities at all levels, down to and including the village. In ideological terms, it called for a new doctrine that would not only justify the exercise of political authority but also seek the allegiance of ordinary citizens and integrate them in the political system. The real problem, then, was disintegration rather than simple disunity; the solution was reintegration on new terms of which the traditional political order had never conceived.29

In this broader sense, the reunification (i.e., reintegration) of China actually began with those reformers of the late nineteenth century who called for a modernized political structure that would base itself on and claim the support of the Chinese people. Implementation of these proposals began with Manchu reforms that antedated the Revolution of 1911. It was not until the 1920s, however, that the political vehicle for forging a new polity emerged in the mass-based political party. Although never successful at either unification or integration, the KMT government spread new political concepts, institutions, and procedures that clearly foreshadowed much of what was to come under CCP rule. Today, the Chinese Communists' understanding of the real dimensions of national unification, their profound commitment to it, and their relative success in attaining it draw heavily on these earlier efforts and experiences.

Socioeconomic Change. Generalizations about socioeconomic change in a revolutionary era—its causes, extent, and political implications—are always inadequate. No discussion of the Chinese revolution is complete, however, without some reference to this subject. Perhaps the most important point to emphasize is that social and economic conditions in modern China were potentially the source of a massive revolution. It was not inevitable that they would cause one or that they would provide the dominant basis of any revolutionary mobilization that might occur; it was inevitable that they would inject the question of radical social and economic change into the revolution that did occur. The potential explosiveness of Chinese society stemmed from a gross discrepancy between perceived possibilities and current reality. On the one hand, foreign penetration and imperial collapse had already initiated some change in values and social structure, particularly in the cities and among the upper classes. These changes stimulated demands for an accelerated transformation that would legitimate the new values and classes, eliminate China’s economic and social “backwardness,” and propel China into full equality—in every sense—with the Western powers. On the other hand, prevailing conditions stood in stark contrast and even opposition to these desires; imperialism, warlordism, the persistence of traditional values among most of the population, and widespread poverty and illiteracy seemed to defy the realization of rapid change. For proponents of socioeconomic reform, this gulf between ambition and reality heightened the attractiveness of revolutionary formulae for attaining it. And although the gulf was an immediate obstacle to revolutionary mobilization of the masses, it also created enormous potential support for any movement that could transmit to the common people an image of how their lives could be improved.

National economic development was a prime concern for all Chinese who hoped for national regeneration, since the economy was so weak and backward relative to that of Japan and the Western powers. Contrary to some impressions, the pre-Communist economy was neither incapable of change nor stagnant in the decades preceding 1949. Historically, China had known periods of great wealth and economic change, although dynastic decline and traditional values had inhibited diffusion of the industrial revolution to China in the modern era. Still, industrialization and modern commercialization did come to China well before the Communist Revolution, particularly after 1919. Industrial growth between 1912 and 1949 averaged over 5 percent annually and was especially impressive in the relatively favorable periods of 1912–1920 and 1931–1936; the gross national product (GNP) was also growing, although not as rapidly as modern industry.

Despite this beginning, however, the Chinese economy in 1949 was still “near the bottom of the world development scale,” with a per capita GNP of about fifty dollars. Growth in the modern sectors of the economy, particularly industry, had relatively little impact on the national economic situation simply because they started at such a low level and remained very modest contributors to the national product. The economy was still basically preindustrial and agrarian, and the all-important agricultural sector was characterized by low labor productivity, technological stagnation, and great population pressure on the cultivable land. In short, economic development before 1949 was weak and uneven, being confined mainly to Manchuria and the treaty ports where foreign capital played an important though declining role. Key developmental issues, such as the role of state planning and entrepreneurship, geographic diversification, and agricultural transformation, remained unresolved. The beginnings of economic modernization had underscored the need for a program of national economic development, but its implementation was one of the least advanced of revolutionary objectives.

The human consequences of modern China’s economic situation were severe. China’s great population explosion came in the eighteenth century, when the population grew from about 150 million to over 300 million and began to strain existing economic resources. Population growth then slowed but did not stop, reaching about 450 million in 1850 and, according to the


first Communist census, 583 million in 1953. In the absence of major increases in cultivable land or change in agricultural technology, the problems faced by the mid-nineteenth century were basic conditions of overpopulation and mass poverty manifested in chronic misery, famine, rebellion, and population movements.9 In the early decades of the twentieth century, warlordism and civil war compounded the problems of rural life that left much of the population at a level of marginal existence.10 No single factor explains the deaths and complexity of this economic malaise. High rates of tenancy and the presence of a few large landowners were obvious sources of peasant dissatisfaction and obvious targets for reformers and revolutionaries, although neither was a condition typical of all China. High rents and taxes, usurious credit practices, small and fragmented farms, traditional farming methods, low productivity per man, illiteracy, and internal disturbances and exactions all contributed to perpetuating the poverty and vulnerability to ruin of most of the rural population. Life in the cities, where a small industrial proletariat was growing, afforded better opportunities for some but scarcely better conditions in general. Low wages, long hours, unsafe working conditions, inadequate housing, and large pools of unemployed or irregular workers were the rule in China’s emerging factory cities.11

If these economic conditions had existed in a stable social and political setting, their revolutionary potentiality might never have been realized. Such stability was lacking, however, for the collapse of the traditional order had already set in motion far-reaching social changes. Basic in this changing social setting was the discreditability of the old elite. The abolition of the examination system of 1905, followed by the end of imperial rule, destroyed the bureaucratic stronghold of the scholar-gentry class, opening the ranks of political elitehood to new claimants and eroding gentry power and status at the local level.12 As the old criteria of legitimate authority declined, leaving crude military and financial power to fill the vacuum, certain groups experienced significant upward mobility; military leaders and the new Chinese bourgeoisie were perhaps the best examples of those groups that were acquiring new power and status. However, social change encompassed far more than a partial replacement of the old elite by warlords and chambers of commerce. The penetration of Western values that both hastened and fed upon the rejection of tradition pointed toward a sweeping liberation of Chinese society from the restraints of the past. Exemplified by the intellectual ferment of the May Fourth Movement of 1919, this trend promoted the study of “science and democracy,” the emancipation of women from their servile status within the family, and the elevation of youth to more independent and responsible roles in society.13 The vision of new freedoms and opportunities for previously subordinate groups was spreading, supported now by at least a few concrete examples of the vision’s attainability.


10Despite all this commentary about the source and precise extent of economic problems in modern China, there is general agreement that the problems were severe and required a new developmental effort to resolve.

11For surveys of agricultural and living conditions in this period, see John Lossing Buck, Land Utilization in China (New York: Paragon Reprint Corporation, 1964); and R. H. Tawney, Land and Labour in China (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932), pp. 28–108.


13For discussion of the “erosion” of local leadership in modern China, see Hsiao-tsun Fei, China’s Gentry: Essays in Rural-Urban Relations, rev. and ed. by Margaret Park Redfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

The actual extent of social "liberation" was sharply limited, of course. Poverty, illiteracy, and traditional isolation from politics made it difficult to persuade the common people that significant changes in their circumstances were possible. Nonetheless, by the 1920s the banner of socioeconomic reform had passed from scattered intellectuals to organized political parties, with increasing evidence that it could be a basis for popular mobilization. Ultimately, the Nationalist Revolution of 1928 remained oriented toward the proven appeals of national independence and unification, but for at least a brief period in 1925–1927 its radical wing (then including Chinese Communists) was able to organize a worker-peasant movement that brought class struggle within Chinese society to the fore. From this point on, fundamental social and economic reform was an unavoidable issue in Chinese politics. It was also the most painful and divisive of the three main revolutionary themes. The KMT after 1928 did more to advance it than any previous government, but persistently gave it lower priority than independence and unification on its own terms. The CCP, on the other hand, perceived social and economic change as an integral part of its program, as inseparable from its nationalist objectives, and was more successful in tapping this vein of potential popular support.

To summarize this discussion, the revolutionary setting of modern China concentrated political energies on the attainment of national independence, national unification and integration, and socioeconomic change. The Chinese Communist movement, existing wholly within the revolutionary period, necessarily absorbed and responded to these goals. Ultimately, it developed a fuller and more convincing response to them than its great competitor, the KMT. The Chinese Nationalists placed unification first, thereby compromising the struggle for resistance to Japan and postponing a concentrated assault on China's social and economic problems; ironically, the strategy heightened national disunity and weakened the KMT's claim to leadership of the revolution. As an illegal opposition party not bearing responsibility for national government, the CCP could talk in terms of programs rather than priorities and could practice some of these programs in a smaller, more manageable setting. Its victory over the KMT was won by force of arms, but only after it had built up an image of real dedication to the paramount national concerns. Once in power, the CCP demonstrated that its credentials for revolutionary leadership were sound by restoring China to greater independence and unity than at any time in the preceding century and by vigorously promoting its social and economic transformation.

Nonetheless, the Communists' ability to come to grips with these problems was heavily dependent on the efforts of earlier actors in the revolution. The popularization of the drive for national independence was largely the work of the KMT and its forerunners, not the CCP. It was the Nanjing government that secured the first real rollback in Western privileges and began to enter into relations with foreign powers on an equal basis, so that China in 1945—still under KMT rule—had largely regained its formal diplomatic equality. Although the KMT never truly unified the country, it was the Nationalists—and even some of the warlords—who established the first modern governmental structures based on experiments begun in the last years of the imperial system. The CCP was to extend governmental authority to the people in an unprecedented way, but the crucial first steps of replacing traditional institutions and introducing new ones were taken by its predecessors. Change in the marriage and family system was well advanced by 1949, with KMT legislation in this area bearing strong similarities to later Communist enactments. The Nationalists did much to spread, although little to implement, the idea of agrarian reform. Educational reform began in earnest as early as the last decade of Qing, producing by 1949 the modern intellectuals, the educational buildings and facilities, and the increased literacy so crucial to many CCP programs. In these and many other spheres, Chinese Communism must be seen as continuing and benefiting from a revolutionary process that it did not initiate or define.

SOVIET COMMUNISM

The role of Soviet Communism in the Chinese Communist Revolution is one of the most controversial issues in the study of this subject. No simple answer explains adequately the historical relationship between the Russian and Chinese "comrades" or Soviet Communism's influence on the political system developed
in China after 1949. It is undeniable, however, that the Soviet Union has had a powerful influence on Chinese Communist politics for over half a century. We introduce this influence by commenting on (1) the initial attraction of Marxism-Leninism, (2) a period of early Soviet control, (3) the importance of the Soviet model, and (4) some broad ideological issues. The analysis in Chapter 4 of the evolution of Chinese Communist ideology puts many of these issues in sharper historical focus.

Attractions of Marxism-Leninism. The attraction of Marxism-Leninism for many Chinese revolutionaries and the enduring influence resulting from their interest in the post-1917 revolutionary government of Russia did not rest on easy acceptance of or total conversion to the Soviet doctrine. Even in the initial contacts, at the time of the founding of the CCP, there were subtle differences in the ways that various elements of Marxism-Leninism penetrated Chinese politics. Some elements carried a distinctly positive attraction. The Chinese intellectuals who were to lead the CCP in its early years committed themselves to Marxism-Leninism largely on the basis of those aspects of it that fit their own understanding of China's needs or that reinforced currents already flowing in the Chinese intellectual stream. Other elements followed as a consequence of this general and in some ways superficial commitment to Marxism-Leninism; they were not necessarily forced on the Chinese, but they nonetheless injected some novel or unsolicited influences into the Chinese revolution.

From party beginnings to the present, CCP leaders have differed in their interpretation of the Marxist-Leninist message and how to apply it in China. At the most general level, one can distinguish between men such as Chen Duxiu (Ch'en Tu-hsiu) and Liu Shaoqi (Liu Shao-ch'i) who tended toward a more "orthodox" or "scientific" use of the doctrine, and those such as Li Dazhao (Li Ta-chao) and Mao Zedong, who displayed more "voluntaristic" and "nationalistic" tendencies. However, during the critical founding years of the party, most soon-to-be Communists in China shared a revolutionary commitment that overshadowed their theoretical commitment to Marxism-Leninism; that is, they identified more with the Bolshevik Revolution's general message of radical change than with the specifics of its ideology. Anti-imperialism was perhaps the strongest element in this message, not so much through the subtleties of Leninist theories as through the basic insistence that foreign oppression must and would be overthrown. The primary catalyst in the growth of Marxist adherents and left-wing activity in China was the May Fourth Movement of 1919, a result of an incident that symbolized upheaval in diverse areas of Chinese life but was in its political focus an ardently nationalistic, anti-imperialist event. The publicity and definition that the May Fourth Movement gave to demands for national independence transformed Marxism-Leninism from an esoteric foreign doctrine to an immediately relevant explanation of a crucial fact of Chinese political life.

The May Fourth Movement, in its broadest sense, also pointed toward another profound attraction in Marxism-Leninism—its claim to science, modernity, and progressive change. At its most fundamental level, the May Fourth Movement represented a growing intellectual revolt against the Chinese tradition, a revolt that was divided in its objectives but was clearly set against China's past. Some Chinese who were determined to promote a revolutionary transformation that would propel their country into the modern era on a basis of full equality with the West were to find inspiration and guidance in Marxism-Leninism. The doctrine not only asserted the inevitability of progressive change that would alter China's inferior international status, but it did so with a claim to science and modernity that had previously

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38A useful survey is O. Edmund Clubb, China and Russia: The "Great Game" (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

40See "Comments by Michel Oksenberg," in Ho and Tsou, eds., China in Crisis, pp. 488-90.
42Meisner, Origins of Chinese Marxism, pp. 95-104.
seemed to be a monopoly of Western capitalism. Particularly important was the Leninist notion that a small group of intellectual elites could, by organized intervention in the historical process, accelerate and guide the promised revolutionary transformation; to Chinese intellectuals aware of their society's inertia and their own traditional role of political leadership, this idea held a special appeal. To be sure, the early Chinese Communists were not uniformly receptive to these various appeals. Perhaps Mao Zedong alone held a kind of "natural Leninism" that made him uniquely responsive to both the revolutionary and organizational themes. But the ideas noted here were central in Chinese intellectual discourse during the May Fourth Movement, and they clearly facilitated a growing interest in and commitment to Marxism-Leninism.

Supplementing Chinese responsiveness to these broad revolutionary appeals was the concrete existence and example of a new Bolshevik government in Russia. As suggested earlier, it was the combination of the October Revolution in Russia and the May Fourth Movement in China that opened the way for Chinese acceptance of Marxism-Leninism. The importance of the Russian example bears special emphasis. Like China, Russia was economically backward relative to the leading Western nations and was faced with the task of providing political alternatives to a discredited imperial system. The success and survival of the Bolshevik movement offered empirical proof that there was a new alternative to both Western capitalism and imperial decadence. Soviet Russia was not so much a model in these formative years of Chinese Communism as it was a symbol and example of how a new system dedicated to revolutionary change could emerge from the ruins of an old imperial order, despite the opposition of the leading Western powers.

Important though this example was to the radical intellectuals of China, it was by no means the only concrete result of the October Revolution. In July 1919, soon after the May Fourth incident, the Soviet government issued the Karakhan Declaration in which it announced its intention to abrogate all "unequal treaties" between Russia and China and to give up all special Russian interests and privileges in China. Although never wholly implemented, the proposal created a highly favorable response and much interest in the new Russian regime from many Chinese. The possibilities of substantive Soviet support were not lost on Chinese revolutionaries, who became increasingly responsive to contacts with Russian representatives. Within a few years, Comintern agents had brought about the organization of the CCP, and the Soviet government had entered into an agreement with Sun Yat-sen's KMT government in Canton (Guangzhou) that was to provide it with Soviet advisers and military assistance. The details of these activities, which were also to produce the first KMT-CCP United Front of 1923–1927, need not concern us here. The point is that Soviet Russia was a source of organizational and military aid to Chinese Communists and Nationalists alike, at a time when both were in need of support and not likely to secure it from any other source. As in the realm of ideas, Soviet Communism had something to offer that was seen as supporting and reinforcing, not altering, the shape of the Chinese revolution.

The acceptance of Marxism-Leninism by Chinese Communists derived mainly from a significant correspondence of ideas and interests, but it led as well to an acceptance of Soviet ideological and organizational discipline. There was no realistic alternative at that point. Moscow was the authoritative center of the movement they had joined. For the Chinese comrades, the strategy of their revolution was not what they found in the Marxist historical tradition but rather the Soviet Communist party's interpretation of it. Most of them were in any case poorly prepared to resist Russian authority, even if they had wished to challenge political

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49 See the sources cited in note 54 of this chapter.
The practical consequences of formal Comintern control over the CCP Central Committee in the 1927–1934 period remain in dispute. For a variety of reasons, this control was certainly less meaningful than in the years between 1921 and 1927. Soviet leadership in the later years was increasingly more concerned with European affairs and less obsessed with the political implications of its China policy. The anti-Communist stance of the new KMT government in Nanjing made communications and support of the CCP more difficult. Most serious of all were de facto political and geographic divisions within the Chinese Communist movement. The events of 1927 shattered its strength in the cities. In the revival that slowly followed, the bulk of CCP activity shifted to the countryside, to the scattered rural “soviets” of South-Central China where Communist guerrillas were struggling to establish territorial bases and a Red Army. The leaders of these rural soviets acknowledged the formal authority of the Central Committee and the Comintern line, but demands of survival and the autonomy derived from geographic isolation and armed support encouraged them to differ at times with orders from the party center. The foremost political representative of the rural areas was Mao Zedong, whose views were in conflict with both the Li Gan and “returned students” factions. His differences with the latter group led him into rivalry with them for leadership of the party. The resulting competition limited the Comintern’s ability to stay in command of the situation in China. Recognizing that the rural soviet and their armed forces had become the real strength of the Communist movement, the Comintern offered doctrinal pronouncements that legitimized their existence and most of their activities. At the same time, once the loyal “returned students” were installed at the party center, the Comintern could ill afford to compromise their formal authority over the Maoist faction. Hence the Comintern favored the “returned students” in the struggle with Mao, yet in doing so it weakened its claim to guide the main force of the revolution.

In the latter part of 1934, KMT military pressure compelled the Communists to evacuate their principal stronghold in southern Jiangxi [Kiangsi] province and embark on the Long March that was to relocate their major forces in the northwestern province of Shaanxi [Shensi]. Early in the course of this march,
at the Zunyi [Tsunyi] Conference in January 1935, Mao Zedong successfully challenged the "returned students" faction and became the leading figure within the CCP. 69 Moscow was not thereafter to wield a controlling hand in Chinese Communist affairs. The question of Soviet direction of CCP policy was to arise on several later occasions, most critically CCP acceptance of the Comintern United Front policy in 1935, the CCP decision to work for Chiang Kai-shek's release following his kidnapping in the Sian [Xian] Incident of December 1936, and Chinese entrance into the Korean War in October–November 1950. In each of these cases, however, current evidence suggests that the CCP acted in line with Moscow's wishes not solely because of Russian pressure but also because Chinese leaders independently concluded that their own interests were served best by such actions. 70 In short, Mao's rise marked the end of CCP submission to the dictates of Soviet Communism.

The important point in this brief discussion is that the Soviet Union lost its power to control and discipline Chinese Communist leaders long before they came to power. Even before 1935, men such as Mao had, at least temporarily, acquired opportunities to experiment with their own responses to the Chinese revolution. After 1935, the CCP embarked on yet another period of growth and expansion. This time, however, control of the movement was in Chinese hands, so that decisions concerning both the revolutionary movement and the political system to emerge from it were made by the Chinese Communists themselves.

The Soviet Model. The imposition of Comintern dominance in the early 1920s required not only Soviet organizational control but also CCP acceptance of the Soviet Union as a model and of the Soviet party as the most advanced and authoritative among all Communist parties. Even after 1935, when Russian elites had lost their control, the CCP continued to acknowledge the primacy of Soviet experience and standing. While insisting that their movement was independent and must "simplify" Marxism-Leninism for application in the Chinese context, CCP leaders avoided open disagreement with Soviet positions and paid deference to the USSR as the model socialist state. 81 Ultimately, of course, the Sino-Soviet conflict led to China's rejection of the USSR's primacy within the socialist camp; yet the CCP delayed open delineation of the differences between the two parties. The differences began, according to the Chinese, with Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin at the Soviet Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956, but they did not launch direct public attacks on the Soviet leadership until 1963; as late as February 1968, the Chinese claimed, they were deliberately refraining from a full accounting of the conflict. 82 In November 1957, nearly two years after the identified origins of the conflict, Mao was referring to the Soviet Union as an "outstanding example" and the "head" of the socialist camp. 83

Were there deference entirely a matter of ritual or protocol—which in part it certainly was—its impact on the Chinese Communist system might have been negligible. In fact, however, it was also a reflection of the genuine importance to China of the Soviet model. The influence of this model has been particularly prominent in the organization of the CCP and its conception of its political role. China has had only two significant mass-based political parties—the KMT and the CCP—and both owe their basic organizational structure to Russian advisers who guided their development during the 1920s. 84 The guidelines came from

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81 For discussion and documentation of the Soviet-sponsored organizational development that occurred in both parties, see G. Martin Wilbur and Julie Lien-yung Hsieh, eds., Documents on Communism, Nationalism and Soviet
the Soviet Communist Party—a hierarchical, disciplined organization based on the principle of democratic centralism that concentrated organizational authority in a small elite at the top. The CCP acquired this Leninist structure; the idea of party dictatorship, the notion that the revolutionary party must ultimately assume dictatorial political power in the name of the proletariat, even though cooperation with other political parties and classes might be necessary at earlier stages of the revolution. While the KMT formally retained Sun Yat-sen’s goal of constitutional government that would limit its monopoly of power, in practice it too clung to a system of single-party rule. Both party organization and party system in modern China reveal, therefore, the force of Bolshevik organizational patterns.

Moreover, Soviet influence on the institutions of Communist China went far beyond the organization of the CCP itself. It appeared as well in the state structure and administrative practices that emerged after 1949, in the “transmission belt” structure and function of nonparty organizations (primarily those for youth, workers, and women), and in the intimate guiding relationship established by the CCP over all other institutions. This is not to say that the institutionalization of CCP leadership in China has been a direct or permanent copy of Russian experience; it is simply to point out that organizational patterns evolved in Soviet Russia have been the primary model for those constructed by the CCP.

**Ideological Influences.** Soviet Communism’s impact on CCP ideology is far more difficult to assess. On the one hand, the basic ideology is Western in origin and was transmitted to China largely via Soviet Russia. The early leaders of the CCP came independently to a revolutionary commitment that made Marxist-Leninist themes of social transformation and anti-imperialism attractive; but they also accepted, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, Russian authority to interpret the doctrine and prescribe its operative implications. Reluctance to challenge this authority endured into the late 1950s and placed limits on the way in which the Chinese were to formulate their own views. On the other hand, the CCP experienced a degree of physical separation from Moscow and a duration of revolutionary practice before coming to power that permitted it to test, absorb, and in some cases “sanitize” the doctrine, a process described in greater detail in Chapter 4. As a result, the doctrine acquired an indigenous character, so that its acceptance derived from application to and modification within the Chinese political context, not simply from Russian authority. It is an oversimplification, then, to conclude that Chinese Communism is either a creative, indigenous product or only an application to China of a foreign doctrine. It is a blending of both: it is foreign in its origins but over time has been handled by the Chinese with sufficient independence to make it their own.

This view permits us to acknowledge that Soviet Communism did introduce significant new concepts into Chinese politics, without our assuming that all of them were to be observed rigidly or permanently by the Chinese Communists. Some of the areas in which the CCP’s historical experience led it to its own particular emphasis and constructions will be discussed in the next section, after referring briefly here to a few of the most influential ideas that came with the acceptance of Marxism-Leninism. Foremost among the latter are the concepts of class struggle, class analysis, and the leading role of the proletariat. Although some of the early Chinese Communists, such as Li Dazhao, were quite receptive to the idea of class struggle, the centrality of class conflict in Marxist analysis was generally a notion foreign to the Chinese comrades and simply had to be

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*Most analysis of this complex issue concentrates on the particular case of Maoism (see the sources cited in footnotes 10–12 of Chapter 1, this book), but the doctrine in question is no longer identified so exclusively with Mao’s writings.*
learned. Part of the difficulty lay in a political tradition that had emphasized social harmony and restrained social conflict. However, even those Chinese whose revolutionary sentiments had led them from images of "harmony" to those of "struggle" found a strict socioeconomic definition of social groups and conflicts unfamiliar. Particularly troublesome was the exalted political role attributed to the urban working class, a class of very small proportions in early modern China. In time, the Chinese Communists became accustomed to analyzing both national and international politics in terms of struggles and alliances between different classes. They accepted, too, the formal acknowledgment of proletarian leadership in the revolution, and after 1949, they were to grant industrial workers special economic and political privileges. Class analysis is now a fundamental element in Chinese political thinking; although it has clashed frequently with desires for national unity and with the realities of Chinese social structure.

The millennial Marxist vision of a classless society, populated by a new socialist man and based on collective ownership and organization, has also had a profound impact on Chinese Communism. Utopian views of man and society were by no means foreign to China, but this particular utopia contained some novel implications. What Marxism-Leninism foretold was a new society that would be both universal and modern, that is, it would ultimately emerge all over the world and would be based on a postindustrial economy. The doctrine thus broadened the revolutionary struggle to include not only China but all other societies as well. Its acceptance encouraged the Chinese to see their revolution as part of a world revolution, to see that the ultimate resolution of class struggle would be on an international rather than simply Chinese dimension. The universalism transmitted by Soviet Communism has never overshadowed Chinese nationalism, but it has given the present political system a sense of intimate, reciprocal involvement in the international system that was not characteristic of China in the past.

The Marxist vision also led the CCP to adopt more specific guidelines for the reconstruction of China that were not necessarily called for by national traditions or conditions. It is in this area that the Soviet model has been of immense importance. Marxism-Leninism did not foretell the exact nature of the future society; it simply stated that any given society would move through a socialist stage to the communist ideal, with the new forms revealed only after the revolution. Once the first socialist society had emerged in Russia, however, the requirements of the "socialist road" became concrete. If China were to follow this road, how could it stray from the path already mapped by the Soviet Union, which was acknowledged to be the most advanced socialist country? The Soviet model was crucial to CCP elites, not because the Russians could force them to follow it, but rather because the Soviet Union seemed to provide the only example of how to move toward their ultimate objectives. When the CCP came to power, it simply assumed that socialist construction required such policies as rapid industrialization, centralized economic planning and administration, and the collectivization of agriculture. It decided, in short, to follow the Soviet model, despite the fact that China's economic conditions were quite different from those in Russia following the October Revolution.

In the early years of the People's Republic, therefore, Soviet influence was very prominent. Efforts to implement general features of the Soviet developmental model supplemented the strictures on doctrine and organization absorbed in earlier years. Russian advisers, assistance, plans, blueprints, and texts came in; but present in the system, too, and ultimately more powerful, were the influences of the CCP's own past. The way in which the Chinese Communists had blended the lessons of both Soviet Communism and their own unique national experience led to modification and then rejection of the Soviet model. Since the middle 1950s, Soviet influence in China has receded to a more

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51See Meissner, Origins of Chinese Marxism, pp. 146-46, showing that even Li Dazhao's enthusiasm for class struggle fell significantly short of a truly Marxist class analysis.


54See Schurmann, The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung, pp. 75-76.

subtle role reflecting its subordination to the national experience of Chinese Communism.

**CCP History**

The historical experience of the CCP is the last topic to be discussed in this survey of the origins of the Chinese political system. As with the previous topics, discussion will be selective, seeking only to identify major trends that have had a pronounced impact on later political patterns and attitudes. After a brief review of key periods in party development, which will be useful for future reference, we will examine some of the elements of CCP political style that grew out of its revolutionary struggles between 1921 and 1949.

The First United Front, 1923–1927. Soon after its First Congress in 1921, the CCP entered into an alliance with the KMT to hasten the conclusion of “national revolution” against imperialism and the northern warlords. This decision, which was imposed on the CCP by the Comintern against the wishes of some Chinese comrades, led to a United Front in which Communists joined the KMT as individuals and accepted its formal leadership of the alliance while retaining membership in a separate Communist party. The United Front was in effect from 1923 through the summer of 1927, when the KMT expelled the Communists and broke off its contacts with Soviet advisers.

During this period of cooperation with the KMT and heavy-handed direction from Moscow, the CCP began to transform itself from a tiny group of Marxists (or proto-Marxists) intellectuals into a mass-based revolutionary organization. Most of its growth and organizational success among workers and peasants came after the May Thirtieth Movement of 1925, which launched a wave of strikes and protests in Chinese cities and set the stage for the KMT’s Northern Expedition against the Peking government. Party membership grew from about 1,000 in May 1925 to 10,000 at the end of the year and to nearly 58,000 by April 1927. Trade unions and peasant associations expanded rapidly during the same period, with Communists playing a major role in their growth and activities. Despite Comintern efforts to restrain the most radical tendencies of this upsurge, conservative leaders of the KMT became increasingly concerned about the direction of the alliance. A reaction began with Chiang Kai-shek’s assault on the Communists in Shanghai in April 1927, and by the summer of that year the KMT had embarked on a thorough suppression of the CCP and its organizational bases. The period ended with a shattering defeat for the United Front policy and a near-catastrophic destruction of Communist supporters.

The Soviet Period, 1928–1934. The rupture of the first United Front left the CCP a fragmented, outlaw party. Its Central Committee continued to operate underground in the cities trying to rebuild the proletariat base, but KMT power easily contained these efforts. The real focus of the movement shifted to the countryside, where small Communist forces survived by virtue of armed support and mobile tactics in relatively isolated areas. Gradually, these forces grew and acquired loose territorial bases referred to as soviets. In November 1931, the CCP established the Chinese Soviet Republic, which nominally brought together a number of soviet areas scattered about Central-South China, although one was located in the northwestern province of Shaanxi. The stronghold of the Soviet Republic was the Central Soviet District, consisting of a large block of xian in Jiangxi province, where the capital was located and where Mao Zedong was a leading political figure. The fortunes and territories of the CCP shifted frequently during the soviet period. At one point in 1933, party membership had risen to a new high of 300,000.


However, increasing military pressure from the KMT took its toll. In late 1933, Chiang Kai-shek launched the fifth in a series of campaigns against the Jiangxi Soviet, and by the latter part of 1934 this campaign had forced the Communists to abandon their stronghold and set out on the Long March to Shaanxi.

Although the Soviet period culminated in military defeat, it brought major changes to the Communist Revolution. It resolved a bitter intraparty struggle between urban and rural orientations in favor of the latter. After the establishment of the Soviet Republic in 1931, central party organs began to move from Shanghai to Jiangxi, tacitly acknowledging that the CCP’s center was in the countryside. This shift was formalized in early 1935 when Mao Zedong, the foremost proponent of the rural revolutionary strategy, became party leader. Second, the period marked the origins and development of the Chinese Red Army, which was henceforth to be the bulwark of the CCP in its struggle for survival and power. Indeed, the movement became nearly inseparable from its military arm, with territorial influence being chiefly a function of Red Army strength and effectiveness. Virtually all CCP members acquired military experience, while the Red Army itself was thoroughly penetrated by party organization and controls. Finally, these years witnessed the crystallization of Mao’s military strategy, in which major emphasis was placed on guerrilla-type units operating from a territorial base area with extensive popular support, and the beginnings of CCP governmental experience. In the Jiangxi Soviet, the Communists had their first opportunities to establish governmental organs and to experiment with various economic and social policies, particularly land policy. These efforts met with mixed results, but the experience gained had considerable influence on later patterns of CCP rule.


A convenient collection of Mao’s military writings is Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1963). The major works in question date mainly from 1936–1938, when Mao had time to reflect and write on his Jiangxi experiences.


to Communist sources, there were nineteen such areas, most of them in North China but some in the lower Yangtze region and South China as well; the CCP had grown to over 1.2 million members, had armies totaling 910,000 men, and governed areas with a population of 98.5 million. Since CCP strength at the end of the Long March was only a fraction of its Jiangxi peak, the Yenan period was one of truly impressive Communist growth and expansion.

The second United Front was a decisive period in the evolution of Chinese Communism. The remarkable increase in CCP strength that occurred between 1937 and 1945 transformed the terms of Chinese politics. Communist forces entered the postwar period still inferior to the Nationalists in numbers and armaments but, for the first time, as genuine competitors for national political power. Supporting this growth of raw power was a consolidation of party leadership, in both personnel and techniques, that reflected the maturation of the CCP as an organization. Mao Zedong's rise to leadership in 1935 had not eliminated all his competitors, but in Yenan he discredited or drove out of the party any who might contest his dominance. Through the zheng-feng (cheng-feng, rectification) campaign of 1942–1944 and the decisions of the party's Seventh National Congress in April–June 1945, Mao established his "thought" as the CCP's guide for the application of Marxism-Leninism to China. With the relatively stable political conditions that prevailed in Shaan-Gan-Ning (although not necessarily in other Communist bases), this consolidation of Mao's political and doctrinal authority was translated directly into practice; Maoist methods for educating and disciplining party members, remolding bureaucracy, leading and working with the masses, organizing the economy, and many other tasks were applied systematically and formalized as integral parts of the CCP's political style.48

Another development of the 1935–1945 years was the nationalization of the CCP's appeal. During the Soviet period, the CCP had retained a basic class orientation, demonstrated in the Central Committee's attempts to build a proletarian party and in the Soviet Republic's land policy, which was at times harsh and confiscatory toward the wealthier rural classes. After the emergence of the United Front, the CCP moved toward more moderate economic policies that would permit multiclass support. The focus of the movement became national struggle rather than class struggle, a shift reflected in doctrinal statements about the character of the Chinese revolution and in the eminently nationalistic propaganda of the period. The real significance of the second United Front was not, then, meaningful cooperation with the KMT, which was never realized, but rather its impact on the Communist Revolution. The United Front was a statement of Communist revolutionary strategy, a strategy that saw the road to power as built on the broadest possible national base rather than on narrow or rigid class lines. It was a strategy of "uniting with all who can be united," and to give meaning to it, the CCP adopted not only nationalistic propaganda but also an operational style that attracted positive support from a broad multiclass base. Superficially, the United Front appeared to suggest cooperation between two parties, each representing a different class base; in fact, the CCP used it to establish itself as the leader of a truly national movement.49

The Civil War, 1946–1949. For a brief period after the Japanese surrender in August 1945, the two major contenders for power negotiated, with American mediation, for a peaceful solution to their conflict. The American role was compromised from the first, however, by its past and continuing support for the

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11 Townsend, Political Participation, p. 52.
12 For documentation of this campaign, see Mao's China: Party Reform Documents, 1942–44.
13 The revised Party Constitution adopted at the Seventh Congress included a specific reference to Mao's thought as the guiding principle of party work. See Brandt, Schwartz, and Fairbank, A Documentary History, pp. 419, 422. Shortly before the Congress opened, the Central Committee also adopted a "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party," which affirmed the rectitude of Mao's political career and scored his various opponents for their errors and deviations. The text is in Selected Works, vol. 8, pp. 177–225.
14 For discussion of major CCP policies in Shaan-Gan-Ning, emphasizing their caution in the post-1949 Communist system, see Mark Selden, The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).
Nationalist government, while the profound suspicion and hostility between the KMT and CCP made workable agreements unlikely. By 1946, a civil war had begun, raising to an unprecedented military scale the struggle that these two parties had waged for twenty-five years. The Nationalist armies were superior on paper and scored some initial successes, but the Communists soon made evident their superiority in the field. The tide had turned by 1948, and within a year the Nationalist forces were defeated. The KMT retreated to the island of Taiwan, and the CCP established its new government on the mainland.

For the CCP, the civil war was yet another military struggle for survival, a campaign fought on a larger scale than ever before but still a continuation of the reliance on armed force that had marked party history since the late 1920s. It was a continuation, too, of the effort to build and lead a national movement. Of course, the shift from a Japanese foe to a Chinese foe sharpened class distinctions between opposing political forces. The CCP appealed to poor and landless peasants with a radical land program that made most rural elites targets of the revolution. Many Chinese whose anti-Japanese credentials had been acceptable to the Communists during the war were now reclassified as "enemies" if they opposed the party's revolutionary socio-economic goals. Nonetheless, despite the actual and impending rise of class conflict, the CCP continued to define its movement as a national one with a multiclass base. The leadership was "proletarian"—that is, the CCP—but the Communists insisted the movement still rested on a United Front that all Chinese, except for a relatively small number of reactionaries and traitors, could join.

The pattern of party history, sketched so crudely in these pages, will be a frequent source of reference in later chapters. Additional details will illuminate specific aspects of post-1949 politics. It is important, however, to emphasize a few salient features of CCP historical experience that shaped the Maoist approach to PRC development. Although they appear less influential since Mao's death, they remain an important part of the CCP's political tradition.

Mobilization and Struggle. The CCP came to power with the conviction that mobilization and struggle are the essence of politics. Until the very end of the revolutionary period, it was a threatened minority movement beset by hostile military forces and a social environment frequently unsympathetic to its cause. Military-type virtues—enthusiasm, heroism, sacrifice, and collective effort—acquired great value. Passivity smacked of opposition and was all the more troublesome because it was a common response in the traditional political culture of the Chinese peasant. When victory finally came, it was a product of successful political mobilization growing out of a wartime struggle for national survival. To the CCP elite, therefore, politics was not simply a matter of peaceful political competition or administration, but it was an effort to mobilize and activate human resources in a crisis situation.

The Mass Line. Closely related to these themes is the party's "mass line," a fundamental CCP principle that has its origins in the circumstances faced on the road to power. In one dimension, it is a method of leadership that stems from the party's reliance on popular assistance in its revolutionary base areas. It is a recognition of the fact that the movement could not be sustained by party members alone but depended also on the intelligence, food supplies, new recruits, and even performance of administrative duties that the nonparty masses could provide. Leadership remained a party prerogative, but leadership could not be effective or achieve permanent results without mass support.

In a second dimension, the mass line has a control function with respect to bureaucrats and intellectuals. The Chinese Communists have been highly sensitive to the bureaucratic-intellectual tradition in which they have operated. Their hostility toward the traditional official as representative of a feudalistic and oppressive culture was joined by suspicion of the modern bureaucrat, who was likely to be ideologically sympathetic toward the KMT or foreign powers. The mass line responded to these concerns by insisting that officials have contact with the masses.

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9. The best description of the empirical conditions fostering the mass line is in Selden, The Yanan Way. For more general discussion, see Lewis, Leadership in Communist China, pp. 70-100; and Towneau, Political Participation, pp. 45-61, 72-74.
by entrusting many administrative duties to popular groups and by urging citizens to scrutinize the behavior of bureaucrats and intellectuals.

Finally, the mass line is an expression of populism, of identification with and commitment to the welfare of the people. The Chinese Communists spent most of their years before coming into power in intimate association with the peasantry, experiencing firsthand the conditions of Chinese life that generated so much of the revolutionary impulse in that society. The party unavoidably grew away from this experience after 1949, but mass line exhortations to "eat, live, work, and consult with the masses" were ongoing reminders not to lose touch with the popular needs said to legitimize the revolution.

This last dimension of the mass line is directly relevant to Mao Zedong's "rural orientation" referred to earlier. In the Soviet period, Mao was the main spokesman for a rural-based revolution, one that could survive and grow in the countryside with the capture of cities postponed until they were surrounded by the rural bases. Mao recognized early that revolution in an overwhelmingly agrarian society required a revolution in the countryside. The villages were not simply a staging area for proletarian revolution; they were the stronghold of the old society and a primary arena in which revolutionary change must occur. In other words, the mass line necessarily carried with it a strong orientation toward the peasants, simply because the Chinese Communists could not talk about their popular base or obligations without talking about the peasantry.

Self-Reliance. The idea of self-reliance is a third element of CCP political style that draws strength from historical experience. The conditions encouraging it were the relative geographic, economic, and political isolation of Communist base areas from 1927 on. These areas were generally shut off from significant contacts with the outside, and even with each other, by military and economic blockades; moreover, they were relatively backward in themselves, being poorly served by surface and wire commu-

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nifications. Each base area was largely on its own, depending for survival on its own military and economic self-sufficiency.

The principal of self-reliance has both national and international implications. On the national scale, it has fostered in Chinese Communism a preference for local units that are relatively self-sufficient and that hold considerable responsibility for the maximum development of their own resources with a minimum of external assistance. It is a preference for a system with decentralized features, although decentralization is in some ways a misleading word, since the party places even greater emphasis on maintaining the primacy of central authority. What self-reliance really suggests is a system in which local units are clearly subject to central control and discipline but, in practice, meet their obligations on their own without requiring much central interference or assistance.

Mao was equally firm about the importance of self-reliance in international affairs. He saw CCP victory in China as due to its own efforts and resources; foreign assistance, as during the first United Front, was actually counterproductive. Chinese views on this question clearly draw on Mao's interpretation of national as well as party experience. They remain sensitive to the way in which a foreign presence may lead to foreign interference and control. They are sensitive, too, to their country's limited capacity for providing material assistance to other countries. Although they welcome international support and will offer it themselves to other countries and movements with which they sympathize, they still insist that each must rely essentially on its own resources to accomplish its goals.

Ideological Education. The most difficult doctrinal problem the Chinese Communists have faced as Marxist-Leninists has been how to create a socialist revolution and build a socialist society in an agrarian country so close to its feudal past. How could this cause succeed in the absence of a proletarian base? The question emerged in full force after 1927, when the CCP was forced to seek survival in a distinctly nonproletarian setting. Mao responded by building a Red Army, composed of peasants, former bandits, Nationalist soldiers, and other motley elements whose ideological commitment was to be instilled by education. Subsequently, the party applied the same principle to its new
peasant and intellectual recruits, to its base-area population, and ultimately to the Chinese people as a whole.

The Maoists never assumed that the educational road to ideological purity would be easy, and they warned repeatedly (the Cultural Revolution being the best example) that powerful nonproletarian influences can corrupt even those who seem to have been converted. Hence they devised techniques of education, indoctrination, and recalcification to overcome these obstacles and threats. The techniques referred to—mass propaganda media, political study, guided small-group discussions, constant criticism and self-criticism—appeared in the Soviet period, matured in Yanan, and were institutionalized after 1949.

But education is a slow process, and what is instilled by one kind of education can presumably be undone by another. How could education alone be a workable tool for revolution? For Mao Zedong, at least, there was another necessary ingredient: human will. It can be the decisive factor in any given situation and should be guided by ideological understanding; but it is the initial human will to act that is crucial and permits the educational process to work through the testing and application of ideas in practice. The entire history of the CCP, with its struggle and ultimate victory under extremely adverse conditions, reinforced the strength of this conviction.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has emphasized the influence of China's past, the way in which the political tradition, the revolutionary setting, Soviet Communism, and the CCP's own history helped shaped the post-1949 system. Perhaps the clearest legacy from the past is the continuing tension between authoritarianism and populism—between tendencies to concentrate power in a small elite with a statist, bureaucratic approach to government and inclinations to distribute throughout society the material, psychic, and political rewards of the revolution. Authoritarianism comes directly from the imperial tradition, reinforced by the crisis of revolution that demanded even stronger and more concentrated authority to cope with domestic crisis and foreign penetration. Soviet Communism and decades of civil war hardened CCP attitudes toward political opponents and nourished the CCP's insistence on party dictatorship.

Populism, too, has its roots in the old order, which set peasants apart from the Confucian elite, isolated them from government, and supported a long tradition of popular rebellion. Inherited resentment of oppression by the elite joined with the new ideology of class conflict and working-class leadership and with the rural-based revolutionary strategy to produce a movement strongly oriented toward mass mobilization and participation. Both authoritarianism and the reaction against it are part of the PRC's inheritance.

The origins of the PRC reveal its link with the past, but linkage is not identity. The Chinese political system of the 1980s is very different from that of the 1960s, just as Cultural Revolution Maoism was different from the Yanan version. Although current elites claim Maoism as a guide and continue to talk about struggle, the mass line, self-reliance, and the importance of political education, their interpretation of these themes is different from Mao's. The contrast between Communist and imperial systems is even stronger. The imperial state was relatively passive, acting largely to maintain the status quo and to restore balance in the wake of human or natural disruptions. It kept affairs of state to itself and hoped that its subjects and tributaries would behave properly without requiring imperial intervention. The new state aggressively pursues social change, regulating an immense sphere of human activity. It assumes social conflict is unavoidable, intervenes to control and channel that conflict, and expects citizens to lend active support to its efforts. It recognizes the international forces that affect its interests and tries to shape them to its own advantage. Whatever the links with political tradition, the revolution brought fundamental changes to Chinese politics, and the postrevolutionary era continues the process by restructuring its inheritance.