MAO TSE-TUNG IN THE
SCALES OF HISTORY

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THE POLITICAL LEADER

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How did Mao Tse-tung organize and employ power? How did he
seek to dominate and draw upon his colleagues? How did he rule
his nation? What was the pattern of interaction between Mao
and those he sought to influence? These are the fascinating
questions to be addressed in this essay. Before turning to them,
however, a few caveats about Mao as a politician are in order.

Mao was both a philosopher and a politician. Possessed of
both a sense of what China could become and a will and capacity
to lead his people in new directions, he combined qualities that
rarely coexist in one being with such intensity. He was an
inquisitive thinker who savoured power; a visionary who
remained an activist; simultaneously a revolutionary who
revolved in disorder, and a dictator who sought to impose a new
order. In temperament, he was mercurial yet disciplined, bene-
volent yet ruthless, solicitous yet tyrannical.

Portraying such a man in understandable terms is no easy
assignment. One difficulty in sketching Mao arises from decid-
ing which portion of his complex intellect and personality
deserves emphasis. Another problem is that philosophical and
political analysis involves a search for pattern and coherence.
Yet there is a real possibility that both Mao’s thought and his
rule were sufficiently disjointed and unintegrated that the intel-
lectual’s effort to impose system upon him is misguided.
Perhaps Lucian Pye was correct in arguing Mao is best explic-
ated in emotional rather than rational terms. However, the
available information is insufficient to permit a totally satisfy-
ing, comprehensive psychological interpretation of Mao. The
evidence only allows a portrait that dwells in the realms of ideas

1 Lucian W. Pye, Mao Tse-tung: The Man in the Leader (New York: Basic Books,
1978).

and power. Even in these areas Mao remains elusive, for he had
an impish quality which caused him to reject any effort to
characterize him. He scorned attempts by others to place labels
on him—in part because of his petulant personality and in part to
preserve his future options. This deliberate cultivation of an
enigmatic image compounds the difficulties of description. In
sum, our effort to cast Mao as politician in bronze and to locate
him in intellectual and leadership traditions runs counter to the
man. As suggested by the water, nuclear physics and scatologi-
cal metaphors which pervade his writings and speeches—imag-
ery which evokes motion and transformation—Mao was the
antithesis of being localizable: his essence was as much fluid,
spirit and change as it was lodestone, substance and durability.

This essay begins with a brief summery of Mao’s quest and of
his concept of power, considerations which largely determined
Mao’s approach to rule. I then examine Mao’s specific tech-
niques of rule: the precise challenge which he faced, the system
he created to meet the challenge, and the mechanisms he em-
ployed to obtain information and to bring his rule to bear. A
discussion follows of Mao’s own office and its relationship with
the four types of arenas which exist in the political landscape:
(1) the policy-specifying bodies; (2) the vast government, CCP
and army bureaucracies; (3) the campaign mechanism; and (4)
local communities. I then trace Mao’s effort to control the alloca-
tion or distribution of issues among these different types of
institutions, noting the limits which constrained his capacity to
set the agenda of decision confronting various policy-makers,
which leads to an exploration of the variation in Mao’s power
over time, place, institution and issue area. I end by addressing
the old question: was Mao in command of the policy process

2 For example, one brief transcript from a Party meeting is available in which
Mao, seeking to distinguish himself somewhat from the harsh first unifying
emperor Ch’in Shih-huang, noted that he did not like to quote the sayings of
Ch’in Shih-huang. Lin Piao, always eager to ingratiate himself, chimed in
listing the evils of Ch’in Shih-huang. The chairman then swiftly turned
the tables on Lin, saying that he was more violent and oppressive than the
emperor of ancient times. The swift exchange suggests it would have been
unwise either to compare or contrast Mao with the nefarious emperor; the
chairman would have rebuffed either effort. See Mao, "Speeches at the Second
Session of the Eighth Party Congress," May 1958, in JPRS, Miscellaneous, Part I,
p. 98.
during his tenure as chairman of the CCP and leader of his country? My conclusion is that he retained command over some issues but not others, and that the degree of his control waxed and waned. He retained a decisive capacity to intervene selectively throughout his reign, but the effort he had to exert for successful intervention varied over time.

MAO'S QUEST

In oversimplified terms, Mao's hope was to create a wealthy, powerful, socialist China—a vision derived partly from late 19th century Chinese reformers and partly from Marxism. Mao eloquently summarized his goals on several occasions, including this one in 1954:

Our general task is to unite the people of the whole country, win the support of all international friends, fight for building a great socialist country, and fight for defending international peace and developing the progressive undertakings of mankind. We should be prepared to build within the period of a number of five year plans our country, which presently is economically and culturally backward, into a great industrialized nation with a high degree of modern culture.

And in an oft-quoted passage from his July 1957 address to a high level Party meeting, Mao described his ideal political system as follows:

We must bring about a political climate which is both centralized and democratic, both disciplined and free, both with a unified will and yet in which the individual temperament would be at ease.

In the social realm, he sought a society with minimum status differences among occupations, with minimum income differences, and with professionals capable of rising above their occupational norms to attain a broad view of societal needs.

Mao's dreams for China were tension-ridden. The acquisition of independent military power diverted resources from economic development projects. Striving for wealth jeopardized the creation of a socialist society. Maximizing economic growth required organizational patterns and incentive systems that over the short run detracted from efforts to achieve cultural change. More profoundly, given the current level of productivity and the current level of man's consciousness, centralization and decentralization, freedom and discipline, collectivism and individualism, can coexist only in tension. Mao's quest was for the ultimate reconciliation of attributes which, at this stage in human development, appear irreconcilable.

The exact route to be traversed in the pursuit of a Chinese modernity, however, remained unclear to Mao. In January 1962, for example, Mao recalled his 1960 conversation with Edgar Snow:

Snow wanted me to say something about China's long term construction plan. I said, "I don't know." He said, "You are being too prudent." I said, "It's not a question of being prudent. It's just that I really don't know. We just haven't any experience, that's all."6

Mao then went on to observe, "In our work of socialist construction, we are still to a very large extent acting blindly. For us, socialist economy is still in many respects a realm of necessity not yet understood."6 Given the vagueness of the ultimate goal—interestingly, except briefly in 1958, no utopian literature emerged in China during Mao's era describing life during the communist millennium—it seems appropriate to conclude that Mao's major emphases were with societal and political processes, and that his major objective was to commit his people and succeeding generations to continue the quest for a wealthy, powerful, socialist China.

MAO'S CONCEPTS OF POWER AND LEADERSHIP

As revolutionary, then, Mao's concern was to preserve the ideals for which so much had been sacrificed. Since the French Thermidor, this problem has been endemic to revolution. Mao's distinctiveness was his high degree of awareness of the problem and his resoluteness in attacking it.


6 Ibid., p. 175.
As politician, Mao’s effort was to reconcile conflicting goals. This too is not unique; all statesmen have to balance contradictory objectives. Mao’s distinctiveness was in his conviction that the divergent ends could be pursued simultaneously, or at least in close proximity. He acted upon a dialectical view of historical development. To understand how and why he did so, we must turn to his concept of power and leadership.

A World in Flux. Mao certainly viewed power in dynamic rather than static terms. He saw a world in eternal flux and ceaseless change. Nothing was constant:

One class is eradicated and another emerges; one society is eradicated and another rises... Eradication and development apply to everything. If someone else does not do the eliminating, you do it yourself... Dialectical life is a continual progression toward its opposite. Ultimately mankind will also arrive at an end.  

There is hardly a matter which is not transformable. The urgent becomes relaxed and the relaxed becomes urgent. Labor becomes leisure and leisure becomes labor...

What we have failed to do will be transformed in the end. If we had developed our industry to become the world’s most advanced, it would fall to the world’s last as our thinking becomes inflexible...

There is nothing in the world which does not go through the process of development and extinction. The monkey developed into the human form, and the human race came into existence. Yet, the human race will eventually become extinct or change into something else, and by that time, the earth will disappear... and the sun will cool...

Matter always has a beginning and an end. Only two things are limitless: time and space... Everything develops gradually and changes gradually.

It is a rare political figure, to put it mildly, who lectures his colleagues on the eventual cooling of the sun. These passages betray a different sense of time and history than that possessed by typical Western leaders. Mao was attracted to the fluidity of any situation, and as a result he was less concerned with immediate power balances than with trends. He tended to classify individuals, classes and nations not so much in terms of the strong and the weak as in terms of those becoming stronger and those becoming weaker. Hence, he dared challenge the overwhelmingly superior forces of the KMT in 1945–46 because he sensed that the trend was against them. In 1955, he sought to nip in the bud through collectivization the emergence of a new middle class in the countryside, for he felt that it could rapidly grow in strength. In the mid-1960s he supported the younger, articulate, radical ideologues, such as Yao Wen-yian, Kuan Feng and Ch’i Pan-yü. Though they were in a minority, he perceived their capacity to become a major social force through which he could articulate the policies of the Cultural Revolution. And with the 1968 Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia and the clear peaking and initial withdrawals of U.S. forces in Vietnam in 1968–69, Mao saw a change in the trend of the relative assertiveness of the two superpowers: the U.S. beginning to wane, but the U.S.S.R. ascendant. In short, Mao acted upon not only what he perceived his adversaries, allies, and oneself were but what they were becoming.

Since he saw everything in constant motion, he did not see power as a definite attribute of any individual, group or nation. Its maintenance could hardly be taken for granted; its absence could be remedied. Perhaps reflecting Taoist influences, Mao often expressed the view that in weakness there is strength and in strength, weakness. One quality of the weak was the capacity to become strong, while power contained the seeds of its own destruction. It was a view which his own career and the history of the CCP confirmed.

The Task of Leadership. While change was inevitable, the outcome was not. Man could affect both the pace of change and, within constraints, its direction. Through his more complex perceptual lenses, Mao saw a world populated by such actors as the weak-but-potentially-becoming-rapidly-strong, the strong-but-certainly-becoming-weak (the pace of decline a function of leadership), the strong-yet-potentially-becoming-slowly-stronger, and so on. The preliminary tasks of enlightened leaders involved intelligence: to have a clear sense of the interests of one’s own camp, to identify clearly one’s adversaries and allies, and to know what the major trends were. It probably is no accident that the opening sentences of Mao’s Selected...
Works are, “Who are our enemies, and who are our friends? This question is one of primary importance in the revolution.” The populace could not simply be divided into “enemies” and “friends,” however, for a large portion of it was in the middle. These “wavering elements” could either be alienated or won over to the cause, depending on their treatment.

In keeping with both the Leninist and dominant Chinese traditions of Legalism and Confucianism, then, Mao placed a premium upon informed leadership and organizational capacity as determinants of political outcomes. And the task of leadership in a world of flux was to manipulate the forces of change to one’s advantage: to accelerate the beneficial changes and to retard the harmful ones, to ally with those whose interest and movement coincided with one’s own, and to isolate and vanquish those forces which inhibited favourable trends.

Omnipresent tensions or contradictions — the struggle between opposites — are what cause continual change. According to Mao, “Without contradiction and struggle, there would be no world, no development, no life, or anything.” Leadership requires the effective exploitation of the opportunities offered by the existing tensions in society. Indeed, Mao’s approach to leadership was based on tension management. He repeatedly surveyed the existing cleavages in society, and sought to select the one — then labelled the “major contradiction” (chu-yao mao-tun) — which could be best played upon. He would seek to enmesh in a network of organization those who stood on the same side of the fault line as he. He then sought to harness the energy of his allies by deliberately exacerbating the tension, by arousing their emotions, and by directing their hostility towards the “enemies” (those on the other side of the fault line). Maximum participation in the struggle yielded maximum commitment to the goals.

Mao’s career can be written in terms of the successive cleavages he used in pursuit of his quest: (1) from 1935 to 1945, between the entire Chinese people and the Japanese invaders; (2) from 1945 to 1953, between the dispossessed and deprived within China (the rural and the urban poor) and the privileged; (3) from 1954 to 1965, between the Chinese eager to build a new society and the vestige groups who had enjoyed privilege in pre-1949 China; and (4) from 1965 to his death, between the less privileged sectors under the new system and the emerging new ruling bureaucratic class in China. To be sure, other cleavages were also exploited. And Mao’s success in manipulating these tensions fluctuated over time, with a long-term decline in his efficacy. But the underlying commitment to the leadership technique remained for a lifetime, from the arousal of Hunan peasants against the landlords and local warlords in preparation for the Northern Expedition in 1926, to the call for national resistance to the Japanese invasion, through his pursuit of land reform in the late 1940s and early 1950s, to his campaign against remnant “capitalists” and “rightists” in 1957–58 which played a crucial role in establishing the mood for the Great Leap, and ending with the arousal of youth to attack the bureaucracy during the Cultural Revolution.

Maintenance of Initiative, Flexibility and Ruthlessness. Mao’s concept of leadership was not particularly complicated. In fact, it was elegantly simple. The complexity was in the execution, for his approach to leadership demanded not only intelligence but great ruthlessness and tactical and strategic flexibility. Tactical agility was required to forge and break alliances with groups whose interests temporarily coincided with and then departed from his own. Mercilessness was needed to turn upon former friends and to eliminate enemies. The list of former allies turned victims is a long one: outside the Party, it comprised the KMT, the Soviets, capitalist entrepreneurs and Western-trained intellectuals, while inside the Party the list stretched from Chang Kuo-tao through Kao Kang, P’eng Teh-huai, Liu Shao-ch’i and Ch’en Po-ta to Lin Piao.

Strategic flexibility was also required, however. The strategy suitable for the “weak-and-becoming-gradually-strong,” for example, is different from the strategy for the “strong-and-possibly-becoming-rapidly-weak.” The strong, to be specific,

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9 Ibid., p. 33.

can attempt to entangle the weak in enduring alliances that keep the subordinates in an inferior position, while the weak must avoid alliance systems that deprive them of their initiative. Protracted struggle, however, accrues to the advantage of the weak, for it allows the weak to sap the resources and will of the strong, while the superior force should seek decisive encounters. What we observe here is that Mao’s strategy of guerrilla war in the 1930s and 1940s was an application of his more general approach to the exercise of power and influence. As he said in 1959, “Military affairs are politics under special conditions. They are a continuation of politics. Politics are also a type of war.” Put another way, a similar strategic orientation guided Mao in his plotting of warfare, social change, or Inner-Party strife.

A vital ingredient in political battle, it followed, was the maintenance of initiative. For Mao, the essence of power was to be able to choose the battlefield and control one’s own and one’s adversaries’ moves. The tactical aims in political manoeuvre were neither to move forward nor to expand but to seize the advantageous position and to manoeuvre one’s opponent into a less favourable stance. A comparison between Oriental and Western sports is appropriate here. To be powerful in the West means having the ball, being on the offensive, and moving inexorably down field. The great fears are loss of momentum or of forward movement. The striker in European football and the quarterback who throws the long bomb win plaudits in Western society. But in Oriental sports such as judo or even the sedate wei-ch’i (Go), retreat and entrapment are essential ingredients of the contest. In Graeco-Roman wrestling the goal is to pin the opponent through overwhelming force. In Chinese wrestling, the goal is to cause the opponent to fall from his own weight and from his tactical blunders. Hence, passivity and inaction – wu-wei – may be the proper posture, for the best exercise of power may be to do nothing. The natural flow of events may be sufficiently favourable. This is certainly contrary to the typical Western emphasis upon action and the frustration that develops with inaction.

With this orientation, timing, stage-setting and image-management become crucial. For Mao, key tasks were to move at the propitious moment for purpose of surprise, to stage confrontations in the most favourable environment, and to project an image of one’s trend-in-power which counters the strategy of the adversary. That is, retaining initiative required trying to control the selection of the strategy of adversaries, which was done partly by projecting a false image of one’s intentions and capabilities to induce the adversary into selecting a strategy most suitable to one’s own objective condition. For example, the proper strategy for a “strong-and-getting-weaker” power probably is to vanquish a “weak-and-getting-weaker” adversary, but to co-opt a “weak-but-inevitably-getting-stronger” adversary. The proper counter for the “weak-and-getting-weaker” force is to project the appearance of being “weak-but-getting-stronger.”

To summarize, Mao believed that participants in political conflict treated allies and adversaries differently, depending on whether they were perceived as “weak-and-inevitably, rapidly-getting-stronger,” as “strong-and-reversibly, slowly-getting-weaker,” etc. Manipulation of image became important in order to appear to be the type of power which would receive the treatment most favourable to one’s situation. But, since Mao had many potential adversaries and allies and desired different behaviour from each, it frequently became necessary to project different images to different targets. This required deception, bluff and compartmentalization of image.

In this context descriptions of Mao by two adversaries over whom he gained the ascendency are pertinent. To be sure, both Chang Kuo-t’ao and Lin Piao had become embittered by the time they gave their descriptions, but it is also worth remembering that these two similar descriptions recall a Mao separated by 35 years. Their similarity is striking. Here is how Chang Kuo-T’ao recalled the Mao of 1935–36, when Mao eliminated Chang as a rival for leadership of the CCP:

Mao Tse-tung is stubborn and proud, has a high regard for power, and achieves his ends regardless of the means . . . [He] acts in a tyrannical manner by using his deceitfulness . . .


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Prone to speculation, [Mao] would stop at nothing, even in the way of evil, to attain his end. Yet, he was adept in playing two-faced tricks. While trying to deal blows at me from all sides, he still turned a smiling face towards me when we met...\textsuperscript{13}

Communism had disappeared [in the CCP]; all that was left was Machiavellianism and struggle, which had become unalterable principles for the maintenance of Mao Tse-tung’s power... [His] unreasonable savageness did not always work; so he sometimes assumed a smiling face...\textsuperscript{14}

Under the cloak of Communist thinking, Mao Tse-tung had hidden his guerilla concepts, his peasant mentality, and his strategy of the rule of might.\textsuperscript{15}

It is doubtful that Lin Piao ever read Chang Kuo-tao’s memoirs, nor did the two ever candidly share their views of the chairman. Yet, here is how Lin Piao purportedly described the Mao and his followers of the late 1960s and early 1970s:

They manufacture contradictions and splits in order to attain their goal of divide and rule, destroying each group in turn to maintain their ruling position. They know that launching an attack on everyone at the same time is suicidal, so each time they use one force to attack another.

Today [Mao] uses this force to attack that force; tomorrow he uses that force to attack this force. Today he uses sweet words and honeyed talk to those whom he entices, and tomorrow he puts them to death for some fabricated crimes. Those who are his guests today will be his prisoners tomorrow. Looking back at the history of the past few decades, is there anyone whom [Mao] had supported initially who had not finally been handed a political death sentence?\textsuperscript{16}

Chang and Lin had been subjected to the ruthless side of Mao, and their reactions reveal important facets of his character. But from our perspective, what we see here is the chagrin and outrage of former colleagues who learned the hard way about Mao’s strategic and tactical flexibility in the pursuit of his broader objectives. To many outside observers, these qualities reveal unbridled opportunism and a lust for power for its own sake: Mao the tyrant. The chairman’s response to Lin Piao’s condem-

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 497. \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 511. \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 578. \textsuperscript{16} The quotation is from the document Lin Piao allegedly instructed his son to draft in justification of his plot to seize power. See the “Outline of ‘Project 571’,” drafted 22–24 March, 1971, reprinted in Michael Y. M. Kau, edited, The Lin Piao Affair (White Plains: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1975), p. 69.
motivating force. He wrote that "...[The] concern for personal material interests' courts the danger of developing individualism... To consider the distribution of consumer goods as a decisive motivating factor is a revision of Marx's correct viewpoint." To be sure, Mao was not averse to using material incentives, as he did for example during the collectivization campaign of 1955-56 when he guaranteed that sweeping agricultural reforms would lead to a much higher standard of living. Rather, given a choice, Mao preferred to rely on other types of power. Moreover, wealth facilitates corruption. Power begets material abundance, but the abundance becomes one of the reasons the powerful subsequently decay. This does not mean Mao wished China to remain impoverished; on the contrary, he sought a wealthy China. But he recognized the risks that would be created thereby.

Mao's view of military strength was more ambivalent. He certainly realized its efficacy:

Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun... Viewed from the Marxist theory of the state, the army is the chief component of the political power of a state. Whoever wants to seize and hold on to political power must have a strong army... Experience of the class struggle of the era of imperialism teaches us that the working class and the toiling masses cannot defeat the armed bourgeoisie and landlord except by the power of the gun; in this sense, we can even say that the whole world can be remoulded only with the gun.  

Similarly, in his classic essay, "On Coalition Government," Mao pointed out that "without a people's army, the people have nothing." In terms of his actual behaviour, moreover, Chang Kuot'ao trenchantly observed that "Mao kept a tight grip on the real power — the Army." And Lin Piao described Mao's care in making sure the chairman would not face cohesive opposition from the military: "Because of [Mao's] divide and rule policy, the Army's internal contradictions are fairly complex, which makes it difficult to form a united force which we can control.


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On the other hand, Mao also noted that "Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party." The key to Mao's estimate of the limits of weapons is this oft-cited passage from his 1938 essay, "On Protracted War":

Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things, that are decisive. The contest of strength is not only a contest of military and economic power, but also a contest of human power and morale. Military and economic power is necessarily wielded by people.

A similar philosophy pervaded his attitude towards the use of coercion internally. Certainly willing to crush his opponents he none the less sought to avoid physical excesses. He was not attracted to the Stalinist use of terror and murder, except as an act of last resort. His desire was to "cure the disease to save the patient." As he noted in March 1951, even while unleashing a harsh campaign against hidden "enemies":

The suppression of counter-revolutionaries always must be carried out precisely, cautiously, and in a planned and methodical way. Besides, it must be controlled from above. Whether this work is done well or poorly should be measured by the way the masses react to it.  

Mao perceived two interrelated limits to power based on coercion: its use risked alienating the population and its maintenance required popular support. In sum, Mao appears to have adopted a position akin to the Hsüan Tzu interpretation of Confucius: force was a necessary but not sufficient ingredient of power; it had to be accompanied by morality and propriety if rule were to be effective.

We can begin to sense, then, that Mao's estimate of the sources of power departs somewhat from dominant, popular Western thinking. While absorbing the lessons of the Vietnam War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, for example, Americans still tend to perceive their country as the most powerful on earth because it is the richest and strongest militarily. Also pertinent is Stalin's derisive question in dismissing the importance of the Pope.

22 Ibid., pp. 143-4.
“Ah, the Pope, how many divisions does he have?” Mao would not have uttered such a thought. He did not deride the power that one derived from being able to claim morality. Nor did U.S. military might engender his respect; he considered it a temporary phenomenon. Rather, the organizational and innovative talents of the American people drew his admiration.

For Mao, the keys to power were knowledge and popular support derived from the people’s faith in the essential goodness and virtue of their rulers:

The army must become one with the people so that they see it as their own army. Such an army will be invincible. Every comrade must be helped to understand that as long as we rely on the people, believe firmly in the inexhaustible creative power of the masses and hence trust and identify ourselves with them, we can surmount any difficulty, and no enemy can crush us while we can crush any enemy.

“Trust in the masses; rely on the masses.” “The people and the people alone are the motive force in the making of world history.” “The masses are the real heroes.” “The masses have boundless creative power.” “To link oneself with the masses, one must act in accordance with the needs and wishes of the masses.” Phrases such as these punctuated Mao’s writings that one is led to believe they express his real conviction.

But such a conclusion would be only partially correct, for Mao also supported such dicta as, “To rebel is justified” and “The majority is not always correct.” After all, Mao did not seriously believe in the inherent wisdom of popular beliefs, since he dedicated his life to their transformation. The apparent contradiction can be easily reconciled. Power stemmed from making the masses believe in their leaders. The task is not to be moral but to be cloaked in morality. As Mao stated in the Cultural Revolution, “When you make revolution, you must first manage public opinion.”

Here, then, lay the root of Mao’s emphasis upon the superstructure in his analysis of the relationship be-

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between the “superstructure” of a society and its economic base. Men who were properly motivated and organized, according to Mao, could transform their environment and enhance their power. Mao felt that those who controlled the thoughts of the Chinese people thereby determined their destiny.

Still, Mao did not believe the realm of ideas to be undetermined. He saw limits, set by objective conditions, to the range of beliefs he could inculcate among followers. He sensed a need to retain credibility and legitimacy, which in turn required retaining close contact with popular opinion. Power therefore was linked to knowledge, particularly information about social conditions and about policies which public opinion could be cultivated to support. Concomitantly, power flowed from control over the processes of communication.

Finally, Mao recognized the importance of strategy itself as an important ingredient of power. His writings are infused with a sense of sequence and an awareness of the ceaseless quality of political struggle.

We shall not have thoroughly discharged our responsibility as directors of strategy if we are occupied only with the counter-offensive and neglect the measures to be taken subsequently in case we win the counter-offensive or perhaps even lose it. When a director of strategy finds himself in the strategic phase, he should take into consideration many succeeding phases, or, at the very least, the one that immediately follows. Even though future changes are difficult to foresee and the farther away the perspective the more blurred it seems, a general calculation is possible and an appraisal of distant prospects is necessary. The method of directing by which the director watches only the immediate next step is harmful not only in politics but in war as well. A generally thought-out, long-term plan covering an entire strategic phase and even a number of strategic phases is certainly indispensable.

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This cursory survey of Mao's views concerning the sources of power indicates that Mao esteemed the long-run force inherent in ideas and knowledge. He valued the short-term importance of military capability. He felt material abundance was a mixed blessing. And human emotion could yield great energy when channelled through organization. The task of the successful politician was to select the proper strategy for the use and development of these sources of power in combination and sequence.

Mao's Pattern of Rule

Mao's concepts of power and leadership gave basic shape to his pattern of rule. Five qualities particularly marked his reign: (1) the pursuit of a "zig-zag" strategy of development; (2) the fostering of tensions among his subordinates; (3) the retention of certain key decisions in his hands; (4) the careful cultivation of a popular image; and (5) the effort to control not so much political outcomes as the process of policy-making by determining communication channels, personnel appointments and military deployment.

Constraints upon Rule. Before we turn to these qualities, however, the enormity of the leadership challenge confronting Mao bears mention. During the revolutionary era, the overlapping Party and Red Army organization was scattered over a wide area of China. Each base area faced its own distinctive problems, and the communication links between them were tenuous. Mao gradually consolidated his position within the central apparatus in Yanan, but his reach into the various base areas was not total. Then, after 1949, he led a nation which grew in population from about 500 million to nearly 900 million at his death. No less than eight tiers of government separated Mao from the peasants: the central apparatus, the regions, provinces, local or special districts, counties, communes or townships, brigades, and teams. Vast bureaucracies were needed simply to unify and administer the country: a three to four million military apparatus, well over 10 million civil servants, and a Communist Party which, by 1975, numbered over 28 million. Mao's desire was to rule rather than passively preside over this huge apparatus, to infuse the

bureaucracies with his objectives and to elicit from them policy choices plus the information necessary to make those choices well. If he truly wished to rule, the imperatives of his office demanded that he avoid becoming the captive of the administrative apparatus.

Mao was constrained in this effort, however, by the poverty of the nation. While the Chinese have not provided state budgetary figures for Mao's last 16 years in office, a fair inference is that the national budget did not mushroom; the sums available to Mao for discretionary expenditures were limited. Mao ruled within strict economic constraints. The competition over scarce resources was intense. Mao had to develop strategies of rule which did not depend on budgetary allocations — on the "pork barrel" — to secure co-operation.

In addition, Mao inherited many of the institutions over which he presided. To be sure, he helped found the CCP, but many of its customs were well developed before Mao became its dominant figure. The rapidity of the CCP victory over the KMT meant that many Nationalist government agencies and officials were absorbed into the new government. And technological considerations to a considerable extent shaped the range of organizational practices which he could employ in a particular situation. All these factors meant that, even as a founding father, Mao could not shape the institutional structure at will. To an extent which Western observers frequently underestimated, therefore, Mao had to use informal means (such as the use of personal ties) or counter-institutions (such as campaigns) in order to make the formal mechanisms which he only partially created responsive to his will.

Finally, although Mao selected his closest colleagues and advisers — Liu Shao-ch'i, Peng Chen, Chou En-lai, Lin Piao, and so on — he did not lift them from obscurity. Except perhaps for Ch'en Po-ta and for some he helped elevate during the Cultural Revolution, Mao's Politburo associates and immediate subordinates were not his creatures, but had an independent standing in revolutionary history. Mao could not count on their rapid, automatic obedience to all his commands. Although it changed over time, for the bulk of his reign the setting bore some resemblance to (King Arthur and the knights of the round table) a
monarch among barons; it was not a classic instance of the
despot surrounded entirely by sycophants. Mao's pattern of rule
can be seen as the product of his seeking to overcome these
economic, organizational and personnel factors in ways com-
patible with his quest and his views about power and leader-
ship.

A Dialectical Process of Development. One of the most strik-
ing aspects of Chinese politics during Mao's era was the alterna-
tion between a period of social ferment, mass mobilization,
unleashed advance and conflict on the one hand, and a period
of consolidation, institutionalization, planned advance and
reconciliation on the other. The initial mood of harmony
and economic rehabilitation ended in late 1950, and the next 18
months witnessed the "Three-Anti, Five-Anti" campaigns in
the urban areas and the acceleration and completion of land
reform in the rural areas. A period of consolidation and
institution-building ensued from mid-1952 through mid-1955,
which then was followed by the 1955–56 collectivization drive
in agriculture, the nationalization of industrial and commercial
enterprises, the harsh rectification campaign (su-fan yun-tung)
in state organs, and (somewhat earlier) the crackdown on in-
telectuals (the Hu Feng Campaign). Then, 1956–57 witnessed
another major era of reconciliation and institutionalization,
only to be followed by the frenetic upsurge of the Great Leap
Forward of 1958–60 and the retrenchment of 1960–62. The
complicated Socialist Education Campaign era of 1963–65 can-
not be neatly characterized, since the period simultaneously
contained strong elements of both consolidation and social
experimentation, each pursued vigorously in different locales
and institutions, but then came the Cultural Revolution of
1966–69, the turmoil and conflict of which brought the nation to
the very precipice of civil war. An era of greater calm and
planned economic growth followed from 1969 to 1973, where-
upon new major campaigns, the "Criticism of Lin, Criticism of
Confucius," and the "Criticism of Bourgeois Rights," affected
national political life from 1974 to 1976.30 To be sure, not all
developments fit easily into the cyclical pattern of change. For
one thing, certain important trends persisted relatively
unabated throughout the period from 1949 to 1976, such as
increasing industrialization, the spread of primary and sec-
dary schooling, and the expansion of the communication net-
work. In addition, each of the upsurges (such as the Great Leap
and the Cultural Revolution) differed greatly from each other.
Finally, during each of the periods of mass mobilization, many
programmes continued to be implemented through more plan-
ned, bureaucratic means, while during the eras of institutional-
zation, some programmes were the object of campaigns. As a
result of these qualifications an exclusive, or perhaps even a
heavy focus on the cyclical aspects of China's post-1949
developmental experience is misplaced.31

Yet, the pattern did exist. Certainly interviews with former
officials who migrated from China indicate that the policy cycle
loomed large in the eyes of the participants. They perceived
themselves to exist under two types of political system—when
there was a movement and when there was not. There are many,
not necessarily mutually exclusive explanations for the oscilla-
tions.32 But in addition to their systemic, economic, or sociologi-
cal roots, one must also look to Mao. Not only did he play a major
role in helping to unleash the eras of unbridled social
experimentation but at least his acquiescence and endorsement
were necessary to usher in an era of consolidation.

It seems fair to conclude that, although other factors helped
generate the oscillations, to the extent his power allowed, Mao
deliberately piloted China along this fluctuating course. He saw
it as the only way to maintain his quest for the irreconcilables,
letting the emphasis shift from economic growth to cultural
change to economic growth, from freedom to discipline to free-
dom, from democracy to centralization to democracy, and from

30 For a comprehensive treatment of each epoch through the Cultural Revolu-
tion, see Ezra Vogel, Canton under Communism (Cambridge: Harvard

31 For trenchant, conflicting views of this see the exchange between Andrew
32 See in particular G. William Skinner and Edwin A. Winckler, "Compliance
succession in Communist China," in Amitai Etzioni (ed.), Complex Organiza-
tions (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969) and Alexander Eckstein,
"Economic fluctuations in Communist China's domestic development," in
P'ing-ti Ho and Tang Tao (eds.), China in Crisis (Chicago: University of
struggle to unity to struggle. The development was supposedly dialectical, with each stage representing a closer approximation to the ultimate synthesis.

Mao explicitly acknowledged his approach on many occasions. One European diplomat, who saw Mao towards the end of the Cultural Revolution, for example, claimed that in their conversation, the chairman had likened his approach to rule to making broth. Every so often, Mao apparently said, one had to throw more logs on the fire to heat up the cauldron to make the impurities bubble to the surface. He described the same view this way in 1958:

What is the situation of the class struggle in the transition period [of socialist construction]? There probably won't be more than a few more rounds in the struggle between the two roads. We must have a strategy, cooling off for awhile and then letting loose. Without such cooling off and letting loose, it won't flare up.

He stated this idea most clearly in a letter supposedly drafted to his wife on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, and disseminated nationally in 1972:

The situation changes from a great upheaval to a great peace once every seven or eight years. Ghosts and monsters jump out by themselves . . . Our current task is to sweep out the Rightists in all the Party and throughout the country. We shall launch another movement for sweeping up the ghosts and monsters after seven or eight years, and will launch more of this movement later.

In sum, Mao viewed the process of social change as the object of grand strategy, with the fomenting of high tides of development central to his design. Those eras of ferment, with their induced and controlled spontaneity, revealed to the leaders the underlying grievances of the people. The energies unleashed through the outpouring of hostility could then be channelled in directions which the leaders deemed advisable. Mao also made use of those eras to test the mettle of his associates and to recruit new cadres into the ranks, for he felt that such times revealed the

33 This is based on a private conversation with the diplomat concerned.

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capacity of the leaders to handle raw social forces no longer mediated by institutions. The clearest instance of Mao's principle in action came during the Cultural Revolution. On the eve of that upheaval, Mao had stated:

Successors to the revolutionary cause of the proletariat come forward in mass struggles and are tempered in the great storms of revolution. It is essential to test and judge cadres and choose and train successors in the long course of mass struggles.

It should be stressed, however, that when Mao called for an era of struggle, he was not sure of the result. Further, he recognized that risks were entailed: excessive violence, disruption of production and so on. But he judged the risks to be necessary.

Fostering Political Tensions among Subordinates. To recapitulate with an obvious but sometimes neglected point, Mao could not and did not rule China alone. He, perforce, relied on his Politburo associates and the vast bureaucracies under their command to transfer his guidelines into action. Mao, therefore, faced the challenge of structuring the political process so that it would yield him the opportunity to pursue his dialectical strategy of development. During a high tide, Mao reckoned the greatest danger would be extreme "leftist" or radical excesses. During consolidation, he feared the excesses of "rightism," "liberalism," or "revisionism." To guard against these excesses and to maintain policy alternatives, Mao simultaneously advocated contradictory policy lines (one dominant, the other in eclipse) and relied on two or more competing subordinates. When he promoted an upsurge, he still purposefully retained some advisers who were opposed to the unleashing of social forces at that moment and encouraged certain organizations and institutions to pursue a more moderate policy line. Liu Shao-ch'i, for example, had reservations about the collectivization of agriculture in 1955–56, while Chou En-lai was not enthusiastic about the Great Leap and repeatedly sought to curb the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. Similarly, Liu Shao-ch'i and P'eng Chen may not have been supporters of some aspects of the 1956–57 moderation, Lin Piao pursued policies in the army that

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diverged from the 1960–62 consolidation, and Chiang Ch'ing found elements of the 1969–73 policies quite objectionable. Yet each retained a position of prominence.

Mao's power was never so total that he was easily able to dismiss his opponents at will. But he also found the opposition useful, for when he decided to abandon the previous thrust for its antithesis, he had ready support among his erstwhile doubters. He was able to curb the excesses, for frequently he had the alternative institutions and programmes in place which he could then expand to implement his new desires. And he could deflect the discontent directed against him by saying that the previous dominant programmes and their implementors had not maintained the balance he had instructed. His commands were usually sufficiently ambiguous to permit this.

To perhaps oversimplify, then, at any moment in time, Mao relied on a chief minister to implement the main thrust of his policies while retaining a secondary minister who pursued an alternative set of policies. The terms "chief minister" and "secondary minister" are meant in a functional sense; they refer to Mao's primary and secondary administrative officers. The formal positions which these aides held varied from the ranking vice-chairman of the CCP to the prime minister of the government to the vice-chairman of the Military Affairs Commission. He sought to pit the chief and secondary ministers against one another in order to avoid becoming entirely the captive of either.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Chief Minster</th>
<th>Secondary Minster</th>
<th>Chief Organization</th>
<th>Secondary Organization</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955–57</td>
<td>Chou En-lai</td>
<td>Liu Shao-ch'i</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>CCP</td>
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<tr>
<td>1958–64</td>
<td>Liu Shao-ch'i</td>
<td>Chou En-lai</td>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965–66</td>
<td>Liu Shao-ch'i</td>
<td>Lin Piao</td>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>PLA</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966–69</td>
<td>Lin Piao</td>
<td>Chou En-lai</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970–74</td>
<td>Chou En-lai</td>
<td>Chang Ch'un-ch'ao</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Teng Hsiao-p'ing</td>
<td>Chang Ch'un-ch'ao</td>
<td>for post-Cultural Revolution</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Hua Kuo-feng</td>
<td>Chang Ch'un-ch'ao</td>
<td>post-Lin Piao era</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The table lists the chief and secondary ministers from the time the informal system jelled in the mid-1950s. Each change roughly corresponded with a change in policy emphasis, though Liu Shao-ch'i remained as Mao's chief minister through the three periods of the Great Leap mobilization, the post-Leap consolidation, and the Socialist Education Campaign. As we have already noted, however, the relationship between Mao and his chief and secondary ministers was not one between a superior and subordinates; a measure of reciprocity remained and a certain amount of tacit bargaining occurred. Simply fostering tensions among his associates—what Lin Piao called Mao's strategy of "divide and rule"—was insufficient to guarantee Mao's rule. He had to elicit commitment and compliance from his associates. Otherwise, he risked these dangers: (1) a coup attempt by the chief minister once he sensed Mao was ready to degrade him (as happened with Lin Piao); (2) a temporary, even tacit alliance between his ministers, which would isolate the chairman (as may in part have happened in 1963–64); or (3) unbridled, even violent conflict among his ministers, with Mao unable to obtain the necessary co-operation among the competitors to make the system work (as occurred in 1966–67 and again in 1975–76). The latter danger, of course, came increasingly to the fore as Mao's death neared, for the system demanded a vigorous and cunning chairman at the helm.

Several factors explain Mao's success until his last years in using his "divide and rule" technique. Three are elaborated at greater length below. At the tactical level, Mao's primary and secondary ministers themselves supervised a group of leaders united in their desire for a stronger, socialist China, but divided in terms of skills, responsibilities and policy preferences. Mao as playwright—perhaps unconsciously and by accident rather than design—had cast himself well as the central actor. Each associate mirrored only a portion of Mao's totality; each balanced or contributed an attribute which Mao lacked. Mao needed each member of the team, but each needed Mao more than Mao needed him. Hence, Chou En-lai provided both the foreign and domestic negotiating skills which balanced Mao's capacity to provoke. Chou provided the cosmopolitan sophistication of the Lower Yangtze to supplement the cruder nativism of Mao's hinterland origins. Liu Shao-ch'i, P'eng Chen, Jen Pi-shih, and Teng Hsiao-p'ing provided the organizational capacity which complemented Mao's ability to arouse commitment and passion. Ch'en Yun and Li Hsien-nien recognized organiza-
tional and economic necessities and thereby tempered Mao’s faith in human will. Ideologues such as Ch’en Po-ta, Ai Szu-ch’i and later Chang Ch’un-ch’iao possessed a sufficient yet culturally rooted understanding of Marx to enable them to develop Mao’s Marxism into a persuasive Chinese ideology. P’eng Teh-huai, Lo Jung-huan, Lin Piao and Yeh Chien-ying understood weaponry and battlefield tactics to give meaning to Mao’s strategic doctrine. K’ang Sheng had the sinister temperament and the sense for secret internal security to supplement Mao’s more tempered inclination to use coercion more sparingly and openly. Ho Lung and Chu Teh represented the native military tradition of the rebel heroes, mirroring a similar strand in Mao. Indeed Mao’s team was remarkably similar in its array of talent to the rebel band that gathered around Sung Chiang at Liang shan po in the Chinese novel, Water Margin. The team took shape in Yanan, and persisted up to 1966 and the Cultural Revolution. To be sure, some changes occurred through attrition and purge. But from the early 1940s on, the basic pattern at the top was of a group of interdependent leaders, with Mao at the hub and reliant on a chief minister to supervise the system on a day-to-day basis.

Then, beginning in the mid-1950s, in preparation for his own succession, Mao began to reduce the level of his own involvement. As he later put it, he retreated to the second line. He expected the interdependent group, working under his first and second lieutenants, to work with only the broadest guidelines from him. He sought to retain his leverage over his associates and particularly his chief and secondary ministers by retaining key issues, by cultivating mass appeal, and frequently by circumventing his immediate associates through direct appeals to their subordinates. (He sometimes made these appeals while on tour in the provinces, and sometimes in specially convened meetings of higher level cadres.)

However, by the mid-1960s, he considered (quite probably inaccurately) that the system was no longer effective; he felt superfluous and disregarded. (It is possible he came to an erroneous conclusion about his own powerlessness through the

malicious intrigue of his wife.) So in 1965–66, he turned to his then second minister and several other key aides — Lin Piao, Chou En-lai, Ch’en Po-ta, K’ang Sheng, his wife Chiang Ch’ing — to destroy the collaborative system. From 1966 to the end of his life, Mao continued to pit a chief against a secondary minister, but instead of the 1940–66 era of collegial dependence on Mao, Mao witnessed a faction-based system involving conflict between what could be called the “inner” and “outer” court. The “inner” court were those whose influence derived from their personal access and ideological ties to Mao; they seemingly included Chiang Ch’ing, Chang Ch’un-ch’iao, Yao Wen-yuan and Wang Hung-wen (the four who were removed soon after Mao’s death). The outer court were the pro-Cultural Revolution leaders of the Party, government and army bureaucracies, such as Chou En-lai, Yeh Chien-ying, Li Hsien-nien and Teng Hsiao-p’ing. From the late 1960s to his death, the ailing, ageing Mao tried to channel the conflict over succession, a struggle as old in human history as the monarchical institution itself.

Retaining Key Decisions. During the peak of his rule, Mao also jealously guarded certain key policy decisions. He clearly sought the ultimate choice over whether the nature of the current situation demanded an emphasis on struggle or on unity, on economic development or on cultural change. He also sought to identify the principal contradiction or tension which was to be exploited at any particular moment. He clearly believed he had special insight into such questions as: Was the moment propitious to launch the drive for total power against the KMT? Had the time come to collectivize agriculture? Was violence necessary to rid China of its remnant capitalist class? Should the tension between state and society be tapped? He did not hesitate to stipulate policy on these questions even in the face of considerable opposition. Because of his demonstrated acumen and political resolve, he usually got his way on these issues as well.

He also sought to keep three issues in his grasp: foreign policy, rural social policy and cultural policy. These three issues concerned areas about which Mao felt passionately but which also vitally involved his power. Mao had attained power in the 1940s first within the CCP and then within China as a whole because he had articulated the aspirations of the bulk of

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the populace. He came to represent the force of Chinese nationalism during an era of extreme national duress, in a way somewhat analogous to Charles de Gaulle or Winston Churchill in their countries at the same time. He came to equate his personal fate with the national destiny. And as the ultimate arbiter of Chinese nationalism, he could destroy any opponent by saying that he or she represented an alien force. This is precisely what he did against P'eng Teh-huai in 1959. Certainly, this helps explain why Mao personally was so immersed in managing the Sino-Soviet relationship and why he would tolerate no opposition on the matter. Not only did he sincerely believe in his policy, but he also probably realized that if he allowed someone successfully to challenge his policy, he would have lost his stature as the person who defined China's national interest.

Similarly, Mao deemed rural social policy to be his issue. Not only did he believe he had special competence in this area, but he believed he spoke for the rural poor in the councils of the Politburo. The self-identified champion of the vast majority of the peasantry, Mao claimed a popular support which could overwhelm adversaries with the Party. Given the rural origins of the Chinese revolution and the commitment of the communist movement to improving the lives of the rural populace, Mao's assertion was powerful. Not surprisingly, he did not tolerate anyone else trying to encroach on his monopoly preserve. One particularly clear instance of this came in the spring of 1959, when Mao defended his recommendation to curb the "leftist" excesses of the Commune movement of late 1958. The chairman said, "I speak for 10 million cadres at the level of production team head and for 500 million peasants. If you do not join me in firmly and thoroughly carrying out right opportunism [as contrasted to leftist adventurism against which he was arguing] I will carry it out thoroughly alone, even to the point of giving up my Party membership." 36

From this perspective, one can understand why Mao reacted with such force in purging P'eng Teh-huai during the acrimonious Lushan gatherings in the summer of 1959. Mao perceived the challenge which the minister of defence offered him to be particularly serious because P'eng's criticisms of Mao were on the twin grounds of Mao's rural policy during the Great Leap and his conduct of Sino-Soviet relations. If our analysis is correct, Mao had to react as toughly as he did because P'eng, knowingly or not, attacked the chairman on the two issues upon which Mao based his legitimacy.

One qualification does need to be made. Although Mao made foreign and rural policies his own, he did not insist on monopolizing their elaboration or implementation. As long as his underlying authority went unchallenged and he could recast policies in these areas, he was willing to share in the actual formulation of many programmes and even to limit his own involvement from prolonged periods to an interventionist one. Thus, it appears that in the two eras during which Chou En-lai served as Mao's chief minister, the making of Sino-American policy may have been a genuinely shared, co-operative venture. But the relationship only moved forward in 1969–71 with Mao's symbolic blessing of a new opening to the U.S. through his interview with Edgar Snow in late 1970 and the People's Daily photograph of Snow and Mao on the T'ien An Men Square, engrossed in friendly conversation.

Mao also sought to be the ultimate arbiter of cultural questions. In the Chinese context, "cultural matters" subsume a wider range of issues than the phrase implies in English. It includes not only policies towards the media, literature and the arts, but also embraces educational affairs, programmes in science and technology, policies towards the intellectuals, and even extends to public health and sports. Mao's focus on these issues flowed naturally from his assessment of their importance in determining China's future. But unlike the foreign policy and rural realms, Mao never established his absolute authority in this realm. For one thing, the issues could not be easily reduced to proportions manageable by one man. In addition, Mao's colleagues did not appear to believe he had special wisdom in this area. In fact, many leaders of the CCP had their own, rather definite views on the changes that needed to be made in China's culture. The notion that China demanded a cultural revolution antedated the founding of the CCP and Mao's rise within it. Whereas the CCP's attention to national resistance against Japan

and to mobilizing the peasantry was partly the result of Mao's efforts, the desire for cultural change antedated Mao's rise in the Party and was one of the factors that had led to the CCP's formation. In spite of Mao's recognition of the ideology's importance, therefore, he never succeeded in making it his own.

In another sense, however, he did ensure that the interpretation of the ideology remained his prerogative. That is, the basis of the Party's claim to legitimacy, the reasons it asserted for claiming the obedience and loyalty of the populace, was based on Mao's thought: his creative adaptation of Marxism-Leninism to the Chinese context. As a result of his successfully claiming to be the sole Chinese source of the ideas upon which the political system was based (the reality was much more complicated), Mao could destroy any rival by saying the opponent had departed from his thought. As Lin Piao's son noted, "The Chairman commands such high prestige that he need only utter one sentence to remove anybody he chooses." Obviously best exercised as a threat and even then sparingly, none the less Mao employed it with devastating effectiveness, especially against potential successors with whom he had grown disenchanted; Mao proclaimed the former heir apparent deficient in ideological understanding of his beliefs. It was the charge which turned Liu Shao-ch'i into a symbol of evil, a pattern repeated with Lin Piao.

Cultivating Authority. There can be little doubt that Mao carefully manipulated his image in order to elicit maximum support from his policy-making associates, the bureaucracy and the population at large. But, as noted earlier, to establish his authority, he had to project a somewhat different image to each constituency. His colleagues saw the total Mao and were exposed to the full range of his power: his willingness to coerce, his ideas, his capacity to reward, and his ability to manipulate psychologically. The bureaucrats were somewhat removed from

his direct lash, and primarily were the objects of his ideas and his material rewards and denials. But to the populace as a whole, Mao remained a remote figure whose presence was felt primarily in its symbolic-ideological dimension. He sought to be held in awe, and drew upon the imperial tradition to foster a sense of reverence. In sociological jargon, those far from the chairman felt only his normative power; remunerative power was added for his bureaucrats; and a coercive dimension was added for his colleagues. To be sure, as with any classification scheme, the types of power are imperfectly drawn, the boundaries between the types of constituencies are not easily delineated, and exceptions to the generalization exist. But still, the images of Mao held by colleagues were vastly different from those seen by the remote populace. Colleagues knew him infinitely better because they were exposed to facets of Mao that the public did not see.

When the Red Guards shouted in emotional frenzy as Mao appeared before them during mass rallies in 1966, or when peasants pasted the chairman's picture on the family altar, they were responding to him as the spiritual symbol of their nation. According to one prisoner who spent considerable time in labour camps, they did not associate Mao with their harsh treatment. Even prisoners revered the chairman and blamed their condition either on their own shortcomings or on Mao's evil, deceitful subordinates. It must be added, however, that in Mao's last years he was less successful in projecting solely a benevolent image. He became inextricably linked with the violence of the Cultural Revolution in the minds of many urban dwellers and, in the "Criticism of Lin, Criticism of Confucius" campaign of 1973–74, he even encouraged mass media comparisons of him with the cruel founder of Ch'in. How much of the awe and reverence of the 1950s and early 1960s had been destroyed by the mid-1970s, particularly in urban areas, remains open to question.

But certainly, until his last years, Mao perceived a wish among the populace to worship their leader. Upon occasion, he

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41 This section owes much in its conceptualization to Edwin Winckler of Columbia University.

explicitly acknowledged his deliberate use of this desire to enhance his power within the Party. In a remarkable passage, he described his situation in a letter to Chiang Ch'ing:

I have never believed that the several booklets I wrote would have so much supernatural power. Now, after [Lin Piao] exaggerated them, the whole nation has exaggerated them. [Referring to Lin's idolatrous praise of Mao — ed.] ... In the conference held in May in Peking, he spoke in the same manner ... I guessed that [Lin and his supporters'] very intention was to strike the ghosts by the help of Chung K'uei. [Chung K'uei is a semi-mythical folk hero whose picture was widely pasted on doors on the eve of the New Year to protect houses against evil spirits — ed.] I became the Chung K'uei of the Communist Party as early as in the 1960s. Things always go toward the opposite side. The higher a thing is blown up, the more serious it is hurt at the fall. I am now prepared to be broken to pieces. This does not bother me. For that matter, I can never be destroyed; I may become pieces, that's all.43

Mao recognized the risks of allowing the "cult of the personality" and, if the 1966 dating of this letter is accurate, he believed Lin's lavish praise was false flattery which he had to endorse in order to weaken the bureaucratic base of his opponents. As he told Edgar Snow in 1965, "Probably Khrushchev fell because he had no cult of personality at all."44 In his subsequent 1970 interview with Snow, the chairman recalled that at the time of their 1965 colloquy, a great deal of power had escaped his control.45 That was why, he explained to the American journalist, a more extensive personality cult was needed, so as to stimulate the masses to dismantle the anti-Mao Party bureaucracy. It was hard, Mao explained, for people to overcome the habits of 3,000 years of emperor-worshipping tradition. But Mao asserted that the cult had become excessive during the Cultural Revolution and ought to be cooled down. Still, he asked, could any leader, even in the U.S., get along without some people to worship him? Mao concluded that there was always the desire to be worshipped and the desire to worship. Snow's reflection on this conversation is pertinent: obviously the chairman had pondered very much over this phenomenon - the human need for

and to worship, about gods and God.46 As Mao confessed to Snow, the one image which he hoped the populace would retain about him would be as a simple schoolteacher - purely his normative dimension.

Bureaucrats had more direct contact with Mao's ideas, primarily through the enforced study of his works and the dissemination of his directives through inner-organizational channels. But bureaucrats also sensed Mao's capacity to affect their careers. He determined the fates of the high-ranking protectors of lower level bureaucrats. He launched rectification campaigns and opened up opportunities for advancement. He affected pay scales. Unfortunately, the necessary survey data is unavailable to document the point, but it does seem that bureaucrats tended to perceive Mao's power primarily in terms of his ability to bestow rewards or to deprive officials of their security. They frequently attributed policy errors to his advisers or to his age. He was not responsible for the physical punishment meted out to bureaucrats. Hence, during the Cultural Revolution, several stories came out of officials who had been purged and even imprisoned as a result of some campaign which Mao had helped launch. Yet, the aggrieved cadre had turned to Mao as the person to right the felt injustice; petitions or letters were addressed to him in confidence that if only his benevolent attention could be drawn to the degraded official's plight, all would be better. (A similar phenomenon existed in Stalinist Russia.)

His colleagues, with their richer experience, appear to have been somewhat intimidated by him. In fact, Mao deliberately created a sense of fear. Here are extracts from Politburo meetings which capture Mao's capacity to threaten his colleagues:

We now have some first secretaries who cannot even match Liu Pang of the feudal period, and are somewhat like Hsiang Yu. [Liu and Hsiang were historical personages of the early Han dynasty — ed.] If these comrades don't reform, they will lose their jobs. You all know the play called The Tyrant Bids his Lady Farewell; if those comrades don't reform, the day will surely come when they too will be saying farewell to their ladies (laughter). Why do I say this so bluntly? It is because I intend to be mean and make some comrades feel so sure that they think over things properly. It wouldn't be a bad thing if they couldn't sleep for a

43 "Mao's Letter to Chiang Ch'ing," in Kau [ed.], Lin Piao, p. 120.
46 Ibid., p. 170.
night or two. If they were able to sleep, then I wouldn’t be pleased because it would mean that they have not yet felt sore.

Here in my speech I have criticized certain phenomena and criticized certain comrades, but I have not named them. I have not pointed out who Tom, Dick and Harry are. You yourselves must have some ideas in your minds (laughter).

Needless to say, the laughter mentioned in the transcript was a nervous one. But Mao was not always so indirect in his intimidation. The comrades whom Mao chastised in this passage from the Lushan Plenum knew they were the objects of his wrath:

Now I am going to admonish some comrades who have made mistakes. Prepare yourselves to listen to some off-hand remarks... As soon as your mistakes are mentioned, you shouldn’t be frightened out of your wits, as though people were going to talk about you for years on end. I can’t go on all that long. It depends on how you go about correcting your errors...

Comrades who have committed mistakes must prepare to listen quite a lot... All they have to do is observe these few points, and I think they can definitely reform... If they aren’t prepared to listen, if they aren’t sincere, then it will be very difficult.

But we see Mao at his most acerbic in his written exchange with Poliburo member and long-time associate Chang Wen-t’ien who was attacked and then was purged by Mao at the July Lushan meetings. On 2 August Mao wrote to Chang after he had fallen seriously ill following the meetings:

You are getting the consequences of your own doings. Whom can you blame? In my opinion, you have relapsed into your old illness... Now you are having spells of cold and fever again. A scholar composed a poem on malaria as follows: “[Mao quotes at length from a poem graphically describing the pain of malaria—ed.] Comrade, is it not like this? If so, then that is fine. One like you needs to go through a serious illness.

Mao then went on to advise Chang to read a particular essay, Mei

48 Ibid., p. 186.

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Cheng’s “Chi Fa,” calling it indeed a wonderful literary piece. Mao concluded his sharply worded, cruel missive:

What is to be done now? Comrade, I would like to give you a piece of advice: “Thorougly rectify yourself.” Since you [profess to] respect me, have phoned me several times, and have wanted to come to my place for a talk, I am willing to talk to you. But I am busy these days. Please wait for some time. I am writing you this letter to express my sentiments.

Fortuitously, Chang Wen-t’ien’s 18 August reply to this barrage is available.

Comrade Tse-tung, I have just undergone a major operation which should be beneficial to my health. I sincerely thank you and other comrades of the Central Committee for your help. I must sever my relations with my reactionary self of yesterday. Today I read your comments on Mei Cheng’s essay, “Chi Fa,” on machine guns, and other subjects, and was greatly moved... I hope to receive more instructions from you.

Mao’s reaction to this letter is also pertinent. He warmly welcomed it, and ordered 160 copies distributed to Central Committee members. As if in anticipation of his subsequent treatment, Chang Wen-t’ien had described Mao as “very brilliant and very strong-handed in rectifying people like Stalin in his late years.”

It seems to have been a widely shared view among his colleagues.

Control of Communications, Personnel and Military Forces. One underlying theme of his essay is that a precondition for Mao’s effectiveness as ruler of China was his dominance of the Poliburo. But we have not yet identified the real ingredients of his power in the policy process. Since the Chinese system was not highly institutionalized, it cannot be said Mao’s power flowed automatically from the positions he held. There was a contingent, almost tenuous quality to his power. In the final analysis, his ability to pursue his strategies, to bring his forceful personality to bear, and to control certain critical issues depended upon his control over the communication process through which policy was formulated, over the appointment

51 Ibid., p. 316.
53 Quoted in The Case of Peng Teh-huai, p. 36.
process to high office, and over the disposition of military forces.

Let us therefore provide a few of the rare glimpses of Mao employing these three raw sources of his power. The chairman provided one such moment of illumination when he revealed how he set about to weaken Lin Piao's position in 1970–71:

I adopted three methods. One was to throw stones [disseminating information – ed.], one was to mix in sand [changing personnel – ed.] and the third was to dig up the cornerstone [changing troop assignments – ed.]. I criticized the material Ch'en Pei-te had used to deceive people, and I commented on reports of the 38th Army and of the Taishan Military District. I also made critical comments on a document of the long forum of the Military Affairs Committee, which didn't criticize Ch'en at all. My method was to get hold of these stones and make critical comments, and then let everyone discuss them — this was throwing stones. When soil is too tightly packed, it can not breathe, but if a little sand is mixed in, then it can breathe. The staff of the Military Affairs Committee was too uniform in composition and needed new people mixed in. This called for mixing in sand. Reorganizing the Peking Military Region is called digging up the cornerstone.64

Military Command. On more than one occasion, Mao ordered troop redeployment as a preliminary step in a power struggle.65 The military contained units with different sets of loyalties, and as Mao sought to weaken one subordinate and strengthen another, he transferred units loyal to his ally to key strategic points, and ordered the troops of his opponent away from crucial locales. In this game, military occupancy of Peking was particularly significant. On several occasions, Mao shuffled the Peking garrison command prior to a major showdown. For example, he began to deprive Lin Piao of his strength by ordering the 38th Division, crack troops highly loyal to Lin, out of Peking at an early stage in the struggle, before Lin was fully aware of Mao's

64 "Summary of Chairman Mao's Talks to Local Comrades During his Inspection Tour" (August–September 1971), in Kau (ed.), Lin Piao, p. xxiv.
65 This is effectively stressed in Michael Pillsbury, "Patterns of Chinese power struggles: three models," prepared for University Seminar on Modern China, Columbia University, New York City, 27 March, 1974. For the chain-of-command which enabled Mao to command forces, see Harvey Nelson, "Military forces in the Cultural Revolution," CQ, No. 51 (July–September 1972), pp. 444–74. For an assertion that Mao could circumvent the normal chain-of-command and directly order combat units to undertake actions, see a presumably informed article by a CIA analyst: Roger Brown, "Chinese politics and American policy," Foreign Policy, No. 23 (Summer 1970), pp. 3–23.

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intent against him.66 Throughout Mao's rule, Chinese elite politics were more praetorian than the external image would lead observers to believe. Mao accrued power from his ability to manipulate and use the tensions within the military.

Control over Words. In the delicate balancing act, he also secured leverage over the military through his command over words.67 Throughout Chinese history, words and arms — wen and wu — have been counterposed as approaches to rule. There exists an eternal contest for power, according to Chinese historiography, between men of letters and men of arms. Of necessity, periods of disunity were ended and new dynasties were established by men of arms, who then in the great dynasties were succeeded by bearers of the literate culture. Just as Mao pitted his subordinates against each other, so too he sought to dominate both realms of wen and wu by retaining and using each to control the other.

Several instances exist not only of Mao's personal attention to the writing of authoritative People's Daily editorials, but also his selecting the slogans which pervaded the media and wall space throughout China. These slogans encapsulated complex policies and set the tone for the politics of the entire nation. They provided the cues upon which millions judged how to behave politically, and changes in slogans communicated to the masses that a shift in the political winds had occurred. Mao revealed his attentiveness to slogans in various discussions. For example, in 1958, Mao disclosed the cares with which he had penned the major Great Leap slogan "Go all out, aim high, and achieve more, better, faster, and more economical results."68 He disclosed that he had considered saying "go out" instead of "go all out," but found then formulation preferable. He wished to stimulate the masses to the utmost, he admitted. He recognized that the slogan was not easily understood by foreigners, and as a result, he had contemplated altering it. But in retrospect, he was pleased with the untempered slogan.

In December 1958 Mao expressed reservations about another

67 For one explanation for the importance of words in Chinese politics, see Richard Solomon, A Revolution is not a Dinner Party (New York: Doubleday, 1975), Ch. 3.
Great Leap slogan: "Basically transform the entire country after three years of hard struggle." Mao recalled that the slogan had been adopted in January, with its primary emphasis on the rural transformation. But by December the chairman was chagrined to find that the qualifying word "basically" had been dropped from the slogan and that it was being applied everywhere with this alteration. He sensed that the slogan should be modified, retaining the optimism of the initial call but introducing a longer time span for achieving a thorough transformation. Mao called for a discussion as to what the appropriate slogan should be.

Clearly Mao did not authorize every slogan, and towards the end of his life, his slogans were sometimes distorted, not well disseminated, or even forged. More broadly, by the 1960s he felt the cultural bureaucracy was unresponsive to him, and one major reason why he launched the Cultural Revolution was to reassert his control over the "word" and its disseminating agencies. He turned to his inner court, particularly his wife, to perform the monitoring task, but it seems likely Chiang Ch'ing abused Mao's trust.

Control over the Communication Process. Mao also specified the process through which many key policies were to be formulated. He scanned the nation continually for places which had solved vexing problems in ways that evidenced Mao's "spirit." He read written reports and heard oral reports by his subordinates. Whenever he came across a description of a unit or a report which he particularly liked, he ordered its distribution. Hence, the torrent of words which flowed from his office was full of injunctions such as these:

Several documents should be printed, including the statements of Wang Ming and K'uo Hsi-ming and the letters of a branch secretary in Tientsin and the party committee secretary of Nanking University. The commerce work of Hsin-hui County, Kwangtung, is well handled. An on-the-spot meeting [bringing people from many places to examine its accomplishments — ed.] should be held there. I recommend printing and distributing the [attached] article [on the

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50 Mao Tse-tung, "Speech at the Sixth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee" (19 December, 1958), in ibid., p. 141.
52 Ibid., p. 123.
53 "Speech at the Sixth Plenum," in ibid., p. 140.
54 Ibid., p. 140.
notified the secretaries that he required them to assemble in Shanghai on 25 March for an expanded Politburo meeting. Since only 16 days intervened, Mao told them to plan to adjourn their provincial gatherings by 22 March. Simultaneously with the Shanghai meeting, a series of meetings should be held at the county level, convened by those cadres who attended the 10-day provincial gathering. The chairman instructed that these county meetings should have one to two thousand people in attendance and last from seven to 10 days, and they should be followed by Commune and brigade meetings.

The chairman also supervised the process of drafting many key documents. For example, the origins of several programmatic statements are now known: the National Agricultural Development Programme, the Sixty Points on Work Methods and the Former Ten Points, to mention only a few. Mao's role was crucial in all of these. Typically he appointed a drafting group to submit a document to him for his editing and approval, or he presided over a meeting which enumerated the points contained in the draft document. Frequently the document would then be submitted to a large conference convened by the Central Committee for discussion and possible revision, with Mao often specifying who should attend the conference. This administrative style gave Mao an important though not necessarily controlling voice in setting the agenda of issues to which the major political figures had to devote their attention. In effect, Mao played a major role in budgeting the time of his associates.

Personnel Appointments. We do not know precisely how or to what extent the chairman controlled personnel assignments. Could he select, for example, division commanders in the PLA or vice-governors in the provinces? If so, how many positions did he keep under his personal purview, and who collected the dossiers on which he based his decisions? Answers to these questions are not known, but the scanty evidence is that he kept close tabs on personnel. He knew about such matters as the

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state of his comrades' health and the political inclinations of their children. His Politburo speeches contain frequent, biting remarks about the foibles of his associates, about their work style, and what the chairman believed they thought of him. One senses not only a reliance upon information filtered to him through the CCP Organization Department but possibly upon information derived from secret surveillance and upon confidential disclosures by some comrades about the behaviour of others.

Mao also monitored the cases of purges. He set up special investigation committees to trace the sources of their errors, and he helped determine their subsequent fate.

Yet, one senses the limits to Mao's control over personnel as well. It took him time, effort and strategy to remove rivals. He had to secure support for his nominees to new positions. Ultimately, he had to pick his allies where he could find them, and they may not always have been to his liking.

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THE EXTENT OF MAO'S RULE

China specialists have debated widely among themselves precisely how Mao's rule should be characterized. Some have suggested that the political system from 1949 to Mao's death was essentially 'pluralistic' with various autonomous, bureaucratic, factional and social groupings competing for influence. Policies were the result of negotiation and compromise; budget allocations involved bargaining among contesting sectors. In this schema, in addition to being the unifying symbol of the regime, Mao's primary role was to reconcile and balance interests. His capacity to strike compromises that coincided with his value preferences fluctuated with his own changing power position. Occasionally, his power and circumstances permitted him to sponsor major new programmes.

Some China specialists, influenced by the descriptions of power struggles emanating from Peking, seem almost to suggest Mao never was in power. That is, until the mid-1950s, power resided in the regions, and from the mid-1950s on, Mao was continually shunted aside and manipulated by ambitious, devious lieutenants. First Liu Shao-ch'i usurped power, then Lin
Piao and Ch’en Po-ia brought on the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, and finally the dying chairman was unable to control his shrewish wife. Poor old Mao was valiantly trying to implement his programmes of social justice and economic development, but he could never fight his way to the top.

Clearly, a portrayal of Chinese politics that places Mao in a weak position or makes bargaining central to a “pluralistic” policy process has a lot to explain away. The available evidence convincingly demonstrates that the collectivization of agriculture in July 1955, the “Hundred Flowers” episode of May 1957, the unleashing of the Red Guards in August 1966, and the invitation to President Nixon in 1970, to name some of the major initiatives, would not now occur without Mao’s power and resolve. More broadly, the commitment to reducing urban-rural inequities, the ceaseless efforts to create a responsive bureaucracy, and the boldly experimental policies in the educational and public health realms can be clearly traced to Mao’s persistence and will. And we have already noted the remarkable success which Mao encountered in creating a dialectical approach to development and in fostering analytical categories and modes of political discourse that permeated the entire system during his lifetime. A grave danger exists that analysts may give undue weight to his last few years in office, when he was but a shadow of his former self, and neglect the decisive impact he had on his nation’s earlier political course.

Other analysts have sketched a policy process which Mao clearly dominated. All power flowed from him; all subordinates sought to obey his fickle and vague desires, competing among themselves to prove their loyalty to him. To these observers, Mao was a dictator. But this view also has its troubles, and not just with Mao’s apparent inability to control rampant factional strife in his last years and with his being the alleged target of an assassination attempt by Lin Piao. For, as this essay has shown, Mao had to manoeuvre constantly to enforce his will. His resources were limited. He did have domestic adversaries who had their own power to thwart Mao’s designs.

So where does the truth rest? Was Mao one politician in a pack, a monarch among barons, a figure-head, a dictator, or a captive of others? While each caricature contains an element of truth, the best answer seems to be that no static assessment of Mao’s power can be accurate, for his roles changed significantly over time, as did the entire system. At a minimum and to oversimplify, one can say the system and Mao’s position in it passed through five stages. To trace this evolution, it pays to conceive of the Chinese political order during Mao’s era as consisting of several types of policy-making arenas: (1) Mao’s arena, which was not highly institutionalized, but consisted of the mechanisms available to him to communicate and obtain his will — meetings he convened, reports he read and approved, directives he gave through the Military Affairs Commission, directives he gave while on trips, comments he issued to the press, and so on; (2) policy-specifying bodies led by Mao’s associates, including the State Council under Chou En-lai, the Military Affairs Commission under Lin Piao, and the Cultural Revolution Group under Ch’en Po-ia; (3) the vast Party, government and army bureaucratic hierarchies, with their functional subdivisions and their various administrative levels; (4) the ad hoc campaign organizations, composed of officials from the bureaucracies who were seconded to the temporary campaign staffs to mobilize the populace for specific objectives (the campaign staffs could be variously commanded directly by Mao, by one of the policy-specifying bodies, or by a bureaucratic agency itself); and (5) local communities — factories, schools, urban neighbourhoods, commercial enterprises, Communes, hospitals and so on. The evolution of the system can be described in terms of the waxing and waning authority of each arena, of the changing agenda of decisions confronting the leaders in each arena, and the changing relationships between arenas.

Establishing a New Order, 1949–55. The dominant policymaking arenas during this era were Mao and his top policy-specifiers in Peking, the six powerful regional organizations into which the nation’s territory had been grouped, and the ad hoc campaigns which swept the country during those early years: land reform, the resist-America aid-Korea campaign, “Three-Anti, Five-Anti” campaigns, the patriotic health campaign, the local election campaign and the related national census, the campaign for the new marriage law and numerous
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others. Remarkably little is known about Mao’s precise power and interventions during those years, but a great deal of authority resided at the regional levels. Mao and such principal Peking associates as Chou En-lai and Liu Shao-ch’i were creating a viable central apparatus. It took them a while to structure an obedient, orderly bureaucratic apparatus, and state power did not yet extend on a sustained basis into all local institutions, particularly into villages. This was an era of consolidating power and creating viable institutions. Mao sought to rally the populace around his ideology, which was propagated with great intensity, and he launched several of the major campaigns. But in the main, Mao was accruing power for the eventual push towards collectivization of agriculture and nationalization of industrial and commercial enterprises; the accrual was completed with the dismantling of the regional agencies, and the creation of stronger central Party and government organs in 1954–55.

Mao in Command, 1955–59. Historians are likely to record this era as the halcyon years of Mao’s reign in terms of his power and the efficacy of his rule. Except for the 1957 contraction, an increasing state budget yielded sufficient revenues to undertake new economic development and welfare programmes. The expansion made the competition for scarce resources less intense, as everyone could get a piece of the growing pie. Having proven his insight by hastening collectivization in 1955, most of his associates were reluctant to defy his policy recommendations until the failure of the Great Leap. To be sure, Mao complained that he did not obtain a wide range of choices from his economic specialists, and as any strong leader, he encountered limited opposition from his associates on such policies of his as encouraging open criticism of the Party in 1957, or his embarking on the Leap. But he prevailed with power to spare.

The bureaucracies were in place, centralized planning got underway, and a state statistical network was grinding out reliable data on which Mao’s associates and their bureaucratic subordinates made informed decisions. Seeking to bar over-reliance on bureaucratic modes of policy implementation, Mao successfully balanced the enhanced strength of the bureaucracies by continually launching campaigns in various realms.

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The search for proper forms of local institutions continued, but the periodic reorganization of basic level institutions in effect prevented routinization at the grass roots. Mao obtained a flood of reports from below on model units worthy of emulation, which he then publicized in books and articles.

To be sure, elements of the system disturbed him, particularly the potential of the bureaucracy turning into an agency of oppression. Certain substantive problems also concerned him, particularly lagging agricultural production and the slowness with which traditional values were being transformed. But on the whole, so satisfied was Mao with the overall performance of these years that he contemplated his succession with equanimity and he willingly reduced the level of his everyday involvement in the policy process.

A Weakened Monarchy, 1960–65. The failure of the Great Leap, the creation of viable local institutions, and the emergence of an entrenched bureaucracy rather swiftly altered the political landscape. The deep economic depression eroded the authority of the regime vis-à-vis the populace, damaged Mao’s standing among his colleagues, and temporarily deprived him of some of his self-confidence. His associates from Yenan days began to move away from him, in part because of his Great Leap blunders, in part because his vindictive behaviour at Lushan revealed his ugly side. Further, as Mao aged, the issue of succession increasingly came to the fore, and his associates began to scurry and to build independent bases of power that would provide them the capacity to survive after the chairman’s death. In addition, a natural, evolutionary process occurred whereby his associates gradually became immersed in the problems, mores and causes of the bureaucracies over which they presided. To some extent, Mao’s erstwhile colleagues began to embody the interests of their bureaucratic constituencies. It was a slow, almost indiscernible process, but it meant that the links between Mao and his policy-specifiers weakened, while the ties between them and the bureaucratic arenas became stronger.

In addition, the Great Leap impressed upon bureaucrats the limited utility, indeed the dangers of, campaigns. It also may have taught them political skills for preventing, constricting and subverting campaigns. As Mao concluded from the results
of his effort to launch the Socialist Education Campaign in 1963–64, a much greater effort was needed on his part to take issues away from regular bureaucratic implemen- tation and make them the object of campaigns.

But perhaps most significantly, the entire political system was becoming institutionalized. Local political institutions — Communes, brigades, and teams in the countryside, wards, neighbourhoods, and lanes in the city — had jelled. Predictable career patterns had taken shape. The post-Leap era witnessed a significant return to the economic organizations, planning practices, and budgeting procedures of the 1950s. Life was settling down. And with it, the revolutionaries who throughout the 1950s had been exhilarated by the challenge of remoulding a society and creating a new political order now found themselves administering what they had wrought. They had to live within the confines which they had erected for others. And unlike the 1950s, a shrinking budget brought on painful choices over which programmes to reduce, and which to eliminate. The competition over scarce resources intensified.

All this was particularly frustrating for Mao, who misinterpreted the root cause of his decreasing power. He attributed the loss to the sabotage of his colleagues, most of whom loyally tried to reconcile his commands with their own bureaucratic imperatives. In fact, the chairman’s power was being curtailed through the emergence of a stable society.

Fostering a Revolution from Above, 1966–69. Disturbed that the stable social order would eventually yield a new, oppressive ruling class and perturbed by the seeming disloyalty of many of his associates (a perception fed by their rivals), Mao sought to dismantle the very political order which he had helped create. At the age of 72, he tried to orchestrate an attack on the system: the Cultural Revolution. In rapid though not well-planned sequence, and with considerable assistance, Mao undertook these measures: (1) the purge of many policy-making associates and the elimination of several policy-specifying bodies, particularly the Party secretariat; (2) the re-invigoration of the campaign arena through the tapping of generational tensions and the mobilization of youths into the Red Guards; (3) the use of the Red Guards to disrupt bureaucratic routine and literally drag office-holders into the streets (4) reluctantly, the use of the army to undertake the necessary unifying and co-ordinating functions previously performed by the Party and government; and (5) the creation of more democratic local communities to be obtained through the promotion into local leadership positions of younger cadres who demonstrated their understanding of and loyalty to Mao through the course of the Cultural Revolution. In a way, Mao attempted to recapture portions of the system of the CCP’s guerrilla days and the early 1950s: Mao, loyal associates unencumbered by ties to the bureaucracy, and campaign headquarters scattered over the country directing a political movement.

For reasons too complex to summarize here, Mao failed even to approximate his goal. The Red Guards escaped his control. Unbridled power struggles occurred at each level of the hierarchy. And the nation approached a state of civil war. Aware of the internal chaos, Mao imposed order by dispatching troops to the centres of rebellion and by turning to the bureaucracies to once again establish routines.

Dying Embers: The End of an Era, 1969–76. While Mao was able to reimpose domestic tranquillity, at the age of 76 and suffering from a debilitating illness, he was unable decisively to shape the system which emerged after the Cultural Revolution. His last successful political manoeuvre, the elimination of Lin, gained temporary policy advantages but did not enable him to remodel the system. Mao was an ageing monarch. Chou En-lai, the chief minister to whom he turned in 1970, soon became afflicted with cancer. And all the others saw what loomed ahead and plotted. The political system after the Cultural Revolution was clearly a temporary arrangement, its end to be marked by the death of Mao.

Under these uncertain conditions, none the less, the bureaucracies reconstituted themselves with alacrity. The leadership of local communities was often bifurcated, with a cleavage between the older cadres and the younger ones who arose during the Cultural Revolution. None the less, these local institutions also for the most part functioned well, the one exception being in the educational sphere, where the Cultural Revolution left schools and universities in political shambles. Real power
during 1969–76 gravitated towards the economic bureaucracies and local communities. Court politics in Peking determined the content of the media and Western headlines focused on the top, but the real story was elsewhere: in the planning apparatus, the provinces, factories and farms.

In the capital, the weakening Mao proved unable to check factional strife among his associates. Mao could not nor did he wish to totally eliminate the “inner court” whom he had used to direct the Cultural Revolution. They gave him uncomfortable leverage over those associates such as Teng Hsiao-p'ing who were restored to high office. The “inner court” and the “outer court” – the top leaders of the Party, army and government – girded for their inevitable clash, and sought to initiate and bend such campaigns as “Criticism of Lin, Criticism of Confucius” to their advantage.

Mao's ebbing strength depended upon the loyalty of the military to their dying chief. After Lin’s fall, none moved precipitously in support of the various civilian rivals to the throne. The military chose not to force Teng Hsiao-p'ing upon the recalcitrant chairman after Chou En-lai’s death. They allowed him to die quietly, and then they moved swiftly in support of Hua Kuo-feng against the “inner court.” Mao had ruled, and then he did not rule but reigned. He had enjoyed the ultimate power to reshape the destiny of his nation and then suffered the total frustration of physical enfeeblement while retaining the mental acuity to see what had befallen him. This complex politician who embodied with such intensity so many conflicting qualities had undergone a full range of human experience.