

Mao Zedong and the Peasants: Class and Power in the Formation of a Revolutionary Strategy

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More has been written, perhaps, about the emergence of Mao's preoccupation with the peasantry than about any other single topic in the history of the Chinese Communist movement.¹

In his Plan de Ayala, the Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata argued for the re-possession of the 'fields, timber and water' that the landlords had usurped from the Mexican peasants.² He called for the restitution of the property rights of the peasants, 'despoiled by the bad faith of our oppressors', and a redistribution of land so that the 'Mexicans lack of prosperity and well-being may improve in all and for all'. The *Plan*, as brief and unadorned a document as it is, represented a dramatic and powerful clarion call to revolution in the context of the turmoil afflicting Mexican society, and its articles were, as Zapata's biographer demonstrates, scrupulously observed in the subsequent prosecution of the revolution.³ The vision portrayed in the *Plan* is essentially an agrarian vision; it dreams of the re-establishment of a fair and just society that respects the traditional rights, particularly rights to land, of Mexico's peasants. What is absent is any notion of a society different from what it had been, or what it supposedly had been. Nowhere in the *Plan* is there a suggestion that the revolution's objective was to fundamentally alter the traditional character of Mexican society, still less to transform it through industrialisation and modernisation; there is no suggestion

¹ Stuart R. Schram, 'Introduction', in Li Jui, *The Early Revolutionary Activities of Mao Tse-tung* (White Plains, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1977), p. xxxvii. See also Stuart Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 35.

² John Womack Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), especially the 'Plan de Ayala' and Womack's commentary on it, pp. 541–45. See also Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 31–32; also John Dunn, *Modern Revolutions: An Introduction to the Analysis of a Political Phenomenon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 58–59.

³ Womack Jr., *op. cit.*, pp. 541–45.

that Mexico's class character should be profoundly altered, and indeed, the notion of revolution as a medium of class struggle is strikingly absent. Zapata's vision of the good society was deeply rooted in traditional Mexican society, and limited by its essentially agrarian character.

Zapata represents, in quintessential terms, the qualities and limitation of the agrarian or peasant revolutionary: strongly motivated by a sense of justice for his peasant followers, yet atavistic in his solutions to their problems; he yearns for a world that is past and projects this onto the future, believing that through revolutionary action the future can be brought into alignment with this imagined past. In this respect, Zapata offers a useful point of comparison to other revolutionaries who have responded to agrarian resentments and unrest. Some, such as the Russian *narodniks* of the nineteenth century, shared with Zapata an undiluted affection for the peasants and perceived in their conditions of existence, and particularly their relationship to the land, a virtue untainted by the influence of the city and the corrupting spread of capitalism, modern work and manners. Others are cast in a different mould. They identify with the peasants' grievances and perceive in their anger a source of revolutionary strength; they may also retain some admiration for the qualities of the peasants as a class and their rural conditions of existence. However, their perception of the peasantry is infused with a pragmatic estimation of its limitations, and in particular a recognition of the peasants' inability to imagine a world beyond their parochial agrarian horizons.

Where, in this range of perceptions of the peasants and their revolutionary potential did Mao Zedong stand? Was Mao a peasant revolutionary, one with a romantic attachment to the peasants and their virtues? Was he, rather, a pragmatic Marxist who discerned the utility of the peasants to the Chinese Revolution, but recognised that they required leadership from outside their ranks for a modernising revolution to succeed? That Mao relied heavily on China's peasants in the formation of his revolutionary strategy and the prosecution of the Chinese Revolution is not in contention. What is contentious is the suggestion that Mao was predominantly if not exclusively a peasant revolutionary, his professed belief in Marxism not extending to respect for the leadership qualities and revolutionary potential of the industrial proletariat. One influential representative of this school of thought, Maurice Meisner, has vigorously and repeatedly asserted the view that Mao believed that 'the sources of revolutionary creativity and social progress resided in the countryside, and the peasantry was the true revolutionary class'. Mao was full of 'admiration for the innate "wisdom" of the peasantry' and professed 'ardent faith in the revolutionary creativity of the rural masses'. Mao's revolutionary hopes were founded on 'a faith in the creative energies of the peasantry', and he held 'the revolutionary capacities of the urban proletariat' in very low esteem; indeed, his disinterest in the urban working class as a revolutionary class was 'virtually total'. His thought was characterised by 'powerful anti-urban biases', a distaste for the corrupting influence of the cities, and a strongly held belief in the 'relative purity' of the countryside.⁴ There were thus, according to Meisner, deeply entrenched anti-modern

⁴ See Maurice Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), pp. 64, 65, 97, 99, 100, 152, 225. Also Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), pp. 44–47.

and utopian socialist impulses underpinning Mao's concept of revolution, born of his affinity with and admiration for China's peasants. In a similar vein, Isaac Deutscher argued that, in justifying his withdrawal from the cities in 1927, Mao 'recognized more and more explicitly the peasantry as the sole *active* force of the revolution, until, to all intents and purposes, he turned his back upon the urban working class'.⁵ Schwartz concludes likewise that 'Mao turned his back on the industrial proletariat in the face of all theoretical considerations in order to take full advantage of the elemental forces which he found in the villages'.⁶

The description of Mao turning his back on the industrial working class is instructive, for it suggests that he *willingly* forsook the struggle in the cities, was contemptuous of the revolutionary potential of the industrial working class, and perceived in the revolutionary potential of the peasantry the only hope for success in the Chinese revolution. In doing so, Mao supposedly revealed a singular and conscious disregard for the theoretical strictures of Marxism, and was quite prepared to commit what Schwartz has termed a 'heresy in act' through his reliance on the peasantry in the formation of his revolutionary strategy. In the words of Stuart Schram, perhaps the most influential exponent of the heterodox character of Mao's Marxism, 'Mao diverged sharply from orthodoxy, and from the essential logic of Marxism, not only by the sheer importance he accorded to the countryside, but by attributing to the peasants both the capacity to organize themselves, and a clear consciousness of their historical role'.⁷ Schram argues that Mao became convinced 'that the peasantry was capable of being, not merely the leading force, but virtually the sole force, in the revolutionary process'. This conviction was accompanied by an 'indifference to the workers and to the cities far beyond anything Lenin's disciples, sitting in Moscow, would have considered admissible'.⁸

Other historians of the Chinese revolution and Mao's role in it are not convinced. Huang, for example, rejects the suggestion that Mao was a peasant revolutionary with a romantic perception of the peasantry.

Mao was no romantic. In affirming the rural revolution, in breaking with Chen Duxiu's picture of 'the peasants' as 'petty bourgeois', Mao did not assert the romantic opposite: that all peasants were somehow simple and good, that urban civilisation was somehow intrinsically corruptive, that a return to the rustic was equal to a return to the good.⁹

⁵ Isaac Deutscher, *Ironies of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 99. Emphasis in original.

⁶ Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), pp. 76–77.

⁷ Stuart R. Schram, 'Mao Zedong and The Role of the Various Classes in the Chinese Revolution, 1923–1927', in *The Policy and Economy of China: The Late Professor Yuji Muramatsu Commemoration Volume* (Tokyo: Toyo Keizai Shinposha, 1975), p. 235.

⁸ Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969, revised edition), pp. 59–60.

⁹ Philip C.C. Huang, 'Mao Tse-tung and the Middle Peasants, 1925–1928', *Modern China*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (July 1975), p. 285.

Rather, while Mao did recognise the enormous potential for mass peasant action, he also recognised significant variations among the peasantry, in terms of their class, conditions of existence, willingness to support the revolution and general ideological outlook. As Huang points out, Mao recognised that petty bourgeois ideology did characterise the thinking of some peasants; the peasantry was not unreservedly supportive of the revolution. Mao's generally positive view of the peasantry was consequently qualified by a pragmatic estimation of distinctions—socio-economic, political and ideological—within the peasantry and the limitations to revolutionary action that these distinctions imposed on some segments of the peasantry. Other scholars have similarly rejected the view that Mao's reliance on the peasantry in his revolutionary strategy grew out of a romantic attachment to the peasantry rather than force of historical circumstances, namely the brutal suppression of the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP) and labour movement in the urban areas in 1927.¹⁰ As Saich points out, Mao and the CCP never ceased to stress working class leadership over the peasantry after 1927, and 'as soon as conditions permitted, the party again reasserted the primacy of urban work over that in the countryside'.¹¹ From this perspective, Mao's approach to the peasantry was closer to Marxist orthodoxy than has normally been credited. As Van der Kroef suggests, 'Mao's principal views on the peasantry are wholly derived from Marx and Lenin, as is apparent also from his attempt to identify the peasantry with the Marxist–Leninist class antithesis'.¹² Similarly, Sudama argues that 'on the whole one can conclude that . . . in identifying the peasantry and its potential for a positive role in the revolution . . . Mao is operating within the Marxist–Leninist paradigm'.¹³

Who then is right? Was Mao a peasant revolutionary, and if so, what sort? What characteristics did he attribute to the peasants, and how did he define their role in the formation of his revolutionary strategy, particularly in relation to other classes in the Chinese revolution? These questions, as we have seen, are not new, but their centrality to an understanding of Mao's political thought and the character of the Chinese revolution makes them of abiding concern. Moreover, a spur to the reassessment of Mao's views on the peasants and their role in revolution is the greatly increased accessibility to documents by Mao from the twenties and early thirties, the crucial period during which his views on revolution took shape. Does this enlarged corpus of documents allow new insights into this vexed issue? The purpose of this paper is to revisit the issue of Mao and the peasants, to interrogate the documents (old and new) and seek evidence in Mao's own testimony that will allow adjudication of the conflicting interpretations canvassed above. It will do so by examining Mao's views on the

¹⁰ See M. Henri Day, *Mao Zédōng, 1917–1927: Documents* (Stockholm: Skriftserien für Orientaliska Studier, No. 14, 1975), pp. 242–51.

¹¹ See Tony Saich (Ed.), with a contribution by Benjamin Yang, *The Rise to Power of the Chinese Communist Power: Documents and Analysis* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), esp. pp. 111–281.

¹² Justus M. Van der Kroef, 'Lenin, Mao and Aidit', *China Quarterly*, No. 10 (April–June 1962), p. 37.

¹³ Trevor Sudama, 'Analysis of classes by Mao Tse-tung, 1929–39', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1978), p. 361.

peasantry, and particularly its relations with the working class, during three phases in the development of his revolutionary strategy. These phases are:

1. reunion with the peasants, 1923–27;
2. revolution in the countryside, 1927–30; and
3. state formation, 1931–34.

While there are, as one would expect, differing emphases between (and sometimes within) these three phases, there is an underlying theme that affirms the contention that Mao was not a peasant revolutionary *pur sang*, but one who, while deeply respecting the peasants' revolutionary potential and prepared to exploit it, retained a hard-headed appreciation that their contribution to China's revolution was limited by their historically conditioned inability to perceive China's future as one of industrialisation, modernity and socialism. It was primarily for this reason that the peasants required the leadership of the working class; it was this class's experience of modern industry, its consequent organisational ability, and its separation from the agrarian circle that made it capable of leading China forward into a new, modern era.

REUNION WITH THE PEASANTS, 1923–27

In his detailed study (of 1975) of the Mao texts, then available from the early twenties, Day noted that Mao's 'reunion with the peasantry' began sometime between 1923 and 1925.¹⁴ It is now evident that Mao's awareness of the 'pauperisation of the peasants'¹⁵ and their consequent significance to the Chinese Revolution commenced in 1923 (although it is doubtful that the peasants ever entirely disappeared from Mao's consciousness, even during his so-called 'workers' period [1921–23] during which his primary activity was that of a labour organiser).¹⁶ At the CCP's Third Congress (June 1923), Mao moved the 'Resolution on the Peasant Question', in which he

¹⁴ Day *op. cit.*, p. 42. Schram argues that Mao's 'rediscovery [of the peasants] had taken place in the summer and early autumn of 1925'. See Stuart R. Schram, 'Mao Tse-tung and Secret Societies', *China Quarterly*, Vol. 27, July–September 1966, p. 3. See also Mao's own testimony in Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 185–86. Here Mao says: 'Formerly I had not fully realized the degree of class struggle among the peasantry, but after the 30 May Incident [1925], and during the great wave of political activity which followed it, the Hunanese peasantry became very militant'. Mao is not, however, suggesting that he was prior to 1925 unaware of the problems or revolutionary potential of the peasantry; this is clear from his statements of 1923. Rather, the events of 1925 highlighted to Mao the extent of peasant militancy, and the opportunities this offered.

¹⁵ Day, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

¹⁶ 'Workers' period' is the title given to this period in Mao's thought by Schram. See Stuart Schram, 'Mao Tse-tung's Thought to 1949', in Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee (Eds.), *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 283. For information on Mao's activities during this 'workers' period', see Lynda Schaffer, *Mao and the Workers: The Hunan Labor Movement, 1920–1923* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1982); also 'Mao Zedong and the October 1922 Changsha Construction Workers' Strike: Marxism in Preindustrial China', *Modern China*, Vol. 4, No. 4, October 1978, pp. 379–418.

noted that 'the life of the peasants has been made increasingly difficult' as a result of continual wars between warlords and the increasing economic exploitation of the peasants by 'local ruffians and bad gentry'. Consequently, 'a spirit of rebellion had naturally arisen among the peasants. The widespread peasant anti-rent and anti-tax riots are clear evidence of this'. The 'Resolution' called on the Party

to gather together small peasants, sharecroppers, and farm laborers to resist the imperialists who control China, to overthrow the warlords and corrupt officials, and to resist the local ruffians and bad gentry, so as to protect the interests of the peasants and to promote the national revolutionary movement.¹⁷

According to Zhang Guotao's (not always reliable) recollections, Mao argued, in the debates at the Third Congress, that 'in any revolution the peasant problem was the most important problem', and he urged the CCP to emphasise and mobilise the peasants.¹⁸

This positive assessment is typical of Mao's subsequent attitude to the peasants in the formation of his revolutionary strategy. What is also typical, although seemingly unnoticed by Mao scholars, is a less positive comment which appears in an article by Mao entitled 'Hunan under the Provincial Constitution', written a few weeks after the CCP's Third Congress: 'The thinking of the small peasants has changed little. Their political demands are simply for honest officials and a good emperor'.¹⁹ Here, at the outset of Mao's 'reunion with the peasants', emerge two conflicting themes that are characteristic of his attitude to the peasantry across the entire period from 1923 to 1934: on the one hand, a recognition of and admiration for the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and an insistence that the CCP exploit this potential for the revolution to succeed; on the other, a recognition of the limitations that tradition imposed on the thinking of the peasants which prevented their conceiving a political and economic future different from the supposed virtues of a bygone era. The resolution of this tension in Mao's thinking on the peasantry was achieved through a persistent assertion of the need for working class leadership of the peasants in both the revolution and the formation of a post-revolutionary state; for it was the working class, and not the peasantry, whose experience of modern forms of production and consequent organisational acumen imparted it a world outlook of modernity and socialism that the peasants' historically limited outlook made impossible. Mao's positive references to the peasantry's role in revolution are consequently very often balanced by an insistence on the importance of working class leadership, of both the peasants and the revolution as a whole. They are also often accompanied by a none too sanguine recitation of the

¹⁷ Stuart R. Schram (Ed.) and Nancy J. Hodes (associated Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949: Vol. II, National Revolution and Social Revolution, December 1920-June 1927* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 164.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxxii. The Chinese text can be found in *Zhonggong zhongyang wenzian yanjiu shibian, Mao Zedong nianpu* [Chronology of Mao Zedong], Vol. 1, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, Zhongyang wenzian chubanshe, 1993), p. 114, note.

¹⁹ Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. II, p. 171.

social, political and organisational failings of the peasantry, and the problems these posed for the successful prosecution of the revolution.

These apparently conflicting themes are evident in several of Mao's most important documents of 1925 to 1927 that refer to the peasantry and the working class, and which reveal his thinking about the power configuration of class forces in the Chinese Revolution. In 'Analysis of All Classes in Chinese Society' (December 1925), Mao revealed his awareness of the distinctions existing within the peasantry, and identified the peasant problem as 'in the main' the problem of the semi-owner peasants (*zigengnong*), half-share croppers (*banyinong*) and poor peasants. Each of these three strata of the 'semi-proletariat' were, because of their difficult economic conditions and tenuous or non-existent ownership of land, more revolutionary than landowning peasants; and of these three, the poor peasants were 'extremely receptive to revolutionary propaganda'.²⁰ An important dimension of Mao's analysis of the classes and strata in China's countryside thus hinged on the issue of ownership of land, for this was an important determinant of how the peasantry's various strata responded to the revolution. The poor peasants were consequently the most revolutionary (or potentially revolutionary) of the classes and strata in China's countryside; they were 'the most wretched among the peasants' and would thus 'struggle bravely' for the revolution.

Mao's analysis of the working class and its role in the Chinese Revolution in this document is also revealing. The relevant passage is as follows:

Because China is economically backward, there are not many industrial workers (the industrial proletariat). These 2 million industrial workers are primarily in five industries—railways, mining, maritime transport, textiles, and shipbuilding—but the majority are in enterprises owned by foreign capitalists. Therefore, though not very numerous, the industrial proletariat has become the leading force (*zhuli*) in the revolutionary movement. We can see the important position of the industrial proletariat in the national revolution from the strength it has displayed in the strikes in the last four years, such as seamen's strikes, the railway strikes, the strikes in the Kailuan and Jiaozuo coal mines, as well as the general strikes in Shanghai and Hong Kong after the May 30th Incident. The first reason why the industrial proletariat hold this position is their concentration. No other section of the people is so 'organized and concentrated' as they are. The second reason is their low economic status. They have been deprived of tools, have nothing left but their two hands, have no hope of ever becoming rich and, moreover, are subjected to the most ruthless treatment by the imperialists, the warlords, and the comprador class. This is why they are particularly good fighters.²¹

Are these the words of a peasant revolutionary? Apparently, so, according to Maurice Meisner, who interprets this passage in the following quixotic manner: 'If the four million members of the potentially reactionary' 'middle bourgeoisie' were expendable,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 257; see also Day, *op. cit.*, pp. 296–97; Takeuchi Minoru (Ed.), *Mao Zedong Ji*. [Collected Writings of Mao Zedong] Vol. I (Tokyo: Hokubosha, 1970–1972), pp. 168–69.

²¹ Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. II, pp. 258–59; Takeuchi (Ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 170–71.

so also, *implicitly*, were the members of the urban proletariat, who when all is said and done constituted only a tiny percentage of the 395 million'.²² Meisner here directly contradicts Mao's own words in order to downplay the importance of the working class in his perception of the class forces in the Chinese Revolution, and does so on the basis of the diminutive numerical size of the working class, something Mao had himself explicitly acknowledged. However, it is clear from this document, and many others from the period 1923–34, that Mao perceived the issue of class leadership of the revolution not as a function of size, but of the working class's conscious recognition of the need for change generated by its exploitation within the emerging class relations of capitalism. This economic experience of the working class led it to be 'organized and concentrated' and 'particularly good fighters'.

Mao returned to the importance of the peasantry to the Chinese Revolution in January 1926, in the 'Resolution Concerning the Peasant Movement' presented to the Second Congress of the Guomindang: 'China's national revolution is, to put it plainly, a peasant revolution. If we wish to consolidate the foundations of the national revolution, we must, once again, first liberate the peasants'.²³ He returned to this theme even more strongly in September 1926, in a controversial paper entitled 'The National Revolution and the Peasant Movement'. Mao commences with the blunt assertion: 'The peasant movement is the central problem of the national revolution'. Because of the extensive character of China's backward semicolonial economy, the feudal class in the countryside constituted the foundation of the ruling class, and to rid China of its divided and oppressive warlords, it was absolutely essential to first rid China of the landlord class. The 'rampant savagery' of the landlords towards the peasants was even more severe than that of the comprador class towards the workers, precisely because the comprador class was concentrated in China's large coastal cities, whereas the landlord class was to be found in every country and village throughout the length and breadth of rural China. Moreover, should the peasants attempt to organise themselves, they immediately ran into the brutal oppression of the landlords. For this reason, the situation of the peasants was graver than that of the workers in the cities, and their exploitation and oppression even more intense. The political struggle in the two arenas had consequently reached different stages. As Mao pointed out:

It [the book which Mao was introducing] also helps us to understand the basic nature of the peasant movement in China and makes us realize that the peasant movement in China is a movement of class struggle that combines political and economic struggle. Its peculiarities are manifested especially in the political aspect. In this respect, it is somewhat different in nature from the workers' movement in the cities. At present, the political objectives of the urban working class are merely to seek complete freedom of assembly and of association; this class does not yet seek to destroy immediately the political position of the bourgeoisie. As for the

²² Meisner, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Emphasis added.

²³ Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. II, p. 358.

peasants in the countryside, on the other hand, as soon as they rise up, they run into the political power of those local bullies, bad gentry, and landlords who have been crushing the peasants for several thousand years.²⁴

The peasant movement thus occupied a central position in the national revolution, and without its successful prosecution, the national revolution could not succeed. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the oppression of the peasants was more widespread and intense, and despite the fact that the peasants were numerically vastly superior to the working class, the working class remained, as Mao points out here, 'the leader of all revolutionary classes':

Hence, although we are all aware that the workers, students, and middle and small merchants in the cities should rise and strike fiercely at the comprador class and directly resist imperialism, and although *we know that the progressive working class in particular is the leader of all the revolutionary classes*, yet if the peasants do not rise and fight in the villages to overthrow the privileges of the feudal-patriarchal landlord class, the power of the warlords and of imperialism can never be hurled down root and branch.²⁵

According to Schram, Mao was so carried away by enthusiasm for the revolutionary forces unleashed in the countryside that, in this document, 'he turned the axiom of working-class leadership explicitly on its head'.²⁶ While it is true that Mao here went as far as he was ever to go in the direction of elevating the significance of the rural as opposed to the urban struggle, it is certainly not the case that he had turned his long-held belief in the necessity of working class leadership 'on its head'. His reference to the working class being the 'leader of all the revolutionary classes' is far from a 'ritual reference', as Schram claims.²⁷ Were it to be so, one would not expect to find it continually repeated in the documents of the 1923–34 period; yet, it is there, not only as an expression of Mao's deep conviction that China's revolution, while built in large part on the anger and resentment of the peasants, had to be led by a class whose organisational skills and historical vision could lead the revolution beyond its current stage, during which the resolution of the 'peasant problem' loomed as the most urgent task.

Mao's insistence that the peasant movement was vital to the victory of the revolution is expressed with great force and conviction in one of his most famous texts, the 'Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan', written in February 1927 (although published between March and early April). Much has been made of this document, to either refute or promote the view that Mao had abandoned Marxist orthodoxy by

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 391–92.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 389. Emphasis added.

²⁶ Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, p. 39. See also Schram, 'Mao Zedong and the Role of the Various Classes in the Chinese Revolution, 1923–1927', p. 233.

²⁷ Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, p. 40.

'turning' his back on the working class and the struggle in the cities through his focus on the peasantry and the struggle in China's countryside.²⁸ While this 'Report' should not by any means be discounted, and is rightly celebrated as a passionate expression of Mao's views on the peasant movement, it is important to situate it within the broader context of documents written by Mao at or about the same time. This allows a 'smoothing out', as it were, of Mao's immediate concerns to permit an appreciation of the deeper and longer-term impulses that anchored his thinking, and which allowed him to situate the concerns of a particular moment or stage of the revolution within the revolution's larger temporal frame. This cautionary note is reinforced if we examine two documents from November 1926, that is, at a time when Mao evidently perceived the peasants as the 'main force' of the Chinese revolution.²⁹ The first, a document entitled 'The Peasants of Hunan', provides a good deal of statistical and organisational data about the activities and strengths of the peasant associations in the various counties of Hunan. It is a pragmatic working document; Mao was clearly concerned with discovering the actual, empirical nature of the peasantry and its level of organisation and resistance in particular locations.³⁰ Under the sub-heading 'Desire for Good Government', Mao makes the following interesting and familiar observation:

The political and economic demands of the peasants can still be said to remain quite immature. The peasants have as yet no feeling for such slogans as popular elections of the county magistrate, and even when it comes to village level political demands, they have been quite passive. There has never been a shadow of the 'confiscation of land' and 'organisation of a workers and peasants government' as spread in the rumours created by the reactionaries'.³¹

In another somewhat similar document of November 1926, Mao reports on the suffering and resistance of the peasants in a number of counties in Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Mao reports that, in Cixi county, a peasant revolt, triggered by famine, high rents and taxes, was put down, despite the 'intrepid' nature of the peasants and their frequent recourse to armed combat. 'The reason that this uprising failed', Mao concludes, 'was that the popular masses were totally unorganised and had no leadership. Thus it became a primitive revolt and ended in failure'.³²

²⁸ See Karl Wittfogel, 'The Legend of "Maoism"', *China Quarterly*, No. 1, January–March, 1960, pp. 72–86, and No. 2, April–June, 1960, pp. 16–34; Benjamin I. Schwartz, 'The Legend of the "Legend of Maoism"', *China Quarterly*, No. 2, April–June 1960, pp. 35–42; Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, pp. 73–78; Arthur A. Cohen, *The Communism of Mao Tse-tung* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 47–50.

²⁹ Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. II, p. 509.

³⁰ In this respect, this document mirrors Mao's other rural investigations. See *Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, Mao Zedong nongcun diaocha wenji* [Collected Rural Investigations of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1982). For a translation of the longest of these rural investigations, see Mao Zedong, *Report from Xunwu*, translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Roger R. Thompson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

³¹ Day, *op. cit.*, p. 322; Takeuchi (Ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 193.

³² Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. II, p. 419.

These two references—in one to the immaturity and passivity of the peasants, in the other to their disorganisation and lack of leadership—should be kept in mind when reading the ‘Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan’. For in this document, Mao’s focus is well and truly on the countryside, and well and truly on the rising tide of revolution spearheaded by the poor peasants; his objective is to talk up the peasant movement in the face of resistance from within the leadership ranks of his own party, not to allude to the failings of the peasants (of which he was, as we have seen, acutely aware). The tone of the document is almost euphoric, for Mao could clearly sense the enormous power of the peasant movement then being unleashed in Hunan.³³ For a revolutionary, it was an entrancing prospect, and Mao gives it its full due:

... the present upsurge of the peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time, several hundred million peasants in China’s central, southern, and northern provinces will rise like a fierce wind or tempest, a force so swift and violent that no power, however, great, will be able to suppress it. They will break through all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will, in the end, send all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local bullies, and bad gentry to their graves.³⁴

Mao points once again to the importance of the poor peasants to this revolutionary upsurge. They were the ‘most revolutionary group’ amongst the peasants, and the ‘vanguard in overthrowing the feudal forces’. Their leadership of the peasant associations was ‘... extremely necessary. Without the poor peasants there would be no revolution. To deny their role is to deny the revolution’.³⁵ Mao also clearly felt that, up to that particular stage of the democratic revolution, the poor peasants had achieved more than those living in the cities:

To give credit where credit is due, if we allot ten points to the accomplishments of the democratic revolution, then the achievements of the city dwellers (*shimin*) and the military (*junshi*) rate only three points, while the remaining seven points should go the achievements of the peasants in their rural revolution’.³⁶

This should not, however, be read as a manifestation of a supposed anti-urban bias in Mao’s thought, but as a strategic assessment of the differing pace and intensity of the revolution in the urban and rural areas. He remained convinced, as we will see, that a successful outcome of the struggle in the cities was essential to the ultimate victory of the revolution.

³³ Roy Hoffheinz, Jr. has concluded, in rather contradictory terms, that Mao’s Hunan ‘Report’ was ‘an utter fantasy’, although not without ‘certain elements of reality’. See *Broken Wave: The Chinese Communist Peasant Movement, 1922–1928* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 35. The issue here is not so much whether Mao’s perception of the peasant movement and its strength was true or not, but the way in which he evaluated the role of the peasants in the revolution, and their capacity to operate autonomously from the working class in the prosecution of a modernising revolution.

³⁴ Schram (Ed.), *Mao’s Road to Power*, Vol. II, p. 430.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 433; Takeuchi (Ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 211–12.

Apart from this comment, Mao does not elsewhere in this document mention the cities or refer to the leading role of the working class. However, he does so in another document in May 1927, and here the issue of working class leadership of the Chinese revolution is left in no doubt. In a short speech to welcome delegates to the Pacific Labour Conference, Mao stated:

The Chinese peasant movement is the main force in the revolutionary process. They should especially go hand in hand with the working class of the whole world and rely deeply on the influence and guidance of the workers' movement. This demonstrates that the workers have quite naturally become the leaders of the peasants.³⁷

As we will see, it was not merely the formal occasion that promoted Mao to utter this orthodox statement. It was characteristic of his long-held belief in the necessity for working class leadership of the peasant movement, a belief that became more pronounced during the years in the wilderness in which he developed and implemented his strategy for revolution in the countryside.

REVOLUTION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, 1927-30

On the eve of his forced retreat into the countryside after the collapse of the United Front in mid-1927, Mao's perception of the class forces of the Chinese Revolution was clearly premised on the view that the peasant problem constituted the revolution's core problem and that the peasants, particularly the poor peasants, represented its 'main force'. He believed that the revolution was developing more rapidly in the countryside than in the cities, and that the CCP had to recognise and exploit the enormous opportunity represented by the rapid and widespread upsurge in revolutionary activity amongst the peasants. He admired the peasants' capacity for revolutionary struggle, and accepted that their demands were an appropriate response to the 'layer upon layer of crushing exploitation' under which they lived and laboured.³⁸ However, his view of the peasants was not one of unalloyed admiration. He recognised their faults and limits; their thinking and demands tended towards atavism, and their organisational abilities could not match those of the working class, which had been exposed to the enforced disciplines and imposed rigours of industrial capitalism. Mao saw that the consciousness of the working class, generated by the mechanisms of exploitation and oppression inherent within capitalism, encompassed the need for radical social change in the direction of socialism, industrialisation and modernity. It was for these reasons that Mao felt that, on the one hand, there existed the possibility of alliance between the workers and peasants (particularly the poor peasants), and, on the

³⁷ Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. II, p. 509.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

other, that alliance had to be contracted under the leadership of the working class. Nowhere in the Mao documents of the period 1923–27 is there any suggestion that the peasants would lead the revolution, or that the revolution's ultimate goals coincided with their immediate demands.

These sentiments are echoed, if anything even more strongly, in the documents of the period 1927–30, during which Mao had supposedly 'turned his back' on the working class and the struggle in the cities. It is evident that Mao never voluntarily accepted his separation from the cities and from the bulk of the Chinese working class, and that he frequently bemoaned the low level of working class representation in the institutions—the Party, military, mass organisations—that he was attempting to integrate into a coherent and effective revolutionary force. Mao did not choose the largely rural context within which his revolutionary strategy developed; it was thrust upon him by force of circumstance. He had previously accepted that the major theatre of the Chinese Revolution was the countryside; but it would be directed from the cities, and by the working class and the Party that claimed to speak on its behalf. However, following the Horse Day Massacre of 21 May 1927 and the subsequent repression that signalled the imminent collapse of the CCP's United Front with the Left Guomindang, Mao accepted the inevitable: it was necessary for the Party to establish its own independent armed force, based on the strength of the peasants and the peasant associations, and for this force to 'go up to the mountains'.³⁹ To remain in the cities and to attempt to establish an armed force there, was to invite the sort of massacres and reprisals that the Communists and their sympathisers had already experienced. For the moment, the cities and large towns had to be abandoned as sites of mass struggle; undercover operations might persist there, but the focus of mass struggle would, for the foreseeable future, shift to a rural theatre of operations. It is highly unlikely that Mao would have chosen to 'go up to the mountains' and separate himself from the urban areas in which the revolution's leading class resided if he had had any other choice. Mao did not 'turn his back' on the working class; circumstances dictated reliance on the peasantry, but not abandonment of the principle, or the actuality where possible, of working class leadership. At the very moment Mao was setting out to put his strategy of rural revolution into operation, he helped frame a document that reiterated the view that 'the development of this process [the agrarian revolution] requires the democratic political power of the workers, peasants, and petty bourgeoisie led by the proletariat and an armed force of the workers and peasants'.⁴⁰ This was to remain Mao's view, despite his heavy reliance on the peasants.

Between 1927 and 1930, Mao developed a distinctive revolutionary strategy as he became familiar with the challenges and opportunities presented by armed struggle in an agrarian context in which the overwhelming mass of the population was peasants. In particular, the form of guerrilla warfare perfected by Mao relied heavily on the

³⁹ Schram and Hodes, *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, Vol. III, 1912–1949*, p. 11, see also p. 18.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13. Emphasis added.

support provided to his armed forces by the local peasants. It was they who provided sustenance and intelligence; and it was they who enlisted to fight for the confiscation and redistribution of land, and for the cancellation of debts to landlords and the lowering of their crippling burden of rent and taxes. Mao's willingness to exploit the anger and resentment of the peasants in this foray into armed struggle and the establishment of rural soviets was no opportunistic exercise, one that cast round for any support at a time when friends and allies were scarce. Rather, Mao genuinely perceived the peasants and their problems as the core of the Chinese Revolution at that stage. He identified with their anger at their 'crushing exploitation', and was genuinely committed, at this stage of the revolution, to meeting their demands. It was in his longer term vision of the revolution that he departed from the desires of the peasants; for he was opposed to the view that a return to the imagined virtues of a bygone era, of private ownership of small peasants landholdings overseen by a traditional political caste of 'honest officials and a good emperor', was in China's long-term interest.

Mao's faith in the peasants and his focus on the revolution in the countryside thus neither blinded him to the peasants' failings nor deflected him from commitment to a modernising revolution which would move beyond the peasants' historically limited demands. This point can be underscored by examining Mao's comments of the late twenties on the characteristics of the peasantry as a class, for it is very clear that he perceived many of the organisational and ideological problems afflicting the CCP and its military wing as deriving from the very large number of peasants recruited, of necessity, into those organisations. He repeatedly commented on these in extremely negative terms when diagnosing 'serious organizational errors'.⁴¹ A good example appears in the 'Draft Resolution of the Second Congress of *Xian* Party Organizations in the Hunan-Jiangxi Border Area' (October 1928).⁴² Mao complained in this document that

In the past, the Party in every *xian* [county] had strongly marked characteristics of a peasant party, and showed a tendency to evolve toward non-proletarian leadership.... In the past the Party paid little attention to the work in the urban areas, and to the workers' movement.⁴³

He returned to this point with considerable force later in the same document:

Workers are the vanguard of all the toiling masses, they are the leaders of all the toiling masses. In the past we paid no attention to the workers' movement, let alone leadership by the workers. As a result, the tendency toward a peasant party emerged. This is a very serious crisis for the Party.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. III, p. 71.

⁴² The title given this Draft Resolution in Mao's *Selected Works* is 'Why Is It That Red Political Power Can Exist in China? 'For the official version of this document, see *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), Vol. I, pp. 63–72.

⁴³ Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. III, pp. 71–72.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

His strategy for overcoming this 'serious crisis' was contained in the following series of recommendations:

Do your utmost to promote as many worker comrades as possible to leading organs. Executive committees and standing committees at every level should have more than half worker and peasant comrades participating In the course of transforming the Party, we must adopt a completely proletarian point of view At the same time, special attention should be paid to branch work in the urban areas, and excellent worker comrades should also be promoted to become branch Party secretaries and committee members in the rural areas, so as to increase the leadership capacity of the workers and be strictly on guard against the tendency toward a peasant party Party headquarters and soviets at every level should make great efforts to promote workers, so that they will be able to assume leadership positions and lead the struggle At present, basic training work should strive to eliminate the opportunist, feudal, and petty bourgeois thought of the ordinary comrades, and establish among them the revolutionary outlook on life of the proletariat.⁴⁵

Mao believed that, only by pursuing organisational strategies such as these, 'can we prevent the Party from taking a non-proletarian road Only thus can we enhance the leadership capacity of the proletariat'.⁴⁶

His concern regarding the over-representation of the peasants within the Party and military and the 'erroneous tendencies' this caused was restated with considerable force in November 1928:

The problem of the leading role of proletarian consciousness in the Party is extremely important. It can almost be said that the Party organization in all the *xian* of the border area is entirely a peasant party. If they do not receive leadership from the urban proletariat, they are bound to develop erroneous tendencies. Besides correcting previous mistakes and paying active attention to the workers' movement in the *xian* seats and in other large towns in the countryside, it is also extremely necessary to increase worker representation in the soviets...⁴⁷

Moreover, in December 1929, in one of his strongest statements on correcting 'erroneous and non-proletarian ideological tendencies in the Party',⁴⁸ Mao detailed the various defects caused by the large numbers of peasants in the Party and military: 'Ultrademocracy' was linked to 'small peasant production';⁴⁹ 'absolute egalitarianism' was a 'mere illusion of peasants and small proprietors';⁵⁰ and 'the source of individual-

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 72–78.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

ism lies in influences ranging from small peasant thinking to bourgeois thinking within the Party'.⁵¹ As Mao pointed out:

Various kinds of non-proletarian consciousness are very strongly present in the Party of the Fourth Army and are an extremely great hindrance to the application of the Party's correct line.... The overall source of the various incorrect tendencies in the Party of the Fourth Army lies, of course, in the fact that its basic units are composed largely of peasants and other elements of petty bourgeois origin.⁵²

In October 1930, Mao again complained that the 'proletarian base [of the Communist Party] is extremely weak'.⁵³

The solution to these organisational and ideological problems within the Party and military was clear to Mao: working class leadership. In October 1928, he stated that 'this revolution [the bourgeois-democratic revolution] can be carried through only under the leadership of the proletariat'.⁵⁴ He was to return to the centrality of the working class to China's revolution in November of that year: '[A]t present, China is definitely still at the stage of bourgeois-democratic revolution. ... Only in the process of such a democratic revolution can a genuine foundation for workers' political power be formed, so as to advance to the socialist revolution'.⁵⁵ And in December 1928 he was to repeat that '[t]he leader of this [bourgeois-democratic] revolution is the proletariat'.⁵⁶

In March 1929, Mao concluded 'A letter to our brother soldiers throughout the country', in the following hortatory vein: 'Let us raise the bright Red banner and loudly shout, "Comrades! Come quickly and build our working people's Republic. The working class must be masters of the world, only then will humankind enter into the Great Harmony (*datong*)...".'⁵⁷ Similarly, in April 1929, in an important letter to the Central Committee, Mao made the following significant assessment of the relationship between the revolutionary struggle in the urban and rural areas, and of the relative significance of the working class and peasantry:

Proletarian leadership is the sole key to the victory of the revolution. Building up the Party's proletarian basis and establishing Party branches in industrial enterprises

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 567.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 146 Translation modified. For the original, see Takeuchi Minoru (Ed.), *Mao Zedong Ji. Bujuan* [Supplement to the Collected Writings of Mao Zedong] (Tokyo: Sososha, 1983–1986), Vol. 3, pp. 21–25. The quoted section is from p. 24. For further analysis of Mao's use of the Chinese concept *datong* to describe China's future, see Nick Knight, 'Politics and Vision: Historical Time and the Future in Mao Zedong's Thought, 1936–1945', *Journal of Oriental Studies*, Vol. XXIX, No. 2, 1991, pp. 139–71; also Nick Knight, 'From Harmony to Struggle, From Perpetual Peace to Cultural Revolution: Changing Futures in Mao Zedong's Thought,' *China Information*, Vol. I, Nos. 2 and 3, and Autumn Winter 1996, pp. 176–95.

in key areas the greatest organizational tasks at present. But, at the same time, the development of the struggle in the countryside, the establishment of soviets in small areas, and the creation and expansion of the Red Army are prerequisites for aiding the struggle in the cities and hastening the revolutionary upsurge. The greatest mistake would therefore be to abandon the struggle in the cities and sink into rural guerillaism. But in our opinion, it is also a mistake—if any of our Party members hold such views—to fear the development of the power of the peasants lest it outstrip the workers' leadership and become detrimental to the revolution. For the revolution in semicolonial China will fail only if the peasant struggle is deprived of the leadership of the workers; it will never suffer just because the peasant struggle develops in such a way as to become more powerful than the workers.⁵⁸

It is clear from this passage that, while Mao emphasised the importance of the peasant struggle, he emphasised even more the importance of working class leadership of that struggle; as he pointed out, the revolution would only fail 'if the peasants are deprived of the leadership of the workers'. This passage is also significant as we can discern in it the sort of balance between the urban and rural struggle that Mao felt desirable and would have pursued more actively had he not, of necessity, been obliged to carry out a revolutionary struggle so heavily focussed on the rural dimension of that struggle. For Mao, there was, at that stage of the Chinese Revolution, an organic connection between the urban and rural struggle, a connection which had been weakened through the repressive measures of the Guomindang and its allies, but one which had to be maintained and strengthened lest the peasant struggle degenerate into 'rural guerillaism'.

In the same document, Mao referred to a tactic he had used of organising underground workers' unions in places occupied by the Red Army.⁵⁹ This was in line with his viewpoint that the workers' struggle in the cities and towns had to be strengthened so that the proletariat would be in a position to lead the peasant struggle:

During this year, we must lay the foundations for the struggle of the proletariat in Shanghai, Wuxi, Ningpo, Hangzhou, Fuzhou, Xiamen, and other places, so that they can lead the peasant struggles in Zhejiang, Jiangxi, and Fujian. The Jiangxi Provincial Committee must be soundly established, and efforts must be made to build a basis among the workers in Nanchang, Jiujiang, Ji'an, and on the Nanchang-Jiujiang Railroad.⁶⁰

The workers' movement had to be strengthened and expanded because the number of workers in the army and Party units under Mao's control was too small, although not negligible. In June 1929, in a Report to the Central Committee, Mao revealed that, in the First, Second, and Third Columns of the Fourth Red Army, and for those

⁵⁸ Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. III, p. 154. See also p. 241 where Mao repeats this point in his well known letter to Lin Biao.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

military units directly subordinated to the Party in the army, the total number of Party members was 1,329. Of these, 311 were workers, 629 peasants, 106 merchants, 192 students, and ninety five others.⁶¹ In a letter to Lin Biao in June 1929, Mao used these figures to make the following instructive comment:

We are historical materialists. To get at the truth regarding any matter whatsoever, we have to investigate it both from the perspective of history and from the perspective of circumstances.... We should never forget the origins and composition of the Red Army. According to the statistics for May ... the ratio of workers to non-workers is 23 per cent to 77 per cent. When we discuss the thinking of an individual, we should not forget his class origin, his educational background, and his work history. This is the attitude toward research of a Communist. Manifestly, there exists in the Party of the Fourth Army an incorrect ideology based on the peasants, the vagrants, and the petty bourgeoisie. This ideology is harmful to the solidarity of the Party and the future of the revolution. It turns the risk of deviating from the proletarian revolutionary standpoint.⁶²

Mao reiterated the importance of proletarian leadership of the Red Army and peasants' soviets in another letter to Lin Biao in January 1930,⁶³ and in a document of October 1930, he commented that '[t]he Communist Party must establish the leadership of proletarian consciousness ... and cannot become bogged down in poor peasant ideology'.⁶⁴

It is also significant that Mao came to believe that, in the years since 1927, insufficient attention had been given to the investigation of conditions in the cities. In 'Oppose Bookism' of May 1930, he concluded that 'our previous investigations have also had another very great defect: we have concentrated on the villages and not paid attention to the cities ... we must understand the villages, but we must also understand the cities; otherwise we will be unable to adapt to the demands of revolutionary struggle'.⁶⁵ A similar theme emerges in a document of October 1930, in which he called for increased attention to work in the cities: 'Today the proletarian uprising has become the principal and indispensable force in seizing the major cities.... Now we should correct the pessimism and neglect of the work in cities and overcome all difficulties in setting up the work in cities'.⁶⁶ He called for strengthening of the trade union movement, and its participation in armed uprisings and strikes.⁶⁷

There is thus ample evidence in the Mao documents of 1927–30 to demonstrate that Mao had not 'turned his back' on the working class, and neither was his thinking

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171. It will be noted that there is a disparity in Mao's arithmetic here. The numbers add up to 1,330.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 187–88.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 565.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 583–84.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 583–84, 587.

motivated by 'powerful anti-urban biases'. If anything, the reverse holds. During the crucial years of Mao's formulation of a strategy for revolution based in the countryside, he remained convinced of the importance of working class leadership of the peasants, and of the significance of the struggle in the cities for the victory of the revolution. In the years that followed, often referred to as the period of the Jiangxi Soviet, he was provided the opportunity to create the institutions of an embryonic socialist state that would translate into practice this belief in the necessity of working class leadership.

STATE FORMATION AND THE PEASANTS, 1931-34

Mao's revolutionary strategy is often interpreted in quite a limited fashion. Not only is there an overly narrow focus on Mao's emphasis on the peasantry, there is little if any consideration of his contribution to the process of state formation. The latter was an integral dimension of his approach to revolution, for Mao was very conscious of the fact that the seizure of state power was only a preliminary stage in the long-term process of the revolutionary transformation of society. What this required was the creation and management of institutions appropriate to this task; and the nature of these institutions and, importantly, who wielded power within them, were critical to the successful achievement of the long-term goals of the revolution. An examination of this dimension of Mao's thought is therefore essential in evaluating the role of the peasants in his revolutionary strategy.

We have already observed that, while Mao respected the peasantry's capacity for revolution and designated this class as the 'main force' of the revolution, he was not prepared to cede to it leadership of the revolution. That role was reserved for the working class. During the years in which he was preoccupied with the government of the Jiangxi Soviet, 1931-34, he was to build this configuration of class forces into the institutions of the new state of which he was titular head. And Mao made his conviction of the need for working class leadership of this new state absolutely clear in August 1933: 'For the first time in Chinese history, the workers and peasants are in control of their own state, the workers and peasants have become the ruling class, and the working class is the leading force'.⁶⁸

How did Mao institutionalise this view of the relative class power of the peasantry and the working class in the institutions of the Jiangxi Soviet? It is clear that Mao continued to regard the peasants and the resolution of their problems, particularly the issue of land redistribution, as a core policy consideration of the government of the Jiangxi Soviet. He also continued to value the work of the peasant associations (sometimes translated as peasant leagues), and attempted to put in place policies and practices that would facilitate their effective operation. However, Mao also made it abundantly clear, across a range of institutional and policy measures, that the poor

⁶⁸ In Stuart R. Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power: Vol. IV, The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Soviet Republic* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), p. 466.

peasants, while the most reliable ally of the working class, would not be the pre-eminent class in control of the institutions of state; that role was reserved for the working class. Kim is consequently quite wrong to suggest that 'Mao's' concept [of the Jiangxi Soviet] consistently emphasised the equality of the peasantry with the industrial workers in the development and operation of the new political system'.⁶⁹ The evidence points in quite a different direction; the strength of the working class and the failings of the peasantry made any such equality impossible.

Mao's perception of the importance of the working class relative to the peasantry can be perceived in a number of institutional and policy areas. The first of these is his move to improve and extend the hierarchy of soviets, from the lowest to highest levels, which would constitute the fundamental building blocks of the new state. At each of these levels, Mao determined that the electoral system for the soviet congress would ensure that the peasants received less representation (relative to their population) than workers. In a directive of January 1932, Mao ordered that the deputies to the *xiang* representative congress (that is, of soviets at the local level) be elected from different class constituencies, and that these constituencies be given different weightings. Every fifty poor and middle peasants and 'independent labourers' (*duli laodongzhe*) had the right to elect one deputy, whereas every thirteen workers, coolies and farm labourers could elect one deputy and, from 1933, were given the right to hold electoral meetings separate from those of the peasants. This deliberate institution of electoral imbalance in favour of workers had a significant effect on the class composition of the *xiang* representative congresses. In some *xiang* congresses, almost half of the deputies were defined as 'workers', this in a context in which 'workers' (even broadly defined in the manner Mao referred to them⁷⁰) were a small percentage of the population.⁷¹ This class 'gerrymander' was repeated at every level in the hierarchy of soviets. In elections to township soviets, there was one deputy elected for every twenty 'workers, coolies and farm labourers', whereas one deputy was elected for every eighty of the remaining classes. The same electoral ratio applied in city soviets subordinate to the provincial soviet. Here, every one hundred 'workers, coolies, and farm labourers' elected one deputy, whereas four hundred urban poor and local peasants could elect one deputy. At the level above the *xiang*, the district (*qu*) soviet, whose deputies were drawn from *xiang* and township soviets, Mao prescribed that 'workers, coolies and farm laborers' make up a total of 20 per cent of the deputies. Mao stipulated that 'rural and urban soviets as well as congresses at the two levels of district and *xian*

⁶⁹ Ilpyong J. Kim, *The Politics of Chinese Communism: Kiangsi under the Soviets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 6.

⁷⁰ In rural areas, 'As a rule they [workers] have no land or farm implements at all, though some do own a small portion of their land and farm implements. They make their living wholly or primarily by selling their labor power. Such persons are workers (including farm laborers) If a family member works in the city, he is a worker.' Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. IV, p. 548. In his 'Investigation of Changang Township' (November 1933), Mao referred to the following occupations as 'workers': carpenters, tailors, bricklayers, bamboo products handicraft workers, barbers, and casual labourers. Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. IV, p. 619.

⁷¹ Trygve Lötviet, *Chinese Communism, 1931-1934: Experience in Civil Government*, (Stockholm: Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series, 1973), p. 27.

must all pay attention to the components from the workers, coolies, farm laborers, and Red Army'.⁷²

At the next level in the hierarchy of soviets, the *xian* (or county) soviet, the number of 'workers, coolies and farm labourers' was increased to 25 per cent, and deputies elected to this level from towns were to be 50 per cent 'workers, coolies and farm labourers'. The same principle was also applied at the level of provincial soviet congress, which stood immediately below the Soviet Central Government. Elections to the provincial congress allowed one deputy for every five thousand rural residents and one for every two thousand urban residents.⁷³ This ratio was altered, in 1933, to provide even greater representation to urban residents, who now elected one delegate for every 1500 residents, compared to one delegate to every 6000 rural residents. This electoral imbalance, in favour of those living in urban areas (and therefore by implication in favour of the working class), was established at each level, from the *xiang* soviet to the National Soviet Congress. At the latter, there was one deputy for every 10,000 urban electors, and one for every 50,000 rural electors.⁷⁴

The *temporary Soviet Election Law* of August 1933 (which appeared under Mao's signature) made quite explicit its intention to entrench the leadership of the working class. There is, here, no deference to the suggestion that each voter's vote should be equal, or even approximately equal, to the votes of all other voters. And there is certainly no suggestion that the peasants, despite their importance to the revolution, would enjoy equality with the working class. As article 3 points out:

The proletariat is the vanguard of the soviets, leading the peasants in the overthrow of the Guomindang political power of the landlords and the bourgeoisie and establishing the soviet political power of the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants. In order to strengthen the leadership of the proletariat within the soviet organs, workers shall enjoy an advantage compared to other residents in the proportion of representatives to the number of residents.⁷⁵

In his Report of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of people's Commissars of the Chinese Soviet Republic to the Second National Soviet Congress (January 1934), Mao summed up the class intentions of the machinery of Soviet elections, and their achievements over the previous two years, as follows:

They [soviets] should arouse class struggle among the workers, develop the agrarian revolution of the peasants, and heighten the activism of the worker and peasant masses under the principle of a workers' and peasants' alliance led by the working class [C]oncerning the balance of class composition: To guarantee that the proletariat will be the mainstay of leadership within the soviet regime, we applied

⁷² Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 179–80.

⁷³ Information drawn from Lörviet, *op. cit.*, Chapters 1 and 2; Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 179–81, 797–98; Takeuchi (Ed.), *Mao Zedong Ji. Bujuan*, Vol. IV, pp. 21–23.

⁷⁴ Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. IV, pp. 797–98.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 871.

the method under which thirteen workers and their dependents elected one representative, and fifty peasants or poor people elected one representative, and the same composition is used to organize conferences of deputies at the city and township level. At all levels of deputies' congresses and executive committees from the district to the central level, an appropriate ratio of workers' and peasants' deputies was established. This has guaranteed the alliance between workers and peasants in the organization of the soviet regime, and ensured that the workers occupy the leading position.⁷⁶

The principal institutions of government, composed of a hierarchy of soviets from the level of the *xiang* to the National Soviet Congress, were not, therefore, intended to represent the population of the Jiangxi Soviet equally. Rather, the electoral process that brought the soviets into being was deliberately structured in a manner intended to favour one particular section of the population: the working class. This was in part to compensate for the diminutive size of the working class; it was in conformity, too, with the electoral practice of the Soviet Union.⁷⁷ It was also, however, in conformity with Mao's own insistence that the working class play an active and leading role in the establishment of the new state. Moreover, within the soviets themselves, attention had to be given to ensuring that the members of the working class were elected onto leadership committees. As Mao urged, '[a]t the time of electing executive committee members, special attention should be given to worker activities, and large numbers of such elements should be elected to the executive committee to strengthen the leading force of the proletariat in the soviet'.⁷⁸ This would serve to consolidate 'the soviet political power of the dictatorship of the workers and peasants, and to strengthen the leadership of the proletariat'.⁷⁹

Second, Mao moved to ensure that, where possible, members of the working class would lead the mass organisations that helped channel information to and from the institutions of the state in the Jiangxi Soviet. Of particular importance was the Poor Peasant League. Despite its title, the poor Peasant League was not limited to the class whose name it bore. As Mao pointed out in July 1933, 'The poor peasant league is not an organization made up purely of a single class, but a mass organization of poor peasants within the jurisdiction of the township soviet'.⁸⁰ Importantly, leadership of this organisation, and by extension, the poor peasants themselves, was not in the hands of the poor peasants, but the working class; and where this had not occurred, Mao stressed, steps had to be taken to ensure that did. As he pointed out,

workers in the countryside must join the poor peasant league and form a workers' small group to play an active leading role in the league and unite the broad masses

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 671–73; Takeuchi (Ed.), *Mao Zedong Ji*, Vol. IV, pp. 235–35.

⁷⁷ Lötviet, *op. cit.*, p. 47, note 3.

⁷⁸ Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. IV, p. 476.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 483.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

of poor peasants under the leadership of the proletariat, turning the league into the most reliable pillar of the political power of the soviets.⁸¹

One of the clearest indications of his perception of the limitations of the Poor Peasant League under the leadership of the poor peasants themselves was articulated in July 1953:

Only under the leadership of the Communist Party and the soviets can the poor peasant league correctly accomplish all its tasks, avoid being influenced by the rich peasants or dominated by all sorts of backward peasant consciousness, such as the ideas of absolute egalitarianism and localism. ... The unions of agricultural workers and craftsmen should try to pass motions at their own congresses about having their membership join the poor peasant league in a body, so as to bring about a constant leading role for the proletariat in the poor peasant league.⁸²

One of the most important functions of the Poor Peasant League during the Jiangxi Soviet was the Land Investigation Movement, which was an extremely important and broadly based campaign.⁸³ Mao moved to ensure that the Poor Peasant League pursued an appropriate line in this Movement by strengthening the representation of the working class and labour unions within the League. In this regard, it was particularly important to encourage 'farm laborers', who were the 'brothers of the urban proletariat in the countryside', to join the Poor Peasant League and form independent small groups of workers within it. These workers groups 'should be an active leader of the organization', and their presence would have the effect of uniting poor peasant activists and developing the league generally.⁸⁴ It was one of the 'important missions of the labor unions' to provide leadership to the Land Investigation Movement.⁸⁵ Indeed, the purpose of the involvement of workers in the Poor Peasant League during the Land Investigation Movement was to 'establish the leadership of the working class in the countryside'.⁸⁶ Thus, while the Poor Peasant League remained, as Mao asserted, the 'central force' of the Land Investigation Movement, he exhorted the workers in the countryside to join the League 'so as to lead the development of the land investigation struggle'.⁸⁷ For, 'the labor union is expected to be leader of the class struggle in the countryside, while the poor peasant league is expected to be the pillar of the struggle'.⁸⁸ Moreover, only 'a constant leading role for the proletariat in the poor peasant league' could ensure that the League avoid being 'dominated by all sorts of backward peasant consciousness'.⁸⁹

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. IV, p. 455.

⁸³ Kim, *op. cit.*, pp. 135–43.

⁸⁴ Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. IV, p. 396.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 512–13.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 525.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 438–39. Translation modified.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

It was for this latter reason that Mao also emphasised the forceful implementation of the Jiangxi Soviet's Labour Law (which specified the rights and privileges of workers), for this would 'enable the masses of workers to participate actively and speedily in the cause of economic construction, and strengthen their role in the leadership of the peasants'.⁹⁰ Data provided by Mao in his lengthy Report to the Second National Soviet Congress of January 1934 suggests that the strategies of actively implementing the Labour Law, encouraging labour unions and the participation of their members in the leadership of other organisations to provide effective class leadership, had borne fruit. Labour Union members were increasingly drawn into government, the Party and mass organisations. Mao strongly endorsed this tendency, because 'under the soviet regime, workers are the masters. Leading the broad masses of peasants, the workers have shouldered the great responsibility of consolidating and developing the soviet regime'.⁹¹

Third, while Mao had greatly reduced control over the military policy during the years of the Jiangxi Soviet, he was still concerned about ensuring that leadership of the Red Army and the militias remained, where possible, in the hands of workers. In a directive of September 1932 on expanding the Red Army, Mao had insisted that investigation of class status was important in recruiting for the Red Army. Those who became Red Army soldiers, he declared, 'must be the healthiest and most enthusiastic elements among the worker and peasant masses. Only in this way can the Red Army be qualitatively strengthened'.⁹² However, while Mao welcomed 'healthy' and 'enthusiastic' peasants into the ranks of the Red Army, it would not be they, ideally at least, who would lead it. This was the prerogative of the working class, and to achieve this goal, Mao directed that each military district recruit large numbers of worker cadres 'so as to strengthen the leadership of the working class in the Red Guard armies'.⁹³ In his Report to the Second National Soviet Congress of January 1934, Mao reported that his policy had been generally successful: 'Worker cadres have increased in number [in the Red Army] and the political commissar system has been universally instituted, so that control of the Red Army is in the hands of reliable commanders'.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, more remained to be done, and Mao exhorted further consolidation of the Red Army in the hands of workers. As he pointed out, 'more people with worker backgrounds should be promoted to positions as military and political commanders at all levels'.⁹⁵ This was important, as it was necessary for people with 'clear class consciousness and strong leadership ability' to make up the Army if mistakes were not to be made.⁹⁶

Mao's insistence on working class leadership of the institutions of the Jiangxi Soviet was not just built on a belief in the organisational and ideological abilities of the workers; it was based also on a perception of the failings of the peasants. He identified

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 679.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 272–73.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 670.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 704.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111–12.

many of the organisational problems experienced by the Soviet Government as originating with the peasants. Bureaucratism 'infested soviet governments', Mao complained, and he linked it to the 'scattered nature of the peasantry, and their lack of proletarian organization and discipline'.⁹⁷ Mao also recognised that the peasants, themselves deeply immersed in rural feudal class relations and habituated to them, were not necessarily able to mount an effective class analysis. As he pointed out:

...hidden counter-revolutionaries cannot be recognized at a glance by the peasants. Besides, given the various kinds of deep-rooted feudal relationships in the countryside ... it will not be an easy task to raise the class consciousness of the peasants to the extent that they all realize that, in the end, it will be essential to eliminate the feudal remnants. To achieve this will definitely require that the Communist Party and the Soviet Government explain it to the peasants very patiently.⁹⁸

This inability of peasants to discern the nature of the rural class structure was a significant problem in the implementation of the Land Investigation Movement. Mao argued that only with the leadership of the Communist Party and the working class could the Poor Peasant League avoid being 'dominated by all sorts of backward peasant consciousness, such as the ideas of absolute egalitarianism and localism', which impeded their ability to mount an effective class analysis.⁹⁹ The peasants clearly needed leadership, and Mao was in no doubt that the working class had to provide it.

CONCLUSION

None of the strategies of state formation implemented by Mao during the period of his leadership of the Jiangxi Soviet was characteristic of a peasant revolutionary. His were not the ideas or actions of one who had turned 'his back on the industrial proletariat', who 'distrusted the revolutionary capacities of the urban proletariat' and who perceived the peasantry as the 'true revolutionary class'.¹⁰⁰ They were, rather, characteristic of a Marxist revolutionary who finds himself reliant, more so than he would have wished, on the peasants as the 'main force' of the revolution, and who recognises the quite serious problems that this reliance entailed. They are also consistent with his earlier expressed views on the peasantry. Throughout the entire period from 1923 to 1934, Mao consistently expressed a pragmatic estimation of both the potential and limitations of the peasantry as a revolutionary class, and a belief that the working class was the leading class of the Chinese Revolution. His heavy reliance on the peasantry after 1927 was not something he willingly chose, but something he was

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

¹⁰⁰ Meisner, *op. cit.*, pp. 99, 138, 225.

compelled to accept given his forcible separation from the struggle in the urban areas. In these seemingly inauspicious surroundings, Mao formulated a strategy for revolution that drew on mass peasant participation and support, but which made clear that the peasantry would not lead the revolution. Mao did not accept that the largely rural context in which he found himself would determine the character and direction of revolutionary strategy. Rather, he attempted where possible to promote the leadership of workers, encourage labour unions, and develop the struggle in urban areas.

We can perceive in the strategies and policies of the period 1923–34 confirmation of the modernising core at the heart of Mao's vision of revolution and socialism.¹⁰¹ In 1934, he articulated a vision of the future that looked beyond the current stage of revolution, with its reliance on the peasantry. The ultimate objective of the revolution, he stated, would be 'the socialist revolution of the dictatorship of the proletariat. We must transform the revolution into the socialist revolution of the future!'¹⁰² Mao's views on the necessity of a modernising revolution for China, one that required modern industry and a socialist nation-state, did not therefore suddenly emerge when the revolution had been won in 1949, but was a consistently recurring theme in his thought from his earliest years as a revolutionary. Mao's insistence on working class leadership of the first state established by the revolution, during the period of the Jiangxi Soviet, is thus an indication of his determination that the revolution would move China forward into a new and modern era. Mao believed that the peasants, as important as they were to the process of revolution, could not as a class grasp the significance of the dramatic changes required to bring China to that destination. The future belonged not to them, but to the class that would lead them and oversee the transformation of the peasant class and the property relations that underpinned it. There was no place for a smallholding peasantry in Mao's vision of an industrialised future, but a socialised agriculture that served the needs of China's industry and urban areas. As Mao made clear on the eve of the victory of the revolution, in the post-revolutionary era, the cities would lead the villages, and the working class would lead the peasants.¹⁰³

Mao's views on the peasantry and its role in revolution cannot, therefore, be isolated from his views on the working class and its role in revolution. There was, in the development of Mao's revolutionary strategy, a necessary relationship between the two classes, and that relationship, contrary to the views of some Mao scholars, was invariably a relationship of subordination of the peasantry to the working class. The peasantry's subordination was not numerical, nor was it expressed in terms of capacity for revolutionary violence; it was expressed rather in terms of capacity for leadership of a modernising revolution, and in terms of ideology, of a consciousness of both the process of revolution and its ultimate objective. It was its leadership qualities and ideology that gave the working class a superordinate position vis-à-vis the peasantry,

¹⁰¹ For discussion of this aspect of Mao's thought, see Arif Dirlik, 'Modernism and Antimodernism in Mao Zedong's Marxism', in Arif Dirlik, Paul Healy and Nick Knight (Eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Mao Zedong's Thought* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), pp. 59–83.

¹⁰² Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power, Volume IV*, pp. 717–18.

¹⁰³ *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: FLP, 1969), Vol. IV, p. 363.

despite the working class's numerical inferiority (known and understood by Mao) and despite the setbacks from 1926 that had radically diminished its revolutionary capacity during that temporally localised phase of the revolution. It was leadership qualities and ideology that made the members of the working class, in Mao's own words, 'particularly good fighters',¹⁰⁴ and why he qualified his respect for the peasants with recognition of their weaknesses in the areas of leadership and revolutionary vision. This can be observed most acutely in Mao's writings of 1927–30, as the strategy for agrarian revolution unfolded in his thinking, and from 1931–34, as he worked to establish the institutions of a fledgling state in which working class leadership and power would be built into the very structures of government.¹⁰⁵

Was Mao, then, a peasant revolutionary? As we noted through reference to the example of Mexico's Zapata, the approach of the peasant revolutionary is characterised not only by complete or near complete reliance on the peasantry, but a pronounced tendency to enunciate and glorify the virtues of the peasants and rural life. If they refer to urban dwellers at all, it is generally in pejorative terms, for the cities are held to be the origin of society's ills. They express the goals of revolution in essentially atavistic terms, seeking a restitution of the pre-existing rights of the peasants in the face of dispossession of their land and exploitation by an often increasingly rapacious landlord class. The peasant revolutionary's vision is one premised on a desire for the restoration of a traditional order, or at least an imagined traditional order, in which fairness and justice are built on a recognition of the legitimate claims of the peasantry. What is absent in the peasant revolutionary's critique of society is a conception of a post-revolutionary society markedly different to the existing social order, one that might incorporate the classes and class relations of a modern industrial society, and one transformed by the forces of industrialisation and modernisation.

It is therefore possible to conclude, on the basis of an examination of his writings from 1923 to 1934, that Mao was not a peasant revolutionary. While the peasants occupied an enormously important part in his revolutionary strategy, his perception of the peasants was markedly different from that of a peasant revolutionary such as Zapata. Moreover, Mao's commitment to working class leadership of the peasants in the process of revolution anticipated the approach he would adopt on assuming power at national level in 1949. Mao then grasped the opportunity to encourage increased recruitment of workers into the CCP and to reduce the number of peasants within its ranks.¹⁰⁶ He moved to implement the long-held vision of a modern and industrialised

¹⁰⁴ Schram (Ed.), *Mao's Road to Power*, Vol. II, pp. 258–59.

¹⁰⁵ And it remained Mao's view in the subsequent years of the Anti-Japanese War, during which the CCP's power base remained in the countryside. In 1939, he stated: '... the Chinese proletariat is ... the basic motive force (*zui jiben de dongli*) of the Chinese revolution. Unless the proletariat participates in it and leads it, the Chinese revolution cannot possibly succeed'. Mao also repeated his view that 'Only under the leadership of the proletariat can the poor and middle peasants achieve their liberation'. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. II, p. 325. For the original text, see Takeuchi Mineru (Ed.), *Mao Zedong Ji*, Vol. 7 (Tokyo: Hokubosha, 1970–1972), pp. 124–27.

¹⁰⁶ See Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, second edn.), pp. 167–69.

society, one that placed the working class at centre stage; he also moved to institute a revolutionary transformation of the lives and working conditions of China's millions of peasants, a transformation that few if any of his peasant followers might have anticipated or desired in the twenties and thirties. Yet the signs were there, for he never concealed his determination that revolution would lead to a modern, industrialised and socialist China, nor that the peasants and their conditions, particularly the property relations that had characterised peasant life in China for so long, would be overthrown to allow the establishment of a socialised form of agriculture. Without this change, the peasants would, as Mao remarked on several occasions in the post Liberation period, 'remain peasants', for they retained the peasants' ambivalence (or 'dual nature', *liangmianxing*) towards socialism. His view of the peasants thus remained consistent.¹⁰⁷

There is a broader significance to the conclusion that Mao was not a peasant revolutionary. Nor only does Mao's thought appear more orthodox than many interpretations of his Marxism suggest, the oft-encountered view of the Chinese Revolution as a peasant revolution becomes much less persuasive.¹⁰⁸ If the major architect of the Chinese Revolution cannot himself be typecast as a peasant revolutionary, can the revolution he led be simplistically categorised as a peasant revolution? At the very least, his clearly and persistently expressed preference for working class leadership in the formation of his revolutionary strategy suggests as a minimum that a rethinking of Mao's perceptions of and approach to the peasants is in order.

¹⁰⁷ See *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui* [Long live the Thought of Mao Zedong] (n.p.: n.p., 1967), p. 12, 27; also *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui* (n.p.: n.p., 1969), p. 247. Mao also continued to regard China's peasants as a major problem for the achievement of socialism in China: 'The serious problem is the education of the peasantry. The peasant economy is scattered, and the socialisation of agriculture, judging by Soviet Union's experience, will require a long long time and painstaking work'. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. IV, pp. 418–19.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Roland Lew, 'Maoism and the Chinese Revolution', *Socialist Register*, Merlin Press, Suffolk and Monthly Review, New York, 1975, pp. 115–59; also Chalmers A. Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).