
Ideology, Social Goals and Historical Change:

Aspects of the Thought of Mao Zedong in Comparative Perspective

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This paper re-examines, in a comparative philosophical perspective, the image and consequently the historical significance of Chairman Mao Zedong, founding leader of the People's Republic of China and one of the greatest figures of the twentieth century. Campaigns to discredit Mao after his death have militated against a proper and adequate appreciation of him. Employing a framework of comparative western models that relate to aspects of his thought, the paper offers a re-interpretation of his achievement. The theoretical foundation of the discussion is the assumption that there are common elements in the process of any social revolution or policy deliberately engineered and forcefully implemented in the interests of modernization and development. Identifying affinities with Plato, John Calvin and Oliver Cromwell, the paper develops the argument that Mao fits into the typology of a kind of leader who takes society forward at a pivotal time of change, when a totally new order is required within which people may find new meaning and purpose, frequently with a "puritan" dimension. Whatever mistakes and errors he made, Mao's role in the modernization of China is clear, and in so far as ideology and values were harnessed in the interest of social transformation, his work takes its place legitimately within the category of modernization theory.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to re-examine in a comparative philosophical perspective, the image and consequently the historical significance and the achievements of one of the greatest figures of the twentieth century, Chairman Mao Zedong, founding leader of the People's Republic of China. One of the major obstacles to proper western appreciation of Mao is the identity imposed on him by the abusive use of terms such as *communist*, *revolutionary leader*, *cultural vandal*, or *oriental despot*, and all that those derogatory terms imply. The cause of objective evaluation has been further damaged by the publication of works such as *Wild Swans*, one among several blatantly sensational denunciations of modern China, written by defectors, whose education outside China was paid for by the state which thereafter they elected to attack.¹

More recent campaigns to discredit Mao after his death, through alleged revelations about his sexual foibles, are the work of various western agencies that have simply shown how formidable he was, that even after his death, there is felt still a need to attack him. These factors combine to prevent proper and adequate appreciation of him, or what he was seeking

to achieve. This discussion will offer a reinterpretation of aspects of Mao Zedong, not in terms of western imposed interpretations of Chinese history, nor through new dramatic revelations, but through a framework of comparative western models that relate to aspects of his thought. Through them, the argument will try to suggest how he might have been interpreted, if evaluated through comparison with major western figures to whom his goals, ideals and values meaningfully relate, and in certain regards, suggestively approximate.

The theoretical foundation of the discussion is the assumption that there are common elements in the process of any social revolution or policy of social change which are deliberately engineered and forcefully implemented by the leadership of the day. Three historically and culturally disparate figures will be cited to illustrate these points. While from different eras, similarities of concern become obvious and more so, the differences can be seen to lie less in the core or content of the belief systems but more in the ideological application of them in the historical context in which they were formed. Mao Zedong should consequently appear more intelligible in Western terms.

To commence building a balanced view of him, it is necessary to view Mao apart from the image of communist ideology, and to be aware of his roots in the Chinese classical tradition, which ironically, is more universal than his “communism”. Equally important are the existential factors that arose from the historical vortex in which he found himself. His personal sufferings, his consequent determination to succeed, and his majestic poetic² skills are aspects usually passed over by his critics who prefer to dwell on his mistakes. True, as one Chinese publication notes “he was man and not a god”, but he does share an approach to various issues that is similar to classical and respected (if not controversial) figures of western history.

Discussion must commence from the primary concerns that dominated his thinking before and after the defeat of the Japanese armies in China. His writings state clearly³ that he was concerned about the political and economic modernization of China, the territorial integrity of China, the creation of a society characterized by traditional Chinese humanism and modern welfare ideals, and a China respected by the family of nations (his own words). One further premise of the overall argument which belongs to the philosophy of history, is an affirmative response to the question of whether or not periods of intense social change are energized, or engineered by “puritan” forces, reacting to eras of decadence, decay and desparation. The word “puritan” here is used, not in any religious sense, but in the etymological sense of a force that purges corruption, and in so doing, “purifies” society and the body politic. This would certainly be true of Mao Zedong’s response to the Manchu Qing dynasty of China (c. 1644–1912) and the Nationalist movement under Chiang Kai Chek. This study will place Mao alongside ancient and modern thinkers whose “puritan” character is clear. No judgements are being offered, however. Indeed, the agony of those living in a historical context when a “puritan revolution” seems necessary is obvious. Are they changing the world for better or for worse? How can they find criteria upon which to make the decision?

To deal effectively with such issues leads ultimately to a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary critique of historical reason. Puritan movements in the sense described, seem to have the greatest cultural impact as a reaction to earlier excesses. They cannot be created, to order, in the manner in which conservative religious and political groups in the United States and Europe, imagine is possible. People do not vote for such movements. These movements

are born of a unique and fortuitous concatenation of circumstances. They arise, with their leaders, as a spontaneous response to a perceived crisis. However, they oddly share one further common characteristic. They tend to overstep their achievement by pursuing their own logic beyond its proper limits. They frequently end up denying freedom in the name of promoting a higher order of being. Yet they take history forward. How can anyone decide, at that specific nexus of time, whether to support or condemn, or whether it is for good or will?

Decadence comes as a reaction to an earlier period of pain, suffering, and struggle. Decadent eras do not change history. They are symptoms of social disease already in existence. But action and reaction are equal and opposite. Periods of excess are often followed by periods of economy, just as recession can follow inflation. The execution of Charles I of England was followed by the rise of Oliver Cromwell, who held power for two decades, after which came the Restoration of the Stuart family and a return to more of decadence, and eventually to a further revolution.

Chinese history traditionally followed a cyclical pattern of repression, revolution and reformation. In that sense, Mao Zedong was part of a pattern. However, he did try to break with the deterministic cyclical styles of the past through a Cultural Revolution, which, because of its abuse and its excesses, including the Gang of Four, almost led China back to the kind of feudal authoritarian system which has always seemed to hinder the country's historical progress.

I would now like to identify the three thinkers, who, admittedly and ostensibly have little to do with Mao Zedong, but who, according to my argument, help us plot his position within the constellation of universal historical talent. None of the men quoted were perfect. They all made mistakes. Nevertheless, they all changed history in some way and left substantial progressive elements behind them. The fact that Mao Zedong was Chinese has blinded many observers and critics to the universally recognizable positive elements in his thought which might have won him great praise, or at least different types of evaluation, in other contexts or at other times. This paper is concerned to identify and define some of these through looking at relevant historical instances of it in the west. The first thinker within whose thought I identify an affinity with Mao Zedong, is Plato.

Plato and the Republic

Plato (429–347 BCE), in his *Republic*,⁴ proposed a program to create an ideal state based on respect for Sparta's military culture, whose society he knew and whose characteristics are well documented. Greek life in general, and Athenian life in particular, according to him, had become decadent and corrupt. Moral fervour had been replaced by a kind of utilitarianism which was congenial to an age of growing commercial prosperity.⁵ Rhetoric had replaced the pursuit of knowledge and politics had ceased to be an honourable occupation. Shallow pleasures were replacing serious exertions, and all forms of austerity had given way to luxury, extravagance, scepticism and license. Plato himself was about forty when he began teaching in earnest, and the *Republic* was written in an attempt to analyse the causes of the prevalent decadence, and to recommend how the decay might be arrested. The method of arrest he saw in the single concept of justice applied both in public and private life. Thus clarification of the meaning and use of the concept of justice became the central theme of his analysis.

In Plato's theory, the state becomes a distinct political entity when it has at least two general classes.⁶ First there is the class of producers, merchants, and consequently consumers. Second there is the class of warriors. Plato was familiar with the Spartan approach and traces of its influence may be seen in his approach. The two pillars of education, as Plato envisaged it, were mental and physical. He argues that since children appreciate stories, poems and tunes before they understand an argument or learn to think for themselves, and since mental training must begin with something which the immature mind can assimilate, the education of the warriors must begin with tales which contain important moral lessons.⁷ Thus the traditional myths must be censored for educational purposes. Educational theory is not aimed at merely telling stories, but at founding a state. Consequently, fear, emotionalism and acquisitiveness must be eradicated from the character of men whose greatest virtues must be bravery, temperance and truth-telling. The only kind of poet to be permitted in the state is the one who confines his writing to the description of virtuous characters and who does not overindulge in dramatic styles, even in narrative composition.⁸

The theory of the State thus far includes a class of producers and warriors. It is obviously being assumed that someone is making decisions about policy and enforcing the laws. Thus the third class is introduced, namely, the guardians, which in Mao's theory would be the Communist Party leadership. Plato in fact sometimes spoke of the warriors (the army) as guardians. Later he drew a distinction between the guardians, the auxiliaries (the army allies of the guardians) and the producers, that is, the ordinary citizens. The task of the guardians is thus to give instruction to the warriors and to maintain the specialization necessary to the efficiency of the producers. Plato's ideal is that if all the members of the different classes in the state do their work properly and avoid interfering with others, the state as a whole will be happy, and each class will enjoy that share of happiness which its nature allots to it.⁹

This corresponds to Mao's view of the role of the worker comrades who struggle in production, the People's Liberation Army as their protectors, and the Central Committee as the guardians. Mao's concern for economic justice is expressed in Plato's theme that excessive wealth and penury should be eliminated. For Plato, however, the state itself must be kept to a certain size, a proposition impractical in China.¹⁰

The realization of justice in the state, in Plato's view, must be the foundation upon which all else is built. How he understands this again brings us close to Mao's thought on the same theme. Each class must fulfil its own function, and not encroach on the functions of another. In this principle, justice is to be found. Justice thus means the acceptance of reason and self-restraint in matters of personal conduct. Injustice, the disease of the soul, is precisely this lack of self-restraint. In order to rectify behaviour, he offered numerous proposals, some of which are still controversial.

The existence of such a state depends upon its guardians being philosophers, namely cultivated thinkers dedicated to an ideal. The distinction between sophists and philosophers is extremely important here. This is where the ideas of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Revolution find their closest expression. In badly governed states, philosophers are treated with the contempt which the ignorant often feel for the wise. The antithesis of the philosopher is the small-minded man, who never achieves anything, great or small. Traditional Confucian respect for the true scholar should be considered in this context.

In discussing the training suitable for guardians, he makes it clear that education must be

founded upon a clear pattern of ethical and metaphysical thinking. From this, he develops his theory of the Forms, the ideals to which every particular thing should conform, an idea very similar to Confucian¹¹ idealism, the tradition which Mao Zedong inherited and subconsciously incorporated into his eclectic system. Plato's main argument in the *Republic* has moved from a descriptive analysis of the social, political and economic roots of the *politeia* to a normative. This discussion of Plato is relevant to the understanding of Mao in many ways. For example, both saw great dangers in mythology. Mao Zedong tried to destroy the foundations of the kind of mythological thinking that propped up the traditional feudal dynastic system by attacking ancestral reverence through banning graves and gravestones. This is the ultimate device of reductionism and realism.¹²

The issue, already noted, of further similarity, was that the privilege of composing poems and songs was limited to the elite. Artistic self-expression, something China deeply enjoyed, was severely restricted. This "puritan" measure was designed, as it was in Plato's mind, to make thought and communication simple, direct, practical and realistic. Life is taken seriously and therefore frivolous or inconsequential talk is discouraged. People were encouraged to study the thoughts of Chairman Mao, to ensure that they were mentally in line with the demands of the system. This was the manner in which education was to be pursued.

Thirdly, and something that transcends both Plato and Mao, but which is seen in them is that the basis of leadership in a puritan system is moral. This is the old-fashioned concept of setting an example for others to follow, a principle still followed by most contemporary Japanese business management philosophies. In the Greek tradition, the dramatic incident of the 300 Spartans, who held the Pass at Thermopylae against 100,000 Persians illustrates the point, because their leader was none other than King Leonidas himself. The role of the guardians is paramount in the Platonic system. If their role is examined, it will be seen that there is an authentic parallel between their function and that of the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. They are guardians of the state's beliefs and ideas.

The concluding point to note is that for Plato, it was a theory and an ideal. For Mao, it was his daily concern as he acted as the great helmsman and saw to the governance of the state. While Plato did attempt to implement his theory in the training of Dionysius II of Syracuse as a philosopher/statesman in 376 BCE, it was unsuccessful. Mao Zedong applied his own version of the same kind of theory to the world's largest state. While criticism of some of his policies may be in order, the manner in which he created the modern Chinese state and took it forward is beyond question.

John Calvin and the Protestant Sparta

There is a vast historical gap between the writing of the *Republic* of Plato and the Geneva of John Calvin (1509–1564), just as great as that between Calvin and Mao Zedong. However, if we consider the task facing Calvin, the reform of a corrupt system and the creation of a model state, the *prima facie* link with Plato holds. If we then think of Mao Zedong in these terms, the analogy is not so far-fetched. One key to the internationally perceived image of Calvin in his lifetime, may be gleaned from the words of the Ambassador of the Doge of Venice to Geneva in 1561 on Calvin:

Your Serenity will hardly believe the influence and the power which the principal minister (of religion) of Geneva, by name Calvin, a Frenchman and a native of Picardy, possesses in the kingdom. He is a man of extraordinary authority, who by his mode of life, his doctrines and his writings rises superior to all the rest.¹³

The moral basis of Calvin's leadership is herein testified without doubt. It was strong also because it was combined with a transparent and well-defined spiritual ideology in the form of a total theological system to undergird his Reformed Church. Like the guardian in Plato's system, he was a person who suffered a great deal, and was in many ways deprived, isolated and overloaded with responsibility, but profoundly committed to his task. Calvin's scholarship and genius as well as his moral example shone in Geneva like a light of wisdom and truth. His devotion to his work enabled the sixteenth-century Reformation to survive and become the foundation of the modern world and, through what Max Weber identified as the "Protestant Work Ethic", its subsequent social and economic development.

Some historical and contextual explanation is perhaps necessary. The Protestant Reformation was started by Martin Luther (1483–1546), an Augustinian monk and professor at the University of Wittenberg in Germany. In some respects it could be interpreted as a local dispute between Germany and Rome, although its ramifications went much further. Luther was a man of inspiration and charisma, famous for his declaration at the Diet of Worms in 1521, "Here I stand. I can do no other, so help me God", a defiant declaration which brought the surviving vestiges of the Holy Roman Empire to an end. Luther was the first generation revolutionary leader of the Reformation, in contrast with the more academic and rigorous style of Calvin.

When Calvin was approached by the citizens of Geneva to become the first minister of the city, he was being invited to become the guardian of Geneva.¹⁴ His view of the Christian church emphasized discipline and order. He laid out a clearly defined set of doctrines that came to be a total rival to the entire Roman Catholic theological system, transforming the Reformation movement into a greater threat than Luther had ever posed. It became a competing ideology that eventually grew into the Reformed Church. In the course of time, when it became English-speaking, it developed into the Presbyterian tradition, and with the expansion of the British Empire, it grew into an international religious tradition found worldwide. Although the Anglican tradition retained much of the appearance of the medieval church, the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England are in essence, a form of Reformed theology.

Thus, in contrast to Luther, Calvin's role was that of the second generation of the Reformation. It was his task to make it survive and thus, in Plato's sense he became the "guardian" of the Reformation. Calvin was not a puritan, but there were streaks of Stoic puritanism in his thought that gave to him a similar status to that which Mao Zedong achieved in China. He was the living embodiment of his own philosophy, and he exuded its values in a challenging way that endowed him with unquestioned moral authority. Other factors of the Reformed tradition which he founded display parallels with Mao Zedong's ideas. Calvin's *Catechism* was a primer of ideas like the book of Mao's quotations known colloquially as the *Little Red Book*. Indeed, the subsequent use of Catechisms in the Reformed tradition, and the "catechising" of the people, with the ministers visiting and asking questions from the Catechism demonstrates how important the ideological basis of Calvinism actually was.

People were expected to study them at home, and be prepared to memorize and discuss various points. This is precisely the system employed by Mao. Like Calvin, Mao also saw himself, in a prophetic way, as the bearer of a message and the creator of a national ideology. In this respect, the two approaches to order and organization display some similarity.

Calvin shared the same suspicion of representational art and he did not approve even of hymns in the style composed by Luther. The *Psalms of David*, rooted in the Hebrew tradition, translated and set down in metrical form were all that was permitted for singing in church. Clerical dress was simplified to plain black, and a quasi-democratic style of ecclesiastical life was instituted, with all clergy being regarded as equal. It was not democracy, but like Mao's China, it had quasi-democratic features.

One other point of comparison is the similarity of intent between Mao's understanding of the nature of revolution and Calvin's doctrine of the Church as always requiring to undergo continuing reform. Calvin saw the danger of backsliding, or slipping back into error, and superstition was a natural human propensity that needed to be monitored and countered in appropriate ways. The excesses to which both gave rise are well-documented. The witch hunting in Scotland and in Salem, New England in the seventeenth century arose from that anxiety. The excesses of the Chinese Cultural Revolution are also well-documented. The scale was different simply because of the size of China. The logic, however, was almost identical.

To members of the Reformed tradition in the twentieth century, the severity of the Calvinist tradition is probably viewed as a form of excess in itself. Yet no-one would doubt the contribution of that tradition to the cultural and economic development of the western world in its movements towards the modern age. The liberation of the scientific mind, the concept of meaningful work and economic development, the rudiments of democratic thinking, the high premium placed on education and literacy, and the importance of the individual before God, were all precursors of later ideas that in a secular form helped to give a framework to modern life and the modern world. In short, while many may be critical of Calvin, and even his spiritual sons of the twentieth century may be glad they did not have to live with him, the abiding value of his influence is beyond doubt.

Interestingly enough, all the figures mentioned in this paper share one further common characteristic. They all ended up at the centre of controversy, going through periodic re-evaluation. Plato's work remains one of the most praised and simultaneously criticised works of western philosophy. Calvin is respected but also condemned for rigidity on the part of neo-Calvinists. Oliver Cromwell, as we shall see, was exhumed after the Restoration of the English monarchy and beheaded as a traitor. More recent evaluations take a positive view of his achievements. Mao Zedong since 1980 has been going through a period of denunciation in which his achievements are subordinated to the disasters which he is perceived to have caused. Of all four alike, it may be said that they were human, and not gods. They all believed fervently in what they were about. They all lived to the limits of their vision. They may have made mistakes, but they were never motivated by smallness of heart or purely selfish intentions.

Oliver Cromwell and the New Model Army

In addition to the authority derived from moral leadership and the need for a clearly defined spiritual ideology, there is a third necessary element represented by and exemplified in the New Model Army of Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), namely, an articulated national vision, and a structure of authority, in the form of an army to uphold it.

Cromwell created his New Model Army as a response to the decadence engendered by the era of Charles I, who was beheaded in 1649 in the midst an era of instability and uncertainty. Cromwell led because he stood head and shoulders above any man of his era, like Calvin a century before. He embodied his beliefs, and his name still commands respect in the Cromwell country regions in England, where anti-royalist sentiments are strong, and where the Church of England is still a minority denomination. Like Calvin, Cromwell simplified systems, introduced quasi-democratic practices, but still retained absolute command. Like Mao Zedong, Cromwell's puritans had a national uniform, and a common set of shared values. The New Model Army was an army of Protestant liberation of the state from popery and the Stuart family, from religious decadence and political tyranny.

The political circumstances which Cromwell was addressing, and the justification for his response to them, are well set out by Thomas Hobbes in his controversial 1661 work, *The Leviathan*. It raised the issues behind leadership¹⁵ by looking at the origins of the state and the true nature of statecraft. Hobbes argued forcibly that strong government is the only resolution to the kind of "natural warfare" in which human beings would be perpetually engaged if not otherwise directed into more constructive ways.

Mao Zedong created the People's Liberation Army, which had a specific task, to realize and protect the national vision, the body politic, and the ideology upon which it was based. The education of both the army and the general public through the story of Lei Fong and his revolutionary fervour is the kind of model of which Plato approved and which Calvin employed in his role modelling based on Biblical characters. Reformed Sunday School and nineteenth-century day school moral education fastened on to the tales of heroism, self-sacrifice and public spiritedness that such tales convey as examples to the young. In the same vein, John Milton (1608–1674), the Latin Secretary to Cromwell's Council of State, and the famous poet, affirmed Francis Bacon's belief that a writer should convey "things useful to be known".

Cromwell believed that the army represented the godly, and that the army was an instrument of the Parliament. The issues facing Cromwell after the Civil War that led to the execution of King Charles I in 1649 were similar to those facing Mao after the defeat of the Nationalist Army and its escape to Taiwan. Since the army had been the instrument that liberated the nation from the tyranny of the King as well as from the alien religious beliefs he represented, it was not unnatural that Cromwell should look to the army as having a role of preserving the new social and political order. Like Mao, he had been the genius tactician who had defeated the enemies of the people and had established a new society. His soldiers were the servants of the Parliament that in turn represented the people. They were all believers in the cause for which they fought, and were perceived as "honest men who feared God". He even fined them twelvepence for using bad language, such was his discipline. So the army had both a moral and military role to play. Of course, the issues facing Cromwell were

governed by the time in which he lived and were peculiar to English society in his day. However, the concept that an ideologically correct army could enhance the power of government goes back to Plato and the vision of the guardians.

Cromwell has been enjoying reassessment¹⁶ in recent times, and as several observers have noticed, the more he is studied, the greater his merits become. He is of course blamed for the brutality that occurred in the course of his Irish campaign of 1649–50. He saw himself exacting retribution for the Irish Catholic massacre of English Protestants in 1641. The policy he created to deal with the Irish question was relatively enlightened for his age, but the sheer complexity of its implementation meant that its potential benefits were never realized, leaving issues unaddressed that have haunted almost every British administration ever since.

Mao Zedong and the People's Republic of China

We now come to view some of the content of the thought of Chairman Mao in relation to the thinkers discussed earlier, and how he fits into the typology of a kind of leader who takes society forward at a pivotal time of change, when a totally new order is required within which people may find new meaning and purpose.

The issues underlying Mao Zedong's strategy incorporated three clear objectives which emerge from his writings prior to the 1949 revolution. Firstly, he sought to establish territorial integrity by defining China's borders in a permanent manner. Not since the T'ang Dynasty (960–1126) had China any kind of territorial stability and international respect. As a Chinese, he felt deeply that China should again become an object of respect. Secondly, he wished to close all frontiers, at least for a time, to foreign interference. Following the failure of the Manchu Emperors to prevent foreign incursions and the disastrous post-1911 Revolution period when the Nationalists and the Japanese were moving armies freely across the country, he was determined, as were his colleagues, to close the country for a period to establish order and growth within the domestic order. Finally, he worked for the ideological supremacy of the communist party (as he defined communism rather than as defined by Marx or the U.S.S.R). He took upon himself the role of Guardian supreme. The guardian in Plato's system, as has been said earlier, is a person who suffers a great deal, is in many ways deprived, isolated and overloaded with responsibility but deeply committed to his or her task. This certainly fits the role Mao Zedong played on account of his life experiences.

Why did he become Marxist? What was his understanding of Marxism? How did he see Marxism helping China? These questions have been the subject of many arguments and discussions. Mao Zedong was labelled, as westerners love to do, as a communist. But in truth, his Marxism could also be characterized as a Confucian-style philosophy with a strong puritan streak. It was a Confucian type of communism, directed not to the downtrodden industrial masses but to agricultural peasants, and it espoused the cause of China rather than seeing itself as "international". There may have been an early enthusiasm for the Soviet ideal, but that soon waned in favour of something more definitely Chinese. The inspiration for the Revolution was Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, claimed as spiritual leader by both Mao Zedong and the Kuomintang, the Nationalist Party which eventually sought refuge and chose exile by forcibly invading and occupying the offshore island of Taiwan.

The Confucian system is prominent in his discussion of Party discipline:

We must affirm anew the discipline of the Party, namely:

- (1) the individual is subordinate to the organization;
- (2) the minority is subordinate to the majority;
- (3) the lower level is subordinate to the higher level; and
- (4) the entire membership is subordinate to the Central Committee.¹⁷

The definition of rank and precedence is hierarchical in a traditional Chinese way, but it is not very different from the type of religious order that Calvin developed in Geneva. The four propositions could be rewritten:

- (1) individual members are subject to the discipline of the church;
- (2) the minority is subordinate to the majority;
- (3) the congregation is subordinate to the elders; and
- (4) the entire membership is subordinate to the Consistory.

This became the structure of the Presbyterian system of church government and while it has democratic features, it has a clear sense of authority and discipline. Indeed, the basis of the establishment of Calvin's system in Scotland at the Reformation was the primacy of the Books of Discipline.

Consider these words of Mao Zedong on the meaning of freedom, democracy and centralism:

Within the ranks of the people, democracy is correlative with centralism and freedom with discipline. They are the two opposites of a single entity, contradictory as well as united, and we should not one-sidedly emphasize one to the denial of the other. Within the ranks of the people, we cannot do without freedom; we cannot do without democracy, nor can we do without centralism. This unity of democracy and centralism, of freedom and discipline, constitutes our democratic centralism. Under this system, the people enjoy extensive democracy and freedom, but at the same time, they have to keep within the bounds of socialist discipline.¹⁸

Reminiscent of Cromwell's New Model Army, Mao's rules for discipline for the People's Liberation Army are extremely moral:

- (1) Obey orders in all your actions;
- (2) Do not take a single needle or thread from the mass; and
- (3) Turn in everything captured.

The Eight Points for Attention are as follows:

- (1) Speak politely;
- (2) Pay fairly for everything you buy;
- (3) Return everything you borrow;
- (4) Pay for anything you damage;
- (5) Do not hit or swear at people;
- (6) Do not damage crops;
- (7) Do not take liberties with women; and
- (8) Do not ill-treat captives.¹⁹

Although it might perhaps distress those Americans who have a neurotic dislike for either Mao or the word "communist", which I doubt they really understand, General George Washington is said to have issued similar orders to his army. He is even said to have replaced

the bricks on a wall that one of his officers' horses knocked from it, with the order "Always leave anywhere either as it was or better than you found it".

Any number of further quotations could be produced in support of the principal thesis of this paper, namely that Mao Zedong's approach to the historical issues of his time, whatever may be peculiar to him, also has elements that have precedents in the thought and actions of others who were grappling with similar problems. Mao's strategies and activities may thus be seen not as the arbitrary actions of a despot, but rather as conforming to a type of revolutionary figure who follows a pattern that similar leaders have followed at different times in history. This does not necessarily legitimize what he did, or what he has been accused by his critics of having done, but it places him in the company of people towards whom the judgements of history have been kinder.

Ideology, Values, and Historical Transformation

We may now proceed to some concluding observations on Mao Zedong within the framework of a broad philosophy of history which permits him to be seen not simply as a Chinese revolutionary leader, but as a Chinese visionary using his cultural resources in a manner reminiscent of others who have been faced with similar crises.

Whatever his mistakes and errors of judgement, his role in the modernization of China is clear. The concerns he identified and the goals he set carried China into the post-World War II world in a way that enabled progressive goals to replace the feudal tendencies that had hitherto been a source of weakness. Although the territorial integrity of China remained (and remains) an issue, the reversion of Hong Kong in 1997, and subsequently Macau under Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping leaves only the question of Taiwan outstanding.

In order to achieve such goals, ideology and values must be harnessed in the interest of social transformation. In this regard, Mao's work also fits neatly into the category of modernization theory. While the excesses of the sociological theories of the 1960s and 1970s have been recognized and admitted by their creators, they still have enormous explanatory value.²⁰ They demonstrated the need for various forces to interact in the process of change, forces which Mao, perhaps quite unselfconsciously utilized.

The Post-Mao era is not the theme of this paper, but I would like to add two comments that are necessary to balance the perspectives presented. One important point concerns the quiet role of Chou Enlai. During the early years of the new era, Chou remained the representative of the old Chinese humanism, and mediated this aspect of China to the world creating understanding in very critical times. The parallel that most immediately springs to mind is the contrast between the urbane, Harvard educated John F. Kennedy and the Texas cattleman, Lyndon B. Johnson. Two presidents from different moulds who represented two faces of American culture. While Mao did make trips to Russia, it was Chou who represented China internationally.

The second point relates to Deng Xiaoping and his role in following Mao. Deng brought reform and socialism with a Chinese face back to the centre of the national agenda. This was his task as the pragmatic leader of the second generation. Deng Xiaoping brought progressive goals back as the core of national aspirations but recognized that the time had come to open China, albeit slowly, to the world. His theme of "Socialism with a Chinese face" was an

attempt to strike a balance between the progressive goals of Mao and the realities of a world in which, for better or for worse, Anglo-American capitalism had become the major economic driving force. It is most unlikely that Mao would ever have made any concessions to the “paper tigers”, as he called them, and therefore Deng’s role was, like that of Chou, complementary to Mao in various ways. It is an interesting question as to who will stand alongside Mao in the judgement of Chinese historians of the twenty-first century. I would venture to suggest that Chou Enlai will feature prominently.

Finally, and as a rather odd footnote to the whole discussion, which began by referring to puritan values and their role in social change. It would leave the discussion in an incomplete form if no reference was made to another type of puritanism that has emerged on the world stage. The last quarter of the twentieth century saw the rise of an Islamic variety of a different species of puritanism from that which has been discussed thus far. A detailed discussion would call for a separate paper. The simple point I would wish to make is that Islamic puritanism is usually allied to Islamic fundamentalism, whose stated goals are to take culture back in time by the rejection of modern and western ideas. While this may not be true of Islam universally, the fundamentalist/puritan alliance rejects progress. Therein lies the key difference. The “puritan” thinkers discussed earlier were driven by concerns related to modernization and development. In that respect, I think the arguments from which the paper began can stand separately from this latter issue.

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Notes

The background to this paper combines three streams of experience. First is my own long interest in the better understanding of China, Mao and the circumstances that propelled him to his position in Chinese history. I asked for and received in 1966, the earliest edition of the *Quotations of Chairman Mao* from the Chinese Embassy in London. It remains a prized possession in my library. Second is my penchant for comparative philosophical conceptualization that juxtaposes the unlikely in order to see them both in alternative lights. Third is my experience of advising numerous undergraduate and graduate Chinese students during my days at the International Christian University. Latterly, I noticed that the interest in Mao was growing, and I had the privilege of supervising the graduate work of a student whose father was a senior Hong Kong businessman of very considerable standing. That student was clearly concerned about understanding Mao and Mao’s heritage prior to the return of Hong Kong in 1997. Much time was spent in researching and analyzing themes that related to Mao’s ultimate goals and visions, how these had been interpreted by his successors and how these interpretations would affect the future.

While criticism of Mao is inevitable, since Mao was man and not god, as one recent biography has stated (Quan Yanchi, *Mao Zedong: Man not God* [Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1992]), the overall evaluation was always positive. He did little for his own comfort and was genuinely vexed for the people. But he wrote poems, devised strategies and wrote endlessly to ensure that those under his command knew their duties, objectives and strategies. The integrity of China among the family of nations reappears in his writings like an anthem. That appears to have been his supreme inducement to lead the Chinese people.

Western critics pay a lot of attention to the effect of his ideas, pointing to the various negative effects of some policies. Immanuel Kant’s reference to the elliptical character of language is perhaps relevant here: “Even as I speak, I may not know the meaning of what I am saying.”

In other words, even a simple sentence may be misconstrued. Kant lived in an academic community in eighteenth-century Königsberg, a city of several thousand people. Mao addressed one fifth of the world's population. Is it surprising that a percentage misinterpreted his intentions? Facts such as this should temper all judgements not made from a predetermined ideological standpoint, based on an assumed universal understanding of the word "communist".

1. *Wild Swans* (Jung Chang, London: 1993). Without transforming a footnote into a book review, I think it can be argued that among the many weaknesses of the book is the apparent desire to be sensational and shocking. Doubtless there is truth in the narrative. But not all the experiences necessarily happened to the author or her family in the manner explained. The Chinese government paid her airfare to the United Kingdom, for study. Shakespeare would have described that as biting the hand that feeds. The exaggeration of "borrowed" atrocity tales raises questions of credibility. Kierkegaard made an apt comment on this: "A plague on those Protestant ministers who take other people's sufferings and use them as purple patches for their sermons" (*Journals: the Last Years*, tr. Ronald Gregor Smith, Glasgow: Collins, 1965, p. 2). Other similar and equally unconvincing books have followed.
2. 「毛澤東詩詞」(*Poetry of Mao Zedong*, tr. Gu Zhengkun, Beijing: University Press, 1993). Mao's use of poetic images set to traditional Chinese song tunes was part of his ideological campaign. They were composed for the edification and encouragement of the revolutionary forces.
3. 「毛主席語錄」(*Quotations of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, Beijing: Foreign Language Press, Bilingual Edition, 1967). For "unification of China" see p. 471, and for Mao's vision of China in relation to other nations, see p. 339, where he explicitly condemns the idea of "great power chauvinism".
4. *The Republic* (tr. H. D. P. Lee, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1959). Subsequent page references are to the pagination of the Greek text. It is usually dated to around 375 BCE.
5. This precise point was recognized in the classics of China by Shao Yong (1011–1077), the Northern Song Dynasty philosopher in one of his major works: "When action is preferred, the customs of honesty and sincerity will prevail; when speech is preferred, customs of hypocrisy and trickery will prevail." 「先哲名言」 *Chinese Maxims*, Beijing: Foreign Language Printing House, 1994: 175–76.
6. *The Republic* Book I: 369b–76.
7. *The Republic* Book I: 376c–416.
8. In a letter to Comrade Chen Yi, dated 21 July, 1965, Mao expounded his philosophy of poetry as something that conveys ideas through images. He argued that poetic imagery should be used to reflect the class struggle against feudalism, and the struggle for production, implying that it must have educational merit. 毛澤東「詩詞」 *The Poetry of Mao Zedong*, Beijing: Peking University Press, 1993: 276.
9. *The Republic* Book II: 368–76.
10. The *Laws* specifies 5,040 families as the largest number in the state and lays down that no-one should be more than four or five times richer than another (Japan is in a 5–1 ratio, the United Kingdom has instances of 15–1 while the U.S. can go as high as 25–1 and beyond).
11. Mao's attitude to Chinese mythology within Asia stands in contrast to that of the Japanese Imperial Household Agency, which refuses to permit open discussion of the origins of the Imperial Family believing that it would destroy its artificially created sense of identity.
12. There is also a similarity to the Confucian ideal of things conforming to names (*cheng ming* 正名), and the Platonic concept of an *idea* to which things in the world conform. This aspect of philosophical idealism belongs to both thinkers.
13. Quoted in H. A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe* (London: Edward Arnold, 1957) p. 544.
14. Wendel, François, *Calvin* (tr. Philip Mairet, Glasgow, Collins, 1965) p. 69ff.
15. Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan*. This remains a brilliant but still undervalued essay on the basis of power, both constitutional and authoritarian. Many of the issues raised in this paper are discussed with power and originality. Hobbes' apparent cynicism has made him vulnerable to criticism. But it should be remembered that he said that all great philosophical works were written to address a crisis. So too in the case of Mao's writings.
16. Recent positive works on Cromwell include: Gardiner, Samuel Rawson *Oliver Cromwell* (New York: Collier Books, 1962 edition, with an introduction by Maurice Ashley), Woodhouse, A.S.P. ed. *Puritanism and Liberty* (London: Dent and Sons, 1975); Paul, Robert S., *The Lord Protector* (London: Lutterworth

- Press, 1955); Firth, C. H., *Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
17. "The Role of the Communist Party in the National War" (October 1938), Mao Zedong, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, pp. 203–04.
 18. "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" (27 February, 1957), *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (first edition), pp. 10–11.
 19. "On the Reissue of the Three Main Rules of Discipline and the Eight Points for Attention—Instructions of the General Headquarters of the Chinese People's Liberation Army" (10 October, 1947), *Selected Military Writings* (second edition), p. 343.
 20. On modernization theory please refer to the discussion contained in: "Modernization: Japan, China, Asia and the West: Comparative Observations", *International Christian University Asian Cultural Studies*, No. 7, March 1997, pp. 1–15.