Article

Marx and the Chinese Revolution

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Abstract

By focusing on the "Sinification of Marxism," the nature of the Communist Party of China, the strategic concepts of class and nation, the theories of a "new democratic revolution" and "continuous revolution," and the notion of revolutionary modernity, the historical processes, characters and significance of the communist revolution in China can be outlined. Beginning with the shift in Marx's conception of history that affirms the potential for 'socialist revolutions' in the East before Europe, and ends with his methodological illumination for understanding and interpreting world-historical revolutionary transformations, the argument centers on the epic effects and impact of the Chinese revolution and the enduring relevance and power of Marx's ideas, as well as those creatively developed by Chinese Marxists in practice. However, measured by its original goals of freedom, democracy, and prosperity for the laboring people, it must be recognized as an unfinished revolution. The revolution's intrinsic and unresolved dilemmas, along with the partial undoing of its groundwork in market reforms, sharpen the predicament of historical communism. 1949 was only the first threshold in China's ongoing long march.

Keywords:

Sinification of Marxism, class and nation, 1949 divide, revolutionary modernity

The People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded and fundamentally defined by the victory of the Chinese communist revolution in 1949. Committed to national and social liberation, the revolution achieved independence and mainland unity for the country, paving the way for socioeconomic development. The new China then pursued its version of socialist modernization along a torturous path, transforming the devastated economic conditions and cultural outlook of an old, war-torn society. This enabled pro-labor and pro-women policies that changed the plight of traditionally subordinated social groups, creating the historical subject of a self-consciously sovereign people in the process. The communist state, with its popular power base and hence moral confidence and organizational capacity, mobilized resources for socialist construction, bolstered by a rudimentary yet inclusive "public good regime" to meet basic needs. Revolutionary China managed to withstand imperialist blockades and surpassed other countries at a similar income level in growth, thereby lifting the global standing of one of the world's largest and poorest nations.

The compelling fact speaks for itself: On the foundation of the revolution's liberating effects and institutionalization, by the end of the 1970s, before any "market miracle", China had built a comprehensive industrial edifice and led the developing world by a large margin in what was later known as human development. Both national population and life expectancy nearly doubled. The rapid growth afterward would have been impossible otherwise. Remarkably, being free of internal and external debt by the eve of the reform gave the reformers a unique advantage in market transition compared to the other transitional economies (also in contrast with the latter-day debt-financed and foreign-dependent

growth models). Despite grave problems, the formidable work of central planning and central-local coordination accomplished a socialist "internal accumulation" of capital and labor (as opposed to capitalist enclosures, colonization, slavery, and genocides), alongside public investment in human and physical infrastructure. These factors combined to allow the Chinese economy to "take off" since the 1980s, coincidentally riding the neoliberal tide of globalization.

Maurice Meisner's representative assessment, "with an acute and painful awareness of all the horrors and crimes that accompanied the revolution", is definitive: "In the sense that it has saved, prolonged, and bettered the lives of more people than any other single political event in world history, the Chinese revolution of 1949 must be seen as one of the greatest achievements of the 20th century" (1999). When the essayist Hu Feng versed "time has begun" in 1949, he was among the many millions of people witnessing a revolution making history.

China did stand up, as Mao Zedong famously proclaimed, and was tested again straight away on the battleground of Korea 1950–3. As such, the modern "rise of China" (or "resurgence" as economic historians would prefer) with the founding of the PRC predates what is being chanted today. This also explains why the symbolic boundary of 1949 between "Old" and "New" China continues to make sense in everyday Chinese conversations.

Notably, the recognition of the fundamental historicity, justice, and achievements of the communist revolution in China was a liberal consensus across the political spectrum before the post-cold war assaults on social revolutions. Even if Barrington Moore's axiom of modernity requiring a "revolutionary break with the past" cannot be taken literally everywhere, the superior transformative power of social revolutions in large agrarian and patriarchal societies is historically proven. To be sure, revolutions are costly. They can betray themselves, devour their own children, and breed counterrevolution from within. Yet, for their eagle-eyed defenders like Lu Xun, "in the revolution, there is blood and filth, but also new life". Comparing the Russian and Chinese revolutions, Perry Anderson's verdict is open-ended: "If the 20th century was dominated, more than by any other single event, by the trajectory of the Russian Revolution, the 21st will be shaped by the outcome of the Chinese Revolution" (2010: 59). On the scale of history, any outcome is still necessarily in the future tense. Nevertheless, the baseline of China's modern ascent was drawn in 1949.[1]

Revolutions in Asia Before Europe

The founders of Marxism initially believed that the bourgeoisie had set about creating the world in its own image. After the abortive 1848 revolution and the 1852 Cologne communist trial, Marx reassembled activities in London. Following the colonial repercussions in Asia, frequently debated in Westminster regarding imperial Britain's foreign policy and balance of payments, he reported and commented on events unfolding in the colonies as a regular theme of his political journalism. A decade of this work led him to revise his worldview: rejecting a parochial contrast between a rational, liberal, and progressive occident and a despotic, servile, and vegetative orient in the western mind post-industrial revolution, he targeted the disastrous consequences of colonial conquests and expansion not only for the colonized but also the colonizers.

In Marx's earlier portrayal, the Asiatic state was the sole landlord, collecting undifferentiated rents and taxes, overseeing grand public works, and ruling over a closed, cyclically self-reproducing economy based on minute agriculture. As the "self-sustaining unity" of household farming and handicraft "necessarily hangs on most tenaciously and for the longest time", nothing conceivable can be "a more solid basis for Asiatic despotism and stagnation" ([185758]1973: 486; [1853]1983: 346–347). This image has been largely negated by the histories of both Mughal India and imperial China, where multi-formed and flexibly contracted private land, and hence a landed aristocracy, did exist. Villages in many areas were integrated into networks of commodity production and vibrant markets for short- and longdistance trade. As abundantly recorded, for centuries before 1800, Europe was economically peripheral to the Asian and Arab worlds. Here Marx clarified that the ancient village community was not geographically specific. Temporal rather than spatial in a variety of types, communal land/labor represented a universal beginning, "the point of departure of all cultured peoples" ([1857-8]1973, 473, 483–485, 882; [1868]1987, 547).

Adjusting his dilemma of morally condemning yet instrumentally rationalizing "double missioned" colonialism, Marx was struck by the "bleeding process" of colonial extraction. The bourgeoisie "will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social conditions of the masses of the people" in native societies ([1853a]1979: 132; [1853c]1979: 221–222). His *New York Daily Tribune* dispatches revealed the importance of Asian markets for overstretched British and European imperialism, and he unambiguously denounced the greed and brutality of the "civilized'" "drink[ing]

nectar from the skulls of the lesser breed". In his most quoted words: "The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked" ([1853c]1979: 221–222). The racial capitalist logic and sheer illegitimacy of the Chinese "trade" imposed by the fleet with heavy artillery from British "civilization-mongering" is a case in point that revealed "the general relations of the Eastern and Western worlds in the annals of mankind" ([1859]1980: 510–511; [1858]1980: 15).

Page after page, Marx wrote about "the compulsory opium cultivation in India and the armed opium propaganda to China", detailing the "hazardous operation" from Bengal to Calcutta to Whampoa (Huangpu). He was absolutely appalled. The Qing court signed unequal treaties, forcing the Chinese to pay mammoth indemnities, open ports, cede Hong Kong, and yield extraterritorial privileges and financial interests to foreign powers ([1858]1980: 13, 15–20; [1853b]1979: 94–6). As opium became a source of metropolitan revenue and a tool for balancing the trade deficit, the opium war (followed by another) on behalf of the British "moneyocracy and oligarchy" and the "supreme rule of capital" had a globally destructive impact "in the most gigantic dimensions" ([1853c]1979: 222). Later in *Capital I,* Marx described how the influx of dumped commodities cracked local textile and other industries, tearing apart the native socioeconomic fabric to form a "new and international division of labour" ([1867]1971: 453–454). He also detected colonial blowbacks and why "labour in the white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin (ibid: 414). In an epigram to Engels on the Irish question, he made it crystal clear that "the English working class will never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland" — a point applicable to "the social movement in general" ([1869]1988: 398). This is so because the catastrophic cost of the empire was borne by "the British nation and people" in the interest of their rulers ([1869]1988: 398; [1857a]1986: 349–352). As the metropolitan working class was enslaved (while also complicit) in their own countries, anticolonial and class struggles were indispensable as well as mutually dependent.

The outbreak of the religiously disguised Taiping uprising of 1850–64 stunned Marx as a "formidable revolution" ([1853b]1979: 93). The Taiping army swept through half of China while carrying out an egalitarian communal land program with a creed of having "food, clothing, land, and money collectively shared, and all fed and clothed equally". Marx and Engels were impressed by what was described by a German missionary about "the Chinese mobs' "preaching socialism", demanding a 'different distribution of property, and even the complete abolition of private property" ([1853b]1979: 93–99; [1850]1978: 266–267). The pair also greeted the nationalist Indian Mutiny of 1857–58 with compassion and a keen sense of irony (Marx [1853a]1979: 132; [1857c]1986: 297–300; [1857d]1986: 305–308). In a revolting landscape of bullied and injured peoples, the atrocities committed by the insurgents amounted to nothing more than "historical retribution" ([1857e]1986: 353; [1867]1971: 453-4). Not only did Marx denote a nationalist character of these revolts, but he also linked it to prospective anticapitalism in the capitalist heartland. Referring to the Taiping still in advance, he argued that "the Chinese revolution will throw the spark into the overloaded mine of the present industrial system and cause the explosion of the long-prepared general crisis which, spreading abroad, will be closely followed by political revolutions on the [European] Continent" ([1858b]1983: 538).

Disillusionment came when the rebels turned merely destructive "without any nucleus of new construction" ([1862]1984: 216). Finding no radical novelty in these rebellions yet repulsed by their savage suppression, and at a time when the immediate revolutionary prospect had ebbed in Europe, what could remain "gratifying" for Marx was a conviction that the social commotions of the first "revolutionary epoch" in Asia "must have the most profound consequences for civilization". In his last years, this salient perspective beyond western Europe, as discussed in his ethnological notebooks and related texts, was revived by a silver lining in Russia (as "semi-Asiatic in her condition, manners, traditions, and institutions" – Engels [1853a]1979: 23).

Seeing the Czarist regime as an eastern fortress of a reactionary Europe, Marx was drawn to the Russian Narodniks' idea of popular renewal. Eventually, he confirmed the feasibility of a direct transition to communism from the living village *mir*, which appeared to have inherited a dualism of communal property relations on one hand and some sideline development of individuality on the other. Being contemporary with the developed west, an archaic type of collective ownership and production could appropriate the fruits of the more advanced economies without subjecting itself to the capitalist *modus operandi* and "may become the direct starting point of the economic system towards which modern society is tending" ([1881]1989: 352-6). Praising those among the Russian populists who had discovered "what is newest in what is oldest", Marx viewed it as a case of negation of the negation ([1868]1987: 557; [1877]1989: 199).

The condition, however, was the necessity of synchronous revolutions to secure such a leap. In their 1882 preface to the Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels paraphrased what was left out from Marx's finalized letter to Vera Zasulich and her group of Russian socialist exiles in Switzerland: "If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the west; so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development" ([1882]1989: 426).

These familiar contemplations contradict the impression that Marx tethered socialist revolutions to industrialized countries. While incessantly expecting the future return of workers' movements in Europe, Marx attained a new panorama of certain "pre-capitalist" societies striking first to stimulate a broader communist transformation. Writing to a socialist friend in 1877, he indicated that the turbulence in Eurasia could be "a new turning point in European history", and "this time the revolution will begin in the East, hitherto the impregnable bastion and reserve army of counterrevolution" (Marx n.d.a: 278). This intuition was brilliantly prophetic of how the revolutionary 20th century was to pan out. He did not predict the undertakings by the Bolsheviks or other communists in the non-western world, but he did envision national and international revolutions initiated in the victimized capitalist peripheries. This was a breakthrough in Marxist thinking, to the extent that overturning imperialism and colonialism was a prerequisite for transcending capitalism.[2]

Class and Nation

Linking revolutionary movements in Europe and Asia within a global proletarian enterprise is possible only through the Marxian conception of world history and capital's overriding power in an integrative global market. Through cheap commodities as much as violent conquests, imperialism and colonialism catalyzed polarizations between industrialized and less or non-industrialized nations, west and east. Reconfigured social classes and class relations thus redefined domestic as much as international class struggles. As trade and gunboat diplomacy were interchangeable, capitalism and imperialism became symbiotic, which Marx had pinpointed before Marxist and non-Marxist theories of imperialism developed in the late 19th century. Contrary to the perceived incompatibility between nationalism and internationalism in the Marxist arena, Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* had not only supported anticolonial movements but also affirmed the perception of a "proletarian nation" as a stepping stone toward the realm of freedom when nation and state as such would become historical relics: "The proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself as the nation... though not in the bourgeois sense of the word". Still, this "perspective is international and cannot be otherwise" (Gramsci 2018: 240). Extending the Marxist class analysis to the structural locations of nations, the Chinese state, in an ever-deepening crisis under foreign encroachment since the mid-19th century, acquired an internationally "classed" status. This image captured a collective self-awareness in a fomenting revolutionary nationalism. As Lenin noted in a series of commentaries on Asia 1908–1913, the Chinese people had "awakened."

The late Qing reformist illusion of imitating the west was shattered by the "slicing of China" at the hands of rival imperialist powers. Threatened by what was described in the radical media as "racial extinction" and stirred by revolutionaries agitating for national recovery of integrity and dignity, China became, so to speak, an oppressed "class nation" in a polarized global system. This nationally "proletarian" identification adopted in the communist discourse was simultaneously nationalist (for self-determination) and internationalist (as partaking in the "universal" class of workers). Li Dazhao, a founder of the CCP, was convinced that China represented the revolting proletariat within the capitalist spatial order as part of a global "class struggle" with "world significance" (1918; 1924). Qu Qiubai, a party leader during the white terror of 1927, delineated China's semi-colonial and domestic social relations. To reach an "independent people's republic", China must internally form an anti-imperialist alliance while allying itself with the Russian revolution, the worldwide proletariat, and the colonies and other oppressed nations. Working-class segments in the unions and party cells would fulfill their "historical mission" by achieving the "class hegemon" and "vanguard" of a revolutionary national subject to defeat imperialism (1923; 1925).

"Class" for Marx is not a static, positivist sociological category but a dynamic relationship. Reading the national question and borrowing from Marx, Ernest Gellner pondered that "only when a nation became a class... did it become politically conscious and activist" as "a nation-for-itself" (1983: 121; ch. 9). Yet the analogical notion of "class nation" is by no means to displace domestic class politics. Rather, dismantling the *ancien regime* and the comprador class at home as local pillars of imperialism was central to the communist rallying argument for the fundamental coherence of

national and social liberation. This doubly classed conception denoted the dual nature of the Chinese revolution, notwithstanding real tensions between the national and the social. These categories jointly underpinned the Communist Party of China's (CPC) signature united front, which, along with party building and armed struggle, were treasured as the revolution's "three magic weapons". Nevertheless, practicing such a front for the communists could be highly challenging, as seen when the party resumed collaboration with the Kuomintang in the resistance war against Japan immediately after ten years of civil war, which left a sea of blood; not to mention the lessons from 1927 regarding uncompromising independence. It was also challenging when the new PRC regime implemented an "elite line" (rather than the established class and mass lines) to mutualize and neutralize the upper class of ethnic minorities for national unity, or in its foreign policy to bridge class-based internationalism and nation-based projects of third world solidarity.

"Nation" emerged as a conceptual hurdle in the Chinese context. The creation of national sovereign states since Westphalia constituted a capitalist transformation of the world system, involving the remaking of absolutist and religious authorities and the breakdown of empires. The transition from imperial to republican China was distinct, partly due to a long history of reciprocal acculturation and amalgamation between and among the native and settler communities within and beyond the central plain. Quite a few lasting Chinese dynasties thrived under minority rulers, where people intermingled in mutual construction. Moreover, as Max Weber observed, this "pacified empire" contrasted with European militarism and "armed peace" through "varieties of booty capitalism" ([1915]1964: 26, 1034, 61-2). Never a monolith and, after 1949, a constitutionally unitary state with fluid inner and outer frontiers, China has always encompassed many paths and worlds. This factor, sometimes infused with the "civilization-barbarian distinction" or "grand unity" obsession, is a contested legacy of Chinese culture and governance. That republican and communist China have more or less inherited the Qing geographic and demographic makeups, that China's modernization cannot be free of specific sources and dynamisms of tradition, and that imperial genealogy still matters for the contested Chinese identity, all "violate" the standard nation-state expectations, rendering the modernity of China customarily suspectable.

However, communist nationalism was a powerful unifying force amid such multiplicities and complexities. For one thing, the Chinese revolution engaged popular participation from diverse sociocultural groups. For another, the post-revolutionary regime respected and celebrated multiple ethnic-religious identities and autonomy, promising to incorporate minorities into a multiethnic Chinese nation (*zhonghua minzu*) proudly sovereign, modern, and socialist. Unity and diversity were both asserted in the constitution to safeguard equal citizenship, relying on a semi-federal institution of ethno-regional autonomous governments. The party's twofold commitment to the "weak and small nations" was normative. It entailed ensuring domestic equality among all nationalities by redeeming the historical injustices inflicted on the minority communities under previous regimes and fostering external solidarity with the world's other oppressed nations. Nationalism and internationalism were born twins in the communist revolution, from which more recent "sinicization" policies departed. Still, as China continues to associate itself with socialism and the "global south" formally, its "class nation" aspiration lingers. Recurring critiques of China's anomaly or premodernity – an obsolete empire, an amorphous "culture", or a patrimonial "civilizational state" – are beside the point.[3]

"Marxism in the Mountain Valley"

Marxism traveled to China primarily through Japanese and Russian translations during the political-intellectual ferment at the turn of the 20th century, along with an array of foreign-originated thoughts, ranging from anarchism and social Darwinism to liberalism and democracy. The liberal new culture movement in the early years of the new century greatly spread these ideas while attacking conservative traditionalism, protesting female bondage and other oppressive Confucian codes and deeds, and advocating for the vernacular. The unfortunate collusion between liberalism and imperialism in China, however, tainted the former in its local reception. Mao later recalled this encounter and explained how instead, "the salvos" of 1917 had impacted: "Imperialist aggression shattered the fond dreams of the Chinese about learning from the West. It was very odd – why were the teachers always committing aggression against their pupil? ... World War I shook the whole globe. The Russians made the October Revolution and created the world's first socialist state. ...Then, and only then, did the Chinese enter an entirely new era in their thinking and their life. They found Marxism-Leninism, the universally applicable truth, and the face of China began to change. ...Follow the path of the Russians – that was their conclusion" (1949).

Marxism had to be tempered through thoroughgoing localization to take root in even more remote rural soil. The Chinese adaptation through "combining Marxism with China's concrete reality and practice" was conceptualized in Mao's 1930 article "Against dogmatism", among other texts. The showdown in Yan'an (where the CCP relocated its

headquarters after the long march) in the early 1940s between the Maoist and Wang Ming-led positions was a "line struggle" engaging the "mountain valley bumpkins" against the polished Moscow returnees. In the background of mounting pressure for autonomy and self-correction was a series of heavy defeats under dogmatic Comintern lines: the 1927 counterrevolutionary carnage that ruined the 1924–27 revolution, forcing the communists to regroup in the countryside; the 1934 loss of Ruijin, the soviet capital, to Nanjing's extermination campaigns; and the doomed battles one after another on the early journey of the long march. It was the rejuvenated revolution in the rural margins to "encircle the cities from the countryside" and its strategic and tactical innovations that initially defined Chinese Marxism.

To understand Chinese realities is to clarify the complex and intertwined relations between landlordism, warlordism, imperialism, and local ruling institutions. Although peasant revolts against destitution, tyranny, and landlessness were endemic in historical China, this pattern of cyclic rural deprivation and social upheaval worsened in the wake of foreign incursions. Inter-imperialist competition over China only exacerbated the country's internal decay and state involution, urban decline, rural bankruptcy, war calamities, usury, famines, and banditry, all of which were linked to corrupt autocracies within the governing structure. China fell into "semi-colonial and semi-feudal" conditions – a characterization confirmed by Lenin and the Comintern ("Feudalism", referring to a landlord system and its entrenched political-economic-financial nexuses, is a borrowed term, disregarding whether or when a typically feudal formation has ever developed in China).

The thesis of "uneven and combined development" (or "compressed development", which could better reflect lived experiences in the modern world) captures the political dynamics of these conditions. It may have developed from Marx's sense of "legitimation of chance" in productive, social-legal, and cultural and artistic evolvements against linear progress – conceptually, for example, "the point is not the historic position of the economic relations in the succession of different forms of society. Even less is their sequence" ([1857–1858]1973: 107-11). In his analysis of the possibility of a Russian transition skipping capitalism, a post-capitalist social formation could potentially compress economically upward phases through the simultaneity of common property in the east and transferred technologies from the west. This thesis was later elaborated emphatically in the contexts of the Russian and Chinese revolutions, respectively, after Marx (e.g., Trotsky [1932]1957: 4–5; Mao [1939]1991). Mao distilled it incisively regarding China's temporal-spatial position in the capitalist global political economy, as well as within this vast country characterized by regional and other disparities alongside the unfolding revolutionary movements that tested the aims and limits of communist strategy by locating and breaking the weak links of counterrevolutionary chains.

In response to the pessimism within the party and army concerning how the small and fragile red regime, confronted with incomparably powerful enemies, could endure, Mao emphasized the structural factors of semicoloniality. The indirect and fragmented rule of imperialist powers entailed uneven foreign compulsions on internal social life, and their local agents and brokers in conflicts divided the country into "spheres of influence". This resulted in a depressed and locally confined agriculture (compared to the unified national markets of capitalism), where impoverished peasants could be receptive to revolutionary calls. This presented weak-link opportunities for a dual-power pathway to building a "(local) state in the (national) state." Mao entitled one of his essays concerning the "armed independent power of workers and peasants" erected in the separatist territories, "A single spark can start a prairie fire" (1928; 1929; 1930). He was proven correct as more red bases were established around provincial border regions away from the strongholds of counterrevolution. Despite ongoing losses and recoveries, they expanded to connect into integrated stretches. Many managed their economic and financial systems to ensure population subsistence and military supplies. Such regional regimes functioned as a "counter-state, movable counter-power" (Tsou 2000: 205–38). Their three-in-one command system of party, army, and government, for better or worse, prefigured the future party-state.

The base areas had painstakingly tracked a concerted voyage. The party and army's dedicated foot soldiers followed the "mass line" to work with local trade unions, peasant associations, women and youth organizations, the militia, and business circles. This facilitated two-way communication: solicitation of daily needs and grassroots preferences to furnish policies and feedback-enhanced implementation. The red army was designated "an armed body for carrying out the political tasks of the revolution" to educate, organize, and arm the masses (Mao 1929: 86). Wherever possible, elections were conducted to enhance mass supervision and government accountability. Popular analogies for the cherished party-mass and army-people relations were fish in water or seeds in soil. The everyday discursive space was filled with consciousness-raising, political propaganda, and "literature and the arts for the people". There were grim problems, such as internal cleansing in reaction to the actual and inflated threat of enemy infiltration.

However, wartime Yan′an, as Edgar Snow reported in *Red Star over China*, was a model of hegemonic counterpower with a magnetic attraction, appealing to young intellectuals from near and far, as well as foreign volunteers.[4]

What Was New About the "New Democratic Revolution"?

In answering the Leninist "east question" or "national and colonial questions," Chinese communists formulated the theory of a new bourgeois democratic revolution "against imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat capitalism waged by the broad masses of the people under the leadership of the proletariat" (Mao 1948). This theory has evolved since the 1920s and is powerfully elucidated mainly in Mao′s *Strategic Issues of China′s Revolutionary War* (1936), *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party* (1939), *On New Democracy* (1940), and *On the People′s Democratic Dictatorship* (1949). Its eloquence, with a triumphant revolution behind it, has not been surpassed, and should be recognized as an original and significant contribution to Marxism. In the new era that opened in 1917, this revolution was bound to differ from the old bourgeois revolutions that led to capitalist development. The epoch of the latter was marked by a chain of earlier events (Lenin [1914]1964: 405–6): in Western Europe, approximately from 1789 to 1871, and in Eastern Europe and Asia: Russia (1905), Persia (1906), Turkey (1908), and China (1911).

In China, the republican revolution at least and most ended the dynastic empire and brought republicanism to the Chinese mind. Although national independence and "land to the tiller" featured Sun Zhongshan′s platform, the republicans could not achieve either. As the theory goes, the lack of a strong national bourgeoisie meant that only the proletariat could take over these tasks. The differences between the *old* and *new* bourgeois democratic revolutions, in this case, were therefore also those between *political* and *social* revolutions. Counterposing the two, factors around the party and its goals, ideology, and self-identity in class terms come to the fore. The communists had a two-step scheme to "remove the three big mountains" (popularly referring to imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism). First, they committed to national sovereignty and winning a land war, as pursuing both "new democratic" and socialist agendas in one stroke would be strategically infeasible. However, under the communist leadership, even a so-called bourgeois revolution could not stop after completing its "minimum program," as the party′s "maximum program" stipulated further steps toward the socialist revolution. At once national (to overthrow imperialism and semi-coloniality entangled with comprador bureaucracy) and social (to eliminate the landlord class and reactionary rulers), the communist-led new type of democratic revolution aligned itself with the world proletarian cause. The solemn claim of "democracy" on its flag was not merely rhetoric but valid for popularly anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles of democratic legitimacy, which also found institutional expressions in the peasant soviets, soldiers′ committees, and elections in the base areas. Never a regular political party to begin with, the CCP was a vanguard of both the class and the nation at once, and a mass party with a substantial rural membership while maintaining its Marxist guiding ideology and proletarian identification.

In a predominantly agrarian country, the party recognized the central role of the peasant question from its early days. The lower strata of the peasantry were regarded as the most reliable force in Mao′s investigative analysis of social and rural classes in the 1920s. Although large landholding was not widespread, the semifeudal structure centered around a parasitic landed class (including absentee landlords) tied to bureaucratic capital, warlords, and tyrannical local officials must be eradicated. More flexible land and rent policies replaced forcible land redistribution during the second united front to fight the Japanese invasion. The radical distributive methods resumed later with the 1947 *Outline Land Law*. Hundreds of work teams were dispatched to organize rural masses in land surveys, titling registrations, literacy classes, and "speaking bitterness" struggle meetings in the rapidly expanding areas under communist control. Consequently, the balance of power in the civil war decisively shifted. As millions of those who had obtained land joined the PLA and its logistical troops, enemy defections became prevalent at the frontline for the same reason that peasant soldiers chose to fight for their land. By the end of 1952, a large majority of the farming population – of both sexes in individual entitlement – had become *fanshen* (or liberated, as documented by William Hinton) landholders, instigating Red China′s next move toward accumulating for industrialization.

Unlike the top-down land reforms seen elsewhere, this sweeping campaign in China as a class struggle over land from below was politically requisite because emancipation required the oppressed to gain the ability and space to speak and act for themselves, and because the new regime needed its power base to be ingrained in village lives that would support the still impending socioeconomic transformations. The revolution also had a necessary cultural front as a learning process for the peasantry (amid class differentiations) to be reinvented by shaking off its traditional mentality and acquiring new historical subjectivity. Hence, it was no longer premodern or pre-political. Without such class

(re)making, merely seizing state machinery alone would have been socially shallow. This, along with the sociopolitical elevation of the masses, of the now esteemed labor, women, and other subaltern groups, gave the CCP "a depth of social recitation the Russian party never acquired" (Anderson 2010: 64). The case of China outperforming most "underdeveloped" countries in developmental terms is a remarkable testimony. It carries a universal message about the superiority of revolutionary solutions to unjust and unproductive landlordism, among other premodern and colonial quandaries. The fact that neither collectivization nor decollectivization in China could revoke the revolution's fruit of equal land rights also explains how land in the socialist stock could have subsidized post-socialist growth as much as exploitation (of migrant workers who partly depended on the land for labor reproduction), while also serving as a pressure valve and safety velvet in reform era's crisis management.

The rural road of the Chinese revolution has been troublesome for orthodox critics, who mistook Maoism for Stalinism and denied the CCP's proletarian disposition. Observing no significant role of industrial workers after 1927, they argue (inadvertently copying Stalin) that this party was petty bourgeois in nature, "a party of middle-class leaders and peasant followers" (Faulkner 2013: 256). Since the 1927 crush, it "had effectively ceased to be a working-class party, since its entire urban membership base in that class had been destroyed and had become instead a rural guerrilla organization based on the peasantry" (Davidson 2012: 252). But this notion of a missing proletariat is factually one-sided and conceptually superficial. Not only had the party continued to work among railway and factory workers and miners wherever possible – running disguised night schools, training courses, union clubs, and papers and magazines, if not large-scale strikes and insurrections, it also sophisticatedly articulated such undertakings into its identity as an ingenious working-class organization even in rural settings.

To be sure, the young industrial working class in the country was once small, but it was militant and still much larger and stronger than the scant national bourgeoisie. The latter, squeezed by both foreign capital and a bureaucratic bourgeoisie, was politically oscillating. A deadly blow it was, yet 1927 could not end workers' struggles. Joined by hired rural labor, sharecroppers, and other pro-communist elements, the surviving worker militants formed the backbone of a series of armed uprisings later in the year to engage in "armed revolution countering armed counterrevolution." The embattled contingents had been reintegrated into the "worker-peasant revolutionary army," hewing out its first foothold in the Jinggang mountains. Meanwhile, urban workers never ceased underground revolutionary activism in the white zone, and the party central committee remained in Shanghai until the early 1930s. The proletarian constitution of the CCP thus historically and indispensably defined China's *new* democratic revolution. The country's internationally class-like national status only reinforced this self-consciousness. Missing these factors in an unobscured history, it looks as though the proletarian and communist identity of the CCP is beyond positivist comprehension, which takes no account of the marvel of politics – class making through objective *position* as much as subjective *positioning*. These and related points, meticulously elaborated in the 20th-century Chinese Marxist writings, have yet to be duly appreciated.

The petty bourgeoisie – encompassing poor and middle peasants, seasonal agricultural laborers and artisans on odd jobs, small commodity producers, progressive students, intellectuals, and professionals – cannot be dismissed in modern revolutions as in the Marxist acuity. (Even today, small commodity production exists everywhere, mainly in the informal economies, and an accumulation mechanism of international capital is to source rents and profits from such precarious and semi-proletarianized classes in poorer countries.) In particular, the peasant question of the Marxist tradition was primary for the Chinese revolution. Since the peasantry and other petty bourgeois elements were far more numerous and, in the circumstances, worse off than waged urban labor in suffering aggregate exploitation and coercion, they were inclined to revolution despite any class-specific limitations. Yet the proletarian hegemony in a "vast ocean of the petty bourgeoisie" (as the Leninist lexicon has it) was a thorny challenge.

Echoing Lenin's paramount party theory and Gramsci's erudition of hegemony and counterhegemony, the Chinese communists addressed their own agrarian and "southern" questions in combating the "petty bourgeois spontaneous propensity to capitalism" within the party. Marxist education, cadre training, rectification campaigns, and criticism and self-criticism under democratic centralism were standard methods. A telling example is Zhang Guotao's "right opportunist line." Commanding the red fourth field army, he broke away from the party center, causing serious losses to the struggling revolutionary forces in serious distress. The 1937 party politburo resolution pointed out that the incident was rooted in "the narrow-mindedness of the peasants, the destructiveness of the lumpenproletariat, and the mentality of feudal warlords affecting the proletarian party". Having long "operated in economically backward rural regions" under the influence of non-proletarian ideologies, Zhang "became their captive and rejected the proletarian

ideology". The lesson was drawn as that "without the leadership of the Marxist-Leninism of the proletarian vanguard, neither the national revolution nor the land revolution can achieve complete victory" (PLA 1999: 952–4). As inne-rparty struggles never went smoothly, policy mistakes and wrongful convictions could invoke legitimate questioning of the party as a class vanguard. In the end, however, forging a revolutionary agency in the valiant vicissitudes of party, class, and state building was a political and organizational miracle.

With its doubly "proletarian" class character, the communist revolution in China is conceived as a "people's revolution" and a "people's war" in Chinese terminology. These terms count for the revolution's rural sway and popular appeal, which went far more intensively and extensively than any of its contemporary counterparts. Genuinely national-popular, it was an endeavor of the widest participation and profoundly social in tying industrial workers and the toiling masses, especially the peasants. It also conditionally included the national bourgeoisie and various intermediaries in a broad coalition. This revolutionary construction of a people as a historical and political process and the promised body politic of "people's sovereignty" and "people's democracy" – again denounced as a populist confusion or petty bourgeois utopia in orthodox thinking – makes it possible for the generic signifier of *the people* to be a composite *class* marker in domestic and international politics and realignments. Like the plural working classes, the "laboring people" (*laodong renmin*) is the most common reference, inherently gendered, ethnic, cultural, and regional, yet represents a universal transcendence of these identities. Incidentally, the immediate relevance of understanding the importance of collective land, food security, and thriving rural communities should be obvious in Chinese modernization, which is argued to offer an alternative to the socially and ecologically harmful models of industrialism and urbanism.

Above all, the post-1949 experiments in Chinese socialism vindicated Marx's hunch of connecting national liberation with the international socialist movement. Michael Mann is not alone in concluding his systematic examination of the Chinese revolution as "ultimately a Marxian revolution" (2012: 411). The communist leadership of a dual-natured revolution for both national and social liberation – a vanguard party with a proletarian background and character, and socialist ambitions in a peasant society – successfully carried the rural masses along while politically elevating their mindset. It consolidated the worker-peasant alliance and the united front, demonstrating the novelty, the very newness of the Chinese case within the lineage of bourgeois democratic revolutions, west and east.

Revolutionary Modernity

A further charge from a dogmatic standpoint is China's false claim to its superior version of "third world socialism", a form instead of "state capitalism" due to a revolution not enacted by the working class. Since Chinese communists had long transformed themselves "from nationalist revolutionaries into a bureaucratic ruling class" (Faulkner 2013: 257), and since China was also where "the one important entry point to the neoliberal era was first opened" (Davidson), the 1978 reform came to embody "the consolidation of the bourgeois revolution" (Davidson 2017: 134–6; 2012: 621, 252). Presumably, the right class agency is still waiting somewhere to mature and launch a genuine socialist revolution in the correct historical sequence. Here, two conceptual missteps occur: First, conflating the old and new bourgeois revolutions, thus negating China's indisputable socialist transformations under the communist regime post-1956; second, confusing China's pre- and post-reform conditions, which conceals a steep gulf between the two historical periods by misreading their continuities and discontinuities. Both blends are empirically and theoretically implausible while paying an unintended political price of naturalizing, if not justifying, the neoliberalization of the Chinese political economy. Even if the reform -- China's world-shaking deviation from socialism -- was premised on a partial repudiation of the revolution and a reconfigured global capitalist dis/order, the significance of 1949 is categorical and cannot be nullified.

The rejection of the social immensity and depth of the Chinese communist revolution, along with the denunciation of the Maoist search for an alternative to statist socialism, has prevailed in a broad revisionist trend in historiography and the social sciences since the 1980s, which despises major social revolutions. In China, it was typified by an intellectual drifting to "bid farewell to revolution," alongside an officially deformed Marxism to legitimize post-socialist transitions. Aided by some recurring aspects of the old society that blurred the 1949 demarcation, it became fashionable to beautify the republican period while framing a modernization continuum from 1912 to 1978 onwards, diminishing the milestone of "1949." Stretching to subsume imperial glories, there was also a self-deceiving proposal to "synthesize the three traditions" of Confucianism, socialism, and reformism (Gan 2007). In much less charitable narratives, Chinese socialism either never existed or was no more than a horrific and regretful parenthesis. Chinese modernity is thus endlessly questioned: Is not the communist rule just another dynastic cycle of despotism and bureaucracy? Given China's "tyranny of history" and "history of tyranny" (Jenner 1992), is not the liability so thick that

"even a historical event of such magnitude as a revolution appears to have accomplished little more than scratch the surface of a society hardened into immutability" (Dirlik and Meisner 1989: 17)? The world historical monument of 1949 looked to the post-cold war commentators ever shakier.

Regrettably, unregistered here are the massive accomplishments of the communist revolution and the subsequent socioeconomic development in China. Utilizing state power with revolutionary moral and organizational authority to institutionalize newly liberated forces and relations of production was not only a viable way for a country facing daunting internal barriers and international adversaries but also a faster and fairer one. Yet, as Chinese development was severely restricted by inexperience and difficulties, contradictions and policy blunders were predictable, as devastating as a "great leap" famine (Yang 2021). Still, in terms of "catching up," twentieth-century socialist projects proved to be a miraculous shortcut – the communists in power were almost everywhere effective nation builders and modernizers. Likewise, the Chinese revolution decisively altered regional and global geopolitics. Despite the acute errors and setbacks in its foreign policy, China carved out a precious space of autonomy and exerted international influence from Korea to Bandung, from Vietnam to "global 1968." Its intricate anti-hegemonic balancing acts, as nationally biased as they might have been, disrupted the narrow logic of the cold war. That is, China trailblazed de-dependency to challenge the capitalist global order of unequal exchange and chronic dependence of the country on towns, the peasant nations on bourgeois ones, and the east on the west as depicted in the *Communist Manifesto*. Chinese revolutionary and socialist modernity, however unfulfilled, promises to surpass capitalism and transcend the standardization of Euromodernity.

It was capitalist primitive accumulation that relied on colonized lands as a vital means of production and an outlet for Europe to alleviate its population and land pressures in the first place. Marx noted the discovery of gold and silver and the extirpation and entombment of the indigenous people of the Americas in mines, the conquest and plunder of Asia, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins. "The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement, and murder, owed back to the mother country and were turned into capital there" (Marx [1867]1971: 928). He also attended to the "ecological rift" and "industrial pathology" of pollution and waste in the same process, which damaged "the very roots" of workers' health and "the conditions necessary to lasting fertility of the soil." As capitalism 'begets its own negation with the inexorability which governs the metamorphoses of nature" ([1867]1971: 513, 522, 357; [1867]1987: 486), the "fetters" on productive forces could well be ecological. Given a global system of exploitation and conflict that wreaks cataclysms on the planet and societies, along with the accelerating concentration, centralization, and financialization of capital that prevent the eco-socially more beneficial economies from growing, capitalism has not, should not, and cannot be a sure path, let alone the sole form, of modernity. Thinking with Marx and his counter-projects of "rational cultivation of the soil as eternal communal property", "social property", and "collective production" ([1867]1971: 50–52, 738–739), the world's remaining commons distant from the capitalist core could be open to alternative modernities.

The Chinese Marxists understood the logical function of globalizing capitalism. They contended that foreign powers fatally stifled China's "incipient capitalism," obstructing the "natural" progression of a civilization of unparalleled wealth and potential. This politically charged counterfactual was deliberate. Tenable or not, it was a statement about the fundamental right and necessity of national independence, which became central to postwar third-worldism. Furthermore, the core argument that imperialism foreclosed any prospect of home-grown, independent national capitalism in China, liberal or otherwise, still holds. It was not until after 1949 that the PRC was able to fashion an extraordinarily effective socialist developmental state. National and state autonomy also preconditioned market reforms that must not fall into the traps of either dependency (on foreign capital and markets, etc.) or big-country chauvinism. If uneven development entails latent privilege as much as the anguish of backwardness, revolutions could explore the former while overcoming the latter. If generalizable, history demonstrates that national liberation movements and socialist revolutions took place *not* where capitalism succeeded but where it failed to develop society – capitalism is by no means a condition for modernization. Instead, a correlation between capitalism and *under*development is a postcolonial feature. Conversely, those revolutions that made the predicament of "socialism and backwardness" surmountable reveal a causal linkage between *socialism* and development despite manifold limitations. Post-communist shocks, breakups, and devastations only negatively underscored this inverse causation.

Revolution and modernity are not antithetical; the paradigm of *revolutionary modernity* is historically grounded and phenomenal. Great social revolutions also alter the epochal conditions for the development of post-revolutionary economies and polities. Such transformative capacity can be ignited and magnified by momentous revolutionary events.

As subjugated peoples break free of their shackles, they reverse a fate of being brought into history "not as subjects but as objects of the transformative powers of capitalism" (Dirlik 1994: 22). Defying such a fate, revolutionary China emerged as a history maker, reinventing the modern by removing its colonial and capitalist prerequisites. The Chinese revolution went on to experiment with independent and socialist policies that compressed developmental thresholds as overlapping temporalities and social spaces, establishing a model for modernizing societies. To dismantle colonial modernity, the anti-imperialist and decolonial movement must also operate at the cultural level of decolonizing knowledge production and consumption, both intellectually and discursively, as a matter of sovereignty and democracy. [5]

Continuous Revolution

Criticisms of Chinese communism from the standpoint of "permanent revolution" have one thing correct: the petty bourgeois issue of the revolution was linked to the post-revolutionary bureaucracy. The Maoist "continuous revolution" was precisely to surmount this hindrance through socialist advances. Such a revolution differs conceptually from the "permanent" (Blanquist) and "uninterrupted" (Trotskyist) revolutions. Aside from a semantic similarity of keeping the revolution going until it reaches a point of irreversibility, the continuous revolution unfolds within the revolutionary state as formally "the conditions of a proletarian dictatorship". It is unique and paradoxical. Mao told his comrades in *Xibaipo*, before entering Beijing to declare the inauguration of the central people's government, that 1949 was only the first step of a far grander long march. Acknowledging the gravity of impediments ahead, from acquiring skills to manage large cities and the national economy to withstanding "sugar-coated bullets" of material enticements, he forewarned: "The Chinese revolution was great, but the road after the revolution will be longer, the work greater and more arduous" (1949b: 374). A few years later, his catchphrases for the party and country were "never forget class struggle" and "take class struggle as the key link" – in the supposedly "very long transition" from socialism to communism.

The so-called "cultural revolution" was long in the making and culminated in its official launch in 1966. In a November 1956 central committee meeting, with events in Poland and Hungary in the background, Mao commented on people taking to the streets, also scattered in China, as something the party should welcome: The masses will oppose those bureaucrats who "think that state power has been won and they can take it easy and act like tyrants". Street protests "will serve them right" (Mao 1977, 324). Alarmed by a report on deteriorating and uncomradely cadre-worker relations in a factory in the winter of 1964–5, he was impatient: "The class of bureaucrats is a class sharply opposed" to the working masses. If the "workers" state" was not yet a reality, nothing less than a counterattack from below could defeat such "cadre-lords" who turned "the dictatorship of the proletariat into a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" ("May 16 Notification", 1966). Autonomous mass organizations mushroomed earlier in the cultural revolution, exploring a revolutionary public space for "the dark side of our work to be exposed openly, completely, and from the bottom up" (Mao [1967]1998: 220). The Marxist "weapons of criticism" took the form of "grand democracy", known as "speaking out freely, airing views fully, writing big-character posters, and engaging in big debates." Yet, by 1975, sensing his last battle to be fading, Mao was unreconciled, and again pinned down the "big officials" protecting their vested interests, who were "even worse than the capitalists." He lamented that "the bourgeoisie... is right inside the communist party" and "the capitalist roaders are still on the capitalist road" (1975/1996: 265-6; 1998: 487).

Decays of revolution resounded in Marx and Engels" advice that revolutionaries must be vigilant against the return of "all the muck of ages" while getting "fitted to found society anew" ([1846]1975: 52-3). Mao aimed to defend and advance socialism against the backdrop of revisionism, or what he perceived as capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union. Not entirely unprepared for the looming agonies of a daring revolution from within the party and state, he encountered unprecedented dilemmas and was nearly alone as his old guard colleagues were not with him. Taking the brunt of such a revolution was the "revolutionary state" itself – another contradiction in terms. This is because any revolution can hardly continue once the revolutionaries are in power and become rationally conservative powerholders. As the mass movement attacked officials and government institutions, the cultural revolution slipped into a self-undermining spell because it shared the same sources of legitimacy with the reigning order. That is, the cultural revolution was internal to the communist endeavor and "bearing witness to the impossibility of truly and globally freeing politics from the framework of the party-state that imprisons it" (Badiou 2005: 482, 506-7). The signal of stalemate already flashed when the Shanghai Commune was declared in the January storm of 1967, inspired by the Paris Commune – Marx's model of the political form discovered for labor's emancipation – and spoke for the city's two million-strong industrial workforce. Even Mao paused. Due to sheer impracticality, it was instructed to reorganize into

a transitional "revolutionary committee." Finding no organizational alternative, resuming the primacy and power monopoly of communist authority was only a matter of time.

The revolutionary state acting as a proletarian dictatorship is a paradox because, in theory, such a state is never meant to be stable but is relentlessly self-negating. Temporary yet necessary – "if the revolution is not to get bogged down and come to grief" (Althusser 1977: 203) – it must be strengthened to combat both capitalist perversion and statist bureaucratization while approaching its own passing as a form of class rule. For Marx, it was the pledge that "the state as such" would cease to exist, making the Paris Commune a "revolution against the state itself". The revolutionary dictatorship would be instrumental in transforming the state "from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it" (Marx [1871]1968, [1875]1970: 13–30, part 4). Discussing "the ideological state apparatus", Althusser specified that the communist party is incompatible with the governing structure, even in a socialist state, because such administrative functions would perpetuate the proletarian dictatorship purported to "wither away" – the ambiguous duality of the party and the state represents a political impasse (1977: ch. 12).

This was a Maoist insight, and mirrored in the post-Mao stripping of the party's proletarian identity. The erosion of class ideology amounted to a far-reaching mutation of power within the "normalized" ruling machine in and for itself. Along with unresolved tensions, radical mass democracy collapsed into a fanatical passage of turmoil, cruelty, and blatant disregard for legality and basic civil rights. While Mao bypassed state functionaries, rebel activism was not independent of his personality cult. He also violated his own commitment to "correctly handling contradictions among the people" (title of his influential 1957 essay). False class and political divisions inflicted extensive victimization, from arbitrary discrimination and persecution to infighting among students and workers. The army had to be called to intervene (Russo 2020: part 3). Although incomparable to Stalin's terror purges, such felonies had entrenched themselves in a reconstructed collective memory, aiding a specific "red scare" against revolutions that cleared the path to reform.

Oftentimes, revolutions must strike to finish what a single blow cannot accomplish. Even a second strike offers no guarantee, as its corrosion alone could undo the first. The horrendous letdown of the cultural revolution was nowhere better illustrated than by the "return to sanity" with revenge by the mistreated officials. Some had seized much more power and privilege than any so-called capitalist roaders, and this time with private capital and property. Despite globally unparalleled poverty alleviation and many positive results, pervasive corruption and various human, social, environmental, and moral-cultural costs of developmentalist policies led to the contention that Mao had predicted it all about the undoing of "1949", after all. His "second Machiavellian moment" of 1966 faltered due to utopian and voluntarist adventurism and ultraleft excesses, and essentially a premature revolution in search of its yet-to-be-configured enemies. Hence the ultimate irony: just as a substantial "new class" consolidates its privileges and wealth, another cultural revolution, now with a real target and urgency, is utterly impossible.

Mao's detection of a new bourgeoisie within the communist party may resemble concerns raised by others throughout the history of international communism. However, Mao was the sharpest in depicting the cultural logic of ideological class and "line" struggles over the "superstructure" under a communist regime, and the least fatalistic about regeneration. He was indeed the only leader with the vision and nerve to retaliate by appealing directly to the crowds while advocating an educational revolution to serve the people, replacing rulers and aristocracy with workers, peasants, and soldiers on the stage of arts and literature, and "focusing medical and health work on rural areas." Observing the cultural revolution from afar in 1968, Ralph Miliband noted that the issue of decentralization (as a democratic measure) was tackled "for the first time in the annals of Marxism" by the Chinese, who were "the only ones to have really tried to respond in practice, and in theorizing their practice, to the "challenge of elitism" ... at the vital core of the whole socialist project." Disheartened by the movement descending into chaos, he later accurately predicted its downfall through deMaoization (Newman 2002: 230-1).

Eventually, the "continuous revolution", intended to transcend not only capitalism but also statism into a higher realm of socialist modernity, fell apart. The thorny question of how to overcome post-revolutionary bureaucratization and communist degeneration in transforming a revolutionary party into a ruling party remains unanswered. Counterfactually, might the cultural revolution have been conducted differently? Could there be a creative socialist way to transcend the party-state other than an economic reform that tolerates significant bureaucratic capitalist elements? All things considered, this disastrous experiment should be viewed as a tragedy, not a crime. An extraordinary historical moment remains indelible, saturated with a "realist utopia"

of egalitarian and emancipatory values, collective energy, and individual agency, as well as a future-oriented horizon of ideas and politics. The liberty and tyranny of revolution equally deserve critical reflection.

Also worth noting is a lost legacy of communal socialism and economic democracy as aspects of the democratic and liberal socialism envisioned in China. One highlight of Mao's criticisms of the Soviet political economy textbooks was the absence of the right of labor to manage workplaces and participate in state affairs as their "biggest and most fundamental right in a socialist system". This popular right to public decision-making serves as an ultimate test of revolutionary modernity. In Mao's words, "completely relying on the working class" who "takes the lead in everything", including "the means of communication, media, and educational and cultural dissemination," was vital (Mao [1959]1977: 55, 61, 76, 130-6, 147). Microeconomic management needed to be amended accordingly, as exemplified in the "Angang constitution". The initiation of self-management by shop floor workers in Heilongjiang in 1958 was rearticulated through practice at the Anshan Steelworks in 1960 and promoted into the government 1961 "seventy industrial clauses". It encouraged workers, technicians, and managers to engage in multi-skilled teamwork by swapping and sharing roles, thereby fostering efficiency and technological innovation. Short-lived as it was, this policy took a long view of freely associated producers performing unalienated labor and controlling the means and surplus of production. At this level of projection, Mao's 1966 comment on the army's multiple activities beyond military training, including "criticizing the bourgeoisie", known as the May 7th directive, was a blueprint: communal organization and all-round human development should replace rigid divisions of labour and social hierarchies. The Maoist ambition was to eliminate the three overwhelming distinctions – worker-peasant, urban-rural, and mental-manual labor – through the three great revolutionary movements of class struggle, production, and scientific experimentation, which outline what China's continuous revolution sought to achieve.[6]

Marx's Method: Revolution and History

Discussions on class nation, uneven development, comparative modernity, and the paradoxes of revolution, among other themes in the previous sections, each have their methodological implications. Below is a further note on methods directly relevant to the Chinese revolution, focusing on Marx's approach to history.

Systematic Totality and Analytic Dialectics

For Marx, world history began with the capitalist global transformation that connected previously disjointed economies and cultures. He uncovered the organic totality of this mode of production, which "predominates over the rest.... It is a general illumination that bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it" ([1857-8]1973: 106-7), and therefore "the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social edifice, and hence also the political form of the relationship of sovereignty and dependence" ([1894]1976: 754, 927). Herein lies the vantage of historical materialism for historical understanding. To explain the Chinese revolution and its circumstantiated strategic and policy options is, in large measure, to examine China's evolving position *vis*-à-*vis* global capitalism as a foremost contextual reference.

Marx's dialectical method is imbued with conceptual and contextual subtleties. It "regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature". Only "by studying each of these evolutions on its own, and then comparing them" can one "discover the key" to both epochal holism and the complexities of societies. Further, since "everything depends on the concrete historical environment in which it occurs," potentially, "events strikingly analogous, but occurring in different historic milieus, led to quite disparate results." Among precapitalist social formations, for instance, the dispossessed Romans did not become industrial proletariats. Famously and resolutely, he rebuffed any attempt at an "all-purpose formula of a general historico-philosophical theory" – nothing is "supra-historical" ([1867]1971: xxx–xxxi, 739; [1877]1989: 200-1). In "How to study the CCP history" (a 1942 speech), Mao demonstrated such an epistemology: pursuing concrete analysis of concrete situations while always historicizing and contextualizing within the general and shifting conditions of perspective. The construction of "mountain valley Marxism" in the protracted revolutionary practices was crucial in bringing about the world-historical moment of 1949, which triumphantly endured doubts, sabotages, crises, and international antagonisms.

Efficacy of Historical Analysis

Following the Marxist philosophy of praxis – "consistency of logic and history" and "unity of theory and practice", Mao's "On practice" (1937) explains the dialectical interaction between the primacy of practice and theoretical initiative as an epistemological rule. Central to Marx's study of the precapitalist formations was a question about the internal dynamics necessary for such a formation to progress, assuming an upward curve of societal progress. Without their versatile relationships with the genesis of capitalism, these formations would be theoretically insignificant. Here, the generic concept of "precapitalist" implies a capitalist destination. Recasting this deterministic overtone, Marx disclaimed an earlier conviction that laws and tendencies" work with iron necessity" ([1867]1971: xvii). Yet, the Marxist readings after Marx continue to disregard a notional distinction between *pre-* and *non*-capitalism, even though, aside from feudalism, most "pre-capitalist" systems had not transitioned to capitalism, including the proposed "tributary" mode. The efficacy of Marx's method is otherwise intact: like the contingent relationships between ancient and feudal formations, his "pre-capitalist presuppositions" were not sequentially fixed. Furthermore, not only could those systems that evolved into capitalism be understood "only after the self-criticism of bourgeois society had begun", but also the others in critical inquiries due to capitalism's "general illumination". Hence his analogy: "human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape" ([1857-8]1973: 105–107; [1877]1989: 199–200).

This dialectical approach can be superior if deterministic or opportunistic biases are avoided. Without looking into popular struggles in China in the second half of the 19th century, the year 1840 would have signaled no more than a dirty drug war waged by Britain, followed by other imperialist aggressions. It was not the first opium war itself, but the successive Chinese resistance that inaugurated China's modern era. What sets May 4th 1919 apart in the regional context of revolutionary waves from its counterparts elsewhere is its aftermath – the founding of the CCP in 1921 and the ensuing national mass mobilizations. Without 1921, 1919 would carry different connotations; and without 1949, retracing the meaning of 1921 would become opaque. The tragedy of the preventive cultural revolution may be fully understood only long after its fatal defeat. Indeed, the revolutionary 20th century "was not an outcome but a producer of its pre-history" (Wang 2018: 85). Events may be viewed in the order of natural time, but they can be still better understood in hindsight, not in terms of chronology but through comprehension "after the fact" with retrospective referencing yet without "pragmatist use or abuse of history."

The Politics of Productivism

To decouple capitalism and development is to validate political precedence and revolutionary innovations in a boundless post-capitalist horizon, enabling free quests for social and human fulfillment. Denouncing the communist revolutions or celebrating their negation in the post-socialist transitions within the zone of former socialist states tends to re-conflate capitalism and modernity. To "rectify past misdeeds" of the Mao era, reformist Marxists in China rehabilitated "productivism" or "productive force determinism" and backtracked on the party's mid-century transitional program of "new democracy". Dismissing ample evidence that the relations of production change before the forces of production in revolutionary transformations and arguing that material affluence is an economically unpassable precondition for socialism, they implicitly advocated *buke* or "making up a mistakenly skipped stage" (of capitalism) in a linear historical evolution. This incarnation of economism is a pure ideology of developmentalism and, with it, a newfound fetish for money, markets, and growth, to the extent of substituting national greatness for socialism. However, economic growth modeled on the capitalist industrializers embracing the logic of profits and accumulation is neither desirable nor sustainable.

Indeterminacy

Historical studies also merit counterfactual thinking, permitting intervening contingencies and potential alternatives. Envisioning a communist future, Marx's vista of a liberated east triggering European and universal revolutions struck a non-reductionist and non-determinist note. Development is not the same as growth or material prosperity, and it must be an open contour entailing unevenness, uncertainties, setbacks, turns and detours, and the eternal logic of indeterminacy. Nothing is guaranteed, and politics does oftentimes take command. Without beating the telos of capitalism and appreciating aborted trials and paths not taken, multilinearity or interculturality as such, as seen in anti-Eurocentric scholarship, cannot unlock history. Granted, to judge the communist revolution in China, an honest approach would be "to weigh the costs of revolution against the costs of going without revolution" (Meisner 1999). This could stimulate profound soul searching – missed opportunities, lost worlds, unrealized ideals, forgotten lessons –

which is all the more pressing if only because of the most heroic and massive sacrifices. E. H. Carr's (1978, 25) advice on the Russian revolution can be fittingly borrowed for China, where the battle is not over: "The danger is not that we shall draw a veil over the enormous blots on the record of the Revolution, over the cost in human suffering, over the crimes committed in its name. The danger is that we shall be tempted to forget altogether, and to pass over in silence, its immense achievements."

Struggle Over the 1949 Divide

In The *Class Struggles in France,* Marx remarked that "revolutions are the locomotives of history." Great social revolutions are those that have transformed the socioeconomic structure and political power of a given society, as well as its normative codes, values, and direction. They are thus also markers in social historiography. "1949" is such a marker, the most magnificent and crucial one in relevant knowledge production and consumption. It serves as a definitive gauge in assessing judgement regarding the rights and wrongs of the past seven to eight decades, across 1966 and 1978. Not surprisingly, cold war anticommunism refuses to die despite radical post-socialism and has frontally taken the 1949 benchmark. The politics of periodization in China is precisely about this benchmark for the country's development to be normatively gauged. In an optimistic mood, Marx once asked rhetorically: "Can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia?" ([1853b]1979: 93, 98; [1850]1978: 266–267). Yet he also had a disturbing instinct, a cautionary reminder: Writing to Engels in the autumn of 1858 on booming world trade and newly opened Chinese ports, he wondered if the revolution in Europe (thought to be imminent) wouldn't be crushed by the bourgeois crusade "still in the ascendant over a far great area" ([1858a]1983: 347)?

He anticipated myriad obstacles and defeats that the communist revolutionaries would confront. They "return to what has apparently been accomplished in order to begin the task again; with merciless thoroughness, they mock the inadequate, weak, and wretched aspects of their first attempts; they seem to throw their opponent to the ground only to see him draw strength from the earth and rise again before them, more colossal than ever; they shrink back again and again before the immensity of their own goals, until the situation is created in which any retreat is impossible..." ([1852]1978: 62). Recall the darkest days of the Chinese revolution when tens of thousands of workers were slaughtered and nearly all the red areas and the party's urban underground were wiped out, or how the red army trekked 6,000 miles through unimaginable hardship, losing most of its forces along the way. The communists did not despair; they endured enormous self-sacrifices to win the revolution.

Class and social struggles in China today are incomparable with the revolutionary past, which signifies a dualnatured state of ideological and policy contradictions embedded in a path-dependent condition. Worth stressing is that the "wealth and power" that inspired the Qing reformers and republican nationalists should not seduce communists "before the immensity of their own goals." Internationalist investments overseas, for example, must distinguish themselves from the imperialist hunt for resources and profits by ensuring local surplus retention. What 1949 stands for, as clarified in the mighty journey of revolution, must be reaffirmed through critical cross-interrogations of both the revolution and the reform. This task is also intrinsically internationalist, not only because the communist project is so defined inherently, but also because capitalist globality is dominant and in one way or another internal to nations. As geopolitical and geoeconomic rivalries intensify and imperialist warmongers beat the drums, defending 1949 is not just about an essential national heritage; it is also necessarily about seeking transformative politics in China itself to rejuvenate the socialist cause and its grand narrative rooted in the Chinese communist revolution.[7]

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Notes

Text Footnotes

[1] I summarize the achievements and significance of the Chinese communist revolution in Lin 2021: chapter 2 and trace China′s socialist development following 1949 in Lin 2006.

[2] In Lin 2018, the thesis of this section is elaborated in detail.

[3] For more extensive discussions of the themes in this section, see Lin 2021: chapters 5 and 7.

[4] I discuss the “Sinicization” of Marxism and the communist revolution from China′s rural margins more extensively in Lin 2021: chapters 3 and 8; and economic struggles in the base areas in Lin 2023.

[5] Revolutionary versus colonial modernity is a theme explored in Lin 2006: chapter 1 and 2021: chapter
1. Chapter 7 in Lin 2021 includes a critical account of the PRC′s foreign relations trajectory.

[6] I have a fuller discussion on the cultural revolution in Lin 2021: chapter 4.

[7] I have used the same quotations and paraphrased a few paragraphs from Lin 2013, chapters 8 and 9.