Yan'an Communism Reconsidered

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The essential facts are clear. Twice defeated, routed from the revolutionary base areas they had constructed in the course of nearly a decade of guerrilla warfare and land revolution, on the eve of the Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Communist Party and its besieged army were essentially confined to a poor and peripheral area of the Northwest, having narrowly escaped extermination in the course of the Long March. Less than a decade later, Japanese armies in China had been fought to a standstill. By the time of their 1945 surrender, Mao's party-army held sway over almost 100 million people mainly in North, Northeast, and North Central China. In the course of the anti-Japanese resistance, the Communists forged a broad coalition of forces that administered and coordinated activities in widely dispersed rural base areas in China's interior. The base areas provided the springboard for nationwide victory in the subsequent civil war that ended in Guomindang defeat and establishment of the People's Republic. These facts are clear, yet explanations for the Communist victory and assessments of the character of the movement remain the subject of controversy.

This article assesses major interpretations of the wartime resistance since the 1940s and concludes with a critical reassessment of the Yan'an Way as a framework for assessing the revolutionary praxis both of the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region and of the wider wartime Communist movement.

Research for the book *The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China* (Selden, 1971) was conducted during the 1960s, prior to access by

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international researchers to mainland archives, to the spate of Chinese publication of documentary sources, and to opportunities for conducting research in the base areas and interviewing participants in the events studied. This nevertheless seemed at the time to be a period of rich new research opportunities. It was the beginning of the era of archival and documentary study of the wartime period that produced a succession of base area and thematic studies of the resistance drawing on archival, documentary, and press sources in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States. The present discussion draws on the scholarship of subsequent decades, including my own, involving archival, documentary, and interview research in rural China.

The Yenan Way was written at the height of the period of U.S.-China antagonism that was intensified by deepening U.S. involvement in the Indochina War, a war that was widely understood as a proxy U.S.-China War. It was also the beginning of a period of critical reaction in the United States against cold war ideology and scholarship that coincided with the growth of the antiwar movement. Viewed from another perspective, it was conceived at a time when relatively little was known about the disasters that were the result of the fundamentalist policies and practices of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution: the Chinese government tightly controlled information presenting both periods in the best possible light, and independent scholarship by Chinese and international researchers with access to a range of official and unofficial sources had barely begun. Analysis of cycles in international historiography of Chinese resistance and revolution underlines the sensitivity of interpretive trends to global conflict and particularly to contemporary patterns of U.S.-China relations whose dramatic shifts since the 1940s have been mirrored in the works assessed here.

The Yenan Way offered a close documentary study of the origins and political economy of a single important base area as a foundation for advancing a range of propositions concerning the national movement and its global significance. The point is not that the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia region typified the base areas. Shaan-Gan-Ning was unique among the wartime bases, notably in four important ways: it was the poorest of the base areas; it alone had completed land redistribution in significant areas prior to the shift to united front strategies; it was largely spared Japanese invasion (although subject to bombing

and blockade by Japanese and Guomindang forces) so that guerrilla warfare assumed a less central role than it did elsewhere during the resistance; and, finally, it was the home of the central Party and military leadership and the mecca for thousands of intellectuals and other patriots drawn to the resistance.

While recognizing distinctiveness, I argue, and research on other bases confirms, that essential institutional and movement features of the wartime political economy in Shaan-Gan-Ning emerged in the most developed base areas, notably the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei, Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan, and Shanxi-Suiyuan base areas, and shaped not only the outcome of the war but the subsequent course of the Chinese Revolution. From this perspective, Shaan-Gan-Ning was both a microcosm and a critical node in the development of a theory and praxis that would shape the wartime movement and the subsequent course of the Chinese Revolution. To fully assess the resistance, it is necessary to investigate the experience of each of the base areas including their self-reliant features and their position within the larger movement headquartered in Yan'an as well as their relationship to and conditions in Guomindang-dominated, warlord-dominated, and especially Japanese-occupied zones.

The Yenan Way proposed an understanding of the national movement and the dominant forces of the epoch within a framework of people's war and social revolution. Where many studies of the Sino-Japanese War sought to explain the *reasons* for Communist victory, *The Yenan Way* also attempted to chart the *consequences* of revolutionary processes for the people of the base areas. I understood the Yan'an Way as a fluid conception, a spirit, and praxis of revolutionary change that initiated a redefinition of relationships among the Party, the peasantry, and the local elite. It encompassed approaches pertinent to waging a war of national independence, but it also embodied dimensions of political, economic, and social change whose implications extended beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of the wartime base areas to the full range of problems associated with peripheral development.

I begin this reassessment by evaluating briefly the understanding and insights of contemporary observers—the journalists, writers, and scholars who directly experienced and recorded the events of war and revolution. In the following sections, I reconsider the Yan'an Way in

light of major scholarly interpretations of the Chinese Revolution and portions of the comparative literature on revolutionary change as well as of specific criticisms of the original work.[1] Finally, I conclude with my own critical reassessment of *The Yenan Way*.

FIRST-GENERATION INTERPRETATIONS: CONTEMPORARY OBSERVERS

Foreign journalists, writers, and government analysts of the 1930s and 1940s anticipated most of the theories explaining popular support for the Chinese Communists that subsequently received political and scholarly elaboration.[2] In 1936, the American journalist Edgar Snow became the first to slip through the Guomindang blockade and pay an extended visit to the Communist base area in the Northwest. His observations and interviews with Communist leaders, published the following year in *Red Star over China*, made him the most influential author-chronicler of the wartime Communist movement for both Chinese and international readers.

Snow was the first of many observers to hold that the Party's socioeconomic program was the sine qua non for forging bonds between a revolutionary party and an impoverished peasantry whose deepest concerns lay with land, food, and security. In *Red Star* (Snow, 1937/1968) and subsequent books and articles, he stressed the critical role of the Party's *redistributive programs*. In *Scorched Earth* (Snow, 1941: 310-6, 320-1), he also highlighted the importance of cooperatives in addressing the issue of poverty.

As early as 1940, George Taylor drew on personal observations of North China guerrilla bases to argue that the key to Communist success lay in their ability to exploit *nationalist reaction to Japan's invasion* by providing Party leadership of the rural resistance. In contrast to Snow's insistence on the primacy of the land program, Taylor (1940: 101) held that Japanese "brutality was, of course, an excellent argument for the guerrillas," provided "that they had been in a district long enough to organize and infuse a new morale and political outlook into the peasantry."[3] Taylor was thus among the first to suggest that war-induced nationalism, not the social and economic program, held the key to the party-peasant relationship.

Authors such as Harrison Forman, Gunther Stein, Jack Belden, Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby, and Edgar Snow, writing during the late years of the anti-Japanese resistance and the civil war, viewed the Communist movement against a background of their growing antipathy and disillusionment with the corruption, brutality, and malfeasance of the Guomindang. They argued that Communist success in mobilizing the peasantry lay in the introduction of *democracy* to a peasantry that had been politically marginalized—indeed, excluded from politics—under Guomindang and warlord rule:

> The entire Communist political thesis could be reduced to a single paragraph: If you take a peasant who has been swindled, beaten, and kicked about for all his waking days and whose father has transmitted to him an emotion of bitterness reaching back for generations—if you take such a peasant, treat him like a man, ask his opinion, let him vote for a local government, let him organize his own police and gendarmes, decide on his own taxes, and vote himself a reduction in rent and interest—if you do all that, the peasant becomes a man who has something to fight for, and he will fight to preserve it against any enemy, Japanese or Chinese [White and Jacoby, 1946: 201-2].

White and Jacoby, among others, saw the issues of democracy as closely intertwined with the Communist socioeconomic program, as suggested by their reference in this passage to rent and interest reduction. Did many contemporary Western and Chinese observers exaggerate the democratic elements of the movement? Were they misled in their view that the participation and proto-democratic politics of the base areas could be a harbinger of a democratic future? The same question, to which I turn shortly, must be posed to *The Yenan Way*.

American foreign service officer John Service, who visited Yan'an with the Dixie Mission and spoke at length with Mao, Zhou Enlai, and other leaders, also called attention to the democratic character of the political process in the base areas. In a despatch of September 4, 1944, Service explained that the rapid growth of Chinese Communist armies

> would not have been possible without the support of the people of the areas in which they have operated. This widespread popular support must, under the circumstances in which it has occurred, be considered a practical indication that *the policies and method of the Chinese Communists have a democratic character* [quoted in Esherick, 1974: 217; italics in original].

Service spelled out the basis for peasant support in terms that linked the Party's socioeconomic program with democracy:

> The peasants support, join and fight with the Communist armies because they have been convinced that the Communists are fighting for their interests, and because the Communists have created this conviction by producing some tangible benefits for the peasants.
>
> These benefits must be improvement of the social, political or economic condition of the peasants. Whatever the exact nature of this improvement, it must be—in the broader sense of the term as the serving of the interests of the majority of the people—toward democracy (quoted in Esherick, 1974: 219).

This view of democracy does not rest on multiparty elections, parliamentary systems, checks and balances, or other features of liberal democracy. Indeed, it highlights a party-peasant bond secured through improvement of the material conditions of impoverished villagers as a precondition for a democratic polity.

Passages such as these bring Service close to those who emphasize the contribution of the Party's socioeconomic program to improving conditions for broad strata of the peasantry. Service and others implied, though never to my knowledge fully articulated, a position that socioeconomic issues—and not electoral politics—were crucial to the possibilities of democracy in rural China where landlord and rich peasant elites dominated society and politics. Arguably, the Party's rent reduction, tax reforms, and cooperative institutions, in strengthening the owner-cultivator ranks while reducing the power of the richest and most powerful families, created socioeconomic foundations that could support a democratic polity far better than could a society with vast imbalances of wealth and power.[4]

A fourth perspective viewed skeptically the claims of democracy and nationalism and held that *organizational superiority* was the key to the Communist ability to fill the gap created by war, Guomindang retreat, and rural anarchy. The U.S. War Department report of June 1945 (Van Slyke, 1968: 1) stated the point succinctly:[5]

> The Chinese Communists *are* Communists. They are the most effectively organized group in China.
>
> The "democracy" which the Chinese Communists sponsor represents "Soviet democracy" on the pattern of the Soviet Union rather than

> democracy in the Anglo-American sense. It is a "democracy" more rigidly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) than is the so-called "one-party dictatorship" of the Chungking Government controlled by the Guomindang.

Such a "realist" view, a harbinger of cold war perspectives that would dominate American scholarship during the 1950s, assessed Communist strength in terms of organization and manipulation. It stressed close adherence to the "Soviet Russian 'party line' " while tending to ignore or denigrate populist and nationalist elements of the party-peasant bond and the socioeconomic program.

The preceding discussion has highlighted four competing, but also potentially complementary, theses explaining the strengths of the wartime Communist movement and of the Communist-peasant bond elaborated during the 1940s by the first generation of Western observers, ranging from journalists and writers to foreign service officers and military personnel. Their analyses emphasized, respectively, a socioeconomic program, nationalism, democracy, and organization/manipulation. Most of these authors did not insist on a single thesis but saw Communist achievement as multifaceted. Edgar Snow, for example, stressed the importance of material appeals including land, taxes, and cooperatives. But he also recognized the ability of the Communists to tap the burgeoning patriotism of rural youth, some of whom they introduced to the world beyond their villages for the first time (Snow, 1941: 347; 1968: 244). White and Jacoby (1946: 205) complemented their discussion of democracy with the observation that "the Communists won their real popularity by the war they waged against Japan. The black nature of Japanese conquest was common foe to every man, rich or poor, learned or ignorant." And Service pointed to the intertwined character of democratic appeals and the Communist socioeconomic program.

Many of these first-generation authors shared with other contemporary observers an appreciation for the dedication, patriotism, and accomplishments of the Communists reinforced by their growing perceptions of the Guomindang as corrupt, faction-ridden, and incapable of dealing with the social, economic, political, and security problems that overwhelmed the Chinese nation. As a group, they had

years of experience in observing and reporting from China and at learning firsthand about Chinese economy and society at the grassroots. In contrast to the next generation of writers, who were predominantly university- or government-trained China specialists or students of Communist affairs, and who enjoyed access to a wide range of primary source materials including Party and government documents and intelligence reports collected in the United States, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan but were unable to conduct research in or even visit China, the first generation relied predominantly on their eyes and ears as trained reporters and on-the-spot observers. And, in contrast with a generation of reporters who returned to China during the 1980s only to find their activities circumscribed and their contacts limited by tight government controls, the wartime generation enjoyed remarkable access to people of all ranks and walks of life and in diverse regions of China with the important exception of Japanese-occupied zones.

The first-generation American works surveyed here were written during or shortly after the Pacific War at a time when the specter of fascism placed a premium on democratic values and when American populist and egalitarian impulses were reinforced by experiences in China where the United States was allied with forces resisting a rapacious Japanese imperialism. This conjuncture produced a telling critique of Japanese imperialism and, particularly during the years 1945-1949, of Guomindang ineptitude and corruption. The international milieu also facilitated appreciation of the broad popular support that the Communist-led resistance enjoyed in the base areas and among many intellectuals. Likewise, with Soviet-American alliance as the pivot of the allied war effort in Europe, and with Ford and Chrysler advertising their contributions to keeping the Soviet Red Army rolling, it was not until some time after the allied victory in World War II that growing hostility toward the Soviet Union structured American thinking about Communist conspiracy. Above all, it was the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and subsequent Sino-American military confrontation that froze debate on many of the issues concerning the Chinese Revolution that had been debated so vigorously during the preceding decade.

CONFLICTING POLITICAL AND SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVES ON THE CHINESE REVOLUTION DURING THE ERA OF SINO-AMERICAN CONFRONTATION: FROM THE TOTALITARIAN MODEL TO PEASANT NATIONALISM

With the cold war, American preoccupations shifted from a focus on the national and social revolution and on party-peasant-elite relations to the search for conspirators in high places to answer the question as to *who* lost China. During the era of American politics associated with the name of Senator Joseph McCarthy, the answers frequently took the form of denunciations of foreign service officers, including Service and John Davies, and culminated in the purge of virtually the entire corps of American diplomatic personnel with China expertise. Also targeted for scapegoating were academics such as John Fairbank and Owen Lattimore, who had played government or advisory roles in wartime China and subsequently took up leading university posts. The impact of McCarthyism on the fledgling field of China studies and on perceptions of China was profound. Scholarly and political analysis and debate were stunted by an enforced intellectual-political consensus that precluded serious critical discussion of the issues shaping revolution and imperialism in China and Asia and of the exercise of American power in Asia.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, at the height of Soviet-American and Sino-American antagonism, American scholarly interest in the party-peasant relationship, imperialism, and anti-Japanese resistance declined. Public discussion centered on Soviet and Comintern machinations in China.[6] Simultaneously, research shifted from the period of anti-Japanese resistance to the years 1920-1935, emphasizing the Soviet role in shaping the Chinese Communist movement. Much of this literature, focused on Comintern conspiracy and manipulation, largely ignored the social and economic roots of revolution and stressed the slavish adherence of the Chinese Communist movement to Soviet theory and praxis.[7] Consistent with U.S. government denunciations of a monolithic Communist movement dominated by Moscow, a view reinforced by Chinese statements of support for Soviet foreign policy during the early 1950s, scholarship of the period focused on Soviet manipulation of the Chinese Revolution.

During the 1960s and 1970s, scholars returned to the issues of the anti-Japanese resistance. Denied access to archival sources or participant interviews in China, researchers for the first time began to draw on Japanese military and diplomatic archives, on the Chinese documentary and intelligence sources of the Bureau of Investigation in Taiwan, and on Stanford University's Hoover collection of wartime materials.

Chalmers Johnson's (1962) *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power* ignited debate with a forceful presentation of the view that peasant nationalism, inspired by Japan's invasion, occupation, and pacification, was the key to Communist victory in China. Breaking with conspiracy theories and with versions of the "organizational weapon" and totalitarian models transplanted from Soviet studies, Johnson drew attention to the critical importance of the war as a factor redefining the parameters of Chinese politics, particularly the party-peasant relationship. From the observation that earlier attempts to build rural base areas through guerrilla warfare and land revolution had ended in defeat, he concluded that the party's wartime socioeconomic program was irrelevant and, as George Taylor had argued earlier, that war-induced nationalism was the decisive ingredient of Communist victory.

Peasant Nationalism became the dominant interpretation of the period among China specialists, and it was also influential in the fields of comparative Communism and social movements. Because it provided an important stimulus that led to my own interpretation and because it provides a springboard for considering issues of nationalism, I take up its analysis in some detail. This first monograph to draw extensively on Japanese intelligence sources offers a useful military history of the Sino-Japanese War and draws attention to the importance of war-induced peasant nationalism as a unifying factor contributing to its outcome. By securing the major cities, the railroads, and the coastal areas, Japan forced a vastly weakened Guomindang to retreat from the coastal urban and industrial base to Southwest China. This not only prevented the Guomindang from taking advantage of the historic defeat of the Central Soviet to consolidate its rule, it also opened new terrain behind Japanese lines where the Communists would eventually build a powerful guerrilla movement and establish rural base areas that sustained the resistance.

In focusing on the Japanese invasion and subsequent military campaigns, however, *Peasant Nationalism* virtually ignores Chinese social and economic reality, above all slighting endemic sources of rural unrest rooted in landlord-peasant and state-peasant conflict, and the nature of the contending political and class forces with their profoundly different approaches to the countryside. Even the specific outcomes of Japanese military campaigns as they affected the Chinese countryside fade into insignificance in the sense that Johnson assumes that the Japanese presence in all situations fueled wartime nationalism. It is difficult, however, to accept his premise of a universally thriving wartime nationalism defined, following Karl Deutsch, in terms of social mobilization. During the years 1942-1943, notably in the base areas that bore the brunt of Japanese attack, the North China base areas and many of their inhabitants actually were demobilized as the base areas contracted from 44 million to 25 million people. During these years, the Eighth Route Army declined from 400,000 to 300,000 soldiers, and 90% of the plains areas fell to Japan (Van Slyke, 1986: 680). Can this be called social mobilization or should it rather be understood as demobilization? There was no inevitability to survival of the resistance forces and base areas, and still less to victory, whether explanations are framed in terms of nationalism or a mix of other factors.

A number of scholars have challenged central propositions of the peasant nationalism thesis. In the first significant critique of the thesis, Donald Gillin (1964: 274, 283-5) held that nationalism was primarily an elite issue whereas peasant mobilization hinged on the ability to address social and economic problems.

Examining diverse areas across North China following the Japanese invasion, Lyman Van Slyke (1986: 631) observed, quoting Kathleen Hartford (1980: 118-9), that "the local resistance forces were not formed spontaneously and . . . the spontaneously organized forces were not formed for the purpose of resistance." He showed rather that much of the resistance sprang up in areas outside the specific localities of Japan's advance and, by 1939, when most villagers began to feel the bite of Japanese military might, the major base areas had already been established.

In studies of areas under nationalist and warlord rule, Lloyd Eastman (1984: 141) found a lack of nationalist concern "everywhere appar-

ent," noting that "many Chinese—especially . . . the peasantry—were by no means hostile" to the Japanese. Indeed, from a half-million to 1 million troops served in Japanese-sponsored forces, many of them defectors from nationalist armies.

Hartford has shown that Japanese repression, far from strengthening the base areas and the resistance by provoking a powerful nationalist response, frequently stifled mass activism, drove guerrilla forces from even consolidated regions, and reduced or eliminated entire base areas (Hartford and Goldstein, 1989: 94). The central point demonstrated by Van Slyke, Eastman, and Hartford is that there was no automatic or reflexive peasant nationalist response to Japanese conquest and brutality, and still less any inevitability to the triumph of the resistance. Where the Japanese military succeeded in ruthlessly crushing opposition forces, nationalist reaction, if any, was generally weak and ineffectual. To understand popular responses to war and revolution and the volatile interaction among peasantry, local elite, and competing party-armies, we need to explore both the complex world of rural society and the nature of the programs implemented by Japanese, Guomindang and warlord, and Communist administrations, as well as the balance of forces in particular times and places.

If a reflexive peasant nationalism was decisive, why was a renegade Communist Party and not the national government the eventual beneficiary of this windfall of "war-induced anarchy" provided by an imperialist invader? After all, at the outbreak of the war, the national government had consolidated power and was and continued to be internationally recognized as the government of China; by 1935, it had curbed its major warlord and Communist challengers and it too sought to organize rural resistance. The Guomindang was, in short, well positioned to reap the political benefits of war-induced patriotism as did ruling groups in the United States, Britain, Germany, the Soviet Union, and Japan. China's Communist Party, by contrast, was barely surviving in a poor and peripheral region of the Northwest at the start of the war. It enjoyed no such advantage. In the end, a discussion of peasant nationalism, divorced from the analysis of the Party's agrarian program and praxis, offers little insight into why the Communists were more successful than their rivals in building rear area bases and strengthening their forces.

The outcome of the war, particularly the dynamic growth of the Communist movement and the waning of Guomindang power, hinged on the outcomes of political, social, economic, and military programs of contending forces in widely differing localities. Yet *Peasant Nationalism* touches on Communist wartime land policy only to slight its significance, and it ignores other elements of the economic, political, and social programs that distinguished life in the base areas from other regions. Noting correctly that the Party had abandoned the radical redistributive program of the Jiangxi era in favor of rent and interest reduction, it concludes summarily that "the communists' success in winning peasant support cannot be attributed to their carrying out an 'agrarian revolution.' " The issue is not, however, whether the wartime socioeconomic program constituted an "agrarian revolution." It is whether agrarian policies such as rent reduction, tax reform, and mutual aid helped to forge strong party-peasant bonds essential to the survival and growth of the movement.[8] As Yung-fa Chen (1986: 99) rightly observed, "it was primarily redistribution that enabled the Communist Party to involve peasants in the anti-Japanese resistance."

The outpouring of literature on nationalism since the 1980s, and the explosion of virulent nationalist conflicts from the Sino-Vietnamese-Cambodian wars of the 1970s and 1980s to the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia during the 1990s, has produced analytical and historical bases for reconceptualizing issues of Chinese nationalism. Benedict Anderson (1983: 16) has observed astutely that nationalism

> is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.

In *The Yenan Way*, I have suggested that the Chinese resistance offers a historical example of an imagined community with strikingly different implications from the typical pattern described by Anderson. The resistance created intellectual and institutional foundations for a national community in two important senses. First, it provided a defensive community against foreign invasion and domination. Sec-

ond, this community was defined in part by a reform agenda that addressed certain important forms of "actual inequality and exploitation" in Chinese society. This dynamic synthesis was at the heart of the Yan'an Way.

The term *community* in this context does not, of course, imply a face-to-face relationship involving all members of a national movement. I use it in an effort to capture important elements of common purpose that meet Anderson's criteria. At the same time, wartime nationalism raises other difficult questions of community—for example, its assumptions about shared interests of Han and minority peoples, assumptions whose problematic character would become clearer during the decades following the founding of the People's Republic. That is, wartime (and postwar) Chinese nationalism *assumed* an identity of interests between Han and minorities without addressing deeply rooted patterns of inequality and oppression. Nationalism, which seems to me to have had significant emancipatory elements as a focus for the wartime resistance, could become a vehicle after 1949 for reifying the mythos of the infallibility of the Party, the state, its leader, and its cadres, thus strengthening numerous forms of inequality and subordination.

RECENT SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVES: BASE AREA STUDIES AND THE REASSESSMENT OF THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

Since the 1970s, numerous studies have probed the relationship between the impact of war and the socioeconomic and political programs of contending forces in an effort to better grasp changing party-peasant and state-society relationships. Significant new research has focused on individual base areas and regions and even extended the microsocietal approach further to explore localities down to the county and village level. At their best, local and regional studies illuminate the complex interaction of a specific ecology, political economy, war, and competing socioeconomic programs and place the locality within regional, national, and global frameworks.

Analysis of the wartime economic, political, and social programs in the base areas provides the most important vehicle for assessing the impact of the Party on the outcome of the war, on popular mobiliza-

tion, on new forms of state building, and on the character of social change. The best known component of the wartime social and economic program was the reduction of rent and interest, which replaced the Party's earlier confiscatory land distribution. In most contested areas, however, including those parts of Shaan-Gan-Ning that had not earlier experienced land reform, tax reform was more widely implemented and deeply felt than was rent and interest reduction.

There were several reasons for this. First, low tenancy rates in most of North and Central China, including the largest and most important of the base areas, meant that most households paid no rent and that many who did were taxpaying owner-tenants. Tax issues were far more pressing for the overwhelming majority of villagers. Second, as Lucien Bianco (1986), Prasenjit Duara (1988), and Ralph Thaxton (1992) have well documented, twentieth-century peasant protest and insurrection have long been directed predominantly against taxes and an aggrandizing state rather than against the landlord class.[9] The Party's wartime united front program made it possible to build on this antistate animus and create coalitions that could be directed against Japanese puppet administrations that enforced onerous taxation and corvée policies. Third, particularly in contested areas, resistance forces lacked the strength to implement rent reduction, which required sustained mobilization of poorer strata and had the potential to weaken the united front by stressing class divisions. Tax reform, by contrast, which shifted a slightly larger share of the fiscal burden to richer families, could be effected administratively and without overt class conflict. It was far more widely implemented (Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden, 1991: 40-4; Dorris, 1976: 704-9). One result was that income differentials in the base areas were reduced more sharply than were differentials in property ownership (Van Slyke, 1986: 700). In exempting the destitute entirely from taxes, and in reducing the fiscal burden on a significant group of poorer households, tax reform helped consolidate a broad party-peasant bond. Together with rent reduction, it contributed to a general process of expanding and strengthening the owner-cultivator majority and reducing income and wealth differentials. This was frequently accomplished without significantly reducing the overall tax burden or reducing the revenues required to sustain the costly war effort.

Rent and interest reduction, and particularly tax reform, exemplify the Party's approach to curbing the power of the rural elite and equalizing income and land ownership through a "silent revolution" that gradually shifted the burden of taxation from poorer strata toward the more prosperous and strengthened the position of owner-cultivators.[10] Yung-fa Chen (1986: 420-1) has shown for East and Central China that both programs encountered fierce landlord resistance, particularly in contested areas or where the Party was weak. Where it was effectively implemented, however, as in a number of the older North China base areas including Jin-Cha-Ji, Shaan-Gan-Ning, and parts of Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu, progressive taxation and rent reduction had redistributive effects that consolidated the Party's base both among the poorest strata and broadly among the self-cultivating majority (Hartford and Goldstein, 1989: 101; Kataoka, 1974: 122-33, 249-51; Thaxton, 1983: 103-9; Friedman et al., 1991: 40-4). In many instances, moreover, tax reform and rent reduction programs did not rupture the united front by driving the local elite into the arms of the Japanese or out of the area. In short, limited reforms, predicated on the continued economic and social predominance of family farm and market, strengthened the united front.

The wartime program, embracing tax reform, rent and interest reduction, and, in secure base areas, mutual aid and elementary forms of cooperation, initiated limited but significant social change including gradual transformation of state-society and interclass relations. The rich frequently declined in wealth and power whereas the poor, as well as sections of the independent cultivator majority, achieved palpable if fragile economic, social, and political gains. These gains were fragile in the sense that shifting fortunes in the guerrilla war could quickly erase them. The relative decline in the power of the rich was reinforced by the general wartime decline of commercial agriculture and the expansion of food crops at the expense of commercial crops as cultivators sought to ensure subsistence and base area governments to promote trade in an epoch of insecurity (Myers, 1986: 267). The result was an increasingly homogeneous social basis for the consolidation of power by the party-army leading the resistance in the rear areas of North and Central China.

Several issues remain contested in assessing the wartime program, in part because of varying evidence derived from different regions.

One concerns the relationship between resistance forces and the local elite. In Central Hebei and throughout Jin-Cha-Ji, the resistance worked to win over patriotic members of the local elite as well as the poor. In some united communities, it succeeded in bringing some of the rich and their scions into local government. The Party sometimes succeeded in bridging the gap between the prosperous and the poor through a shared commitment to the resistance and implementation of an economic and fiscal program that proved minimally acceptable to significant parts of the elite as well as to the poor (Friedman et al., 1991: chap. 2). More than a shared patriotism was involved. Where resistance forces enjoyed sustained dominance, army enlistment by the sons of elite families could secure tax exemptions and strengthen the family's political position. In short, a range of factors come into play in assessing Party efforts to mobilize patriotic elite rural youth and the scions of independent cultivators, many of whom subsequently rose within the Party, army, and government as middle- and higher-level cadres.

The moral economy/rational peasant debate, framed in the writings of James Scott (1976) and Samuel Popkin (1979), offers another approach for explaining why substantial numbers of villagers of diverse social classes rallied to support the resistance. With reference to the moral economy argument emphasizing the primacy of subsistence and security considerations, in the resistance bases we note both Party efforts and villager responses to policies that sought to secure subsistence. But the juxtaposition of subsistence versus markets may misconstrue a situation in which Communist forces simultaneously sought to ensure subsistence *and* promote market activity. Positive peasant responses to the expansion of market opportunities were by no means restricted to independent cultivators and the more prosperous, but extended to the poor and landless. In rural China, widely shared understanding of the essentials of a good life, a moral life, required cash to ensure a proper wedding and burial and to celebrate the New Year and other important festivals in appropriate ways. Cash could be obtained only in the market.

After coming to power, particularly after 1957, the Communist Party would brand such customs as feudal superstition and seek to eliminate the markets that sustained them. But in building the resistance during the 1940s, the party-army generally protected both

custom and the market, rightly seeing in them powerful weapons essential for the survival and growth of the resistance. David Holm has shown how the Party in Shaan-Gan-Ning and other areas, during the course of the resistance, drew on and adapted popular cultural themes. For example, *yangge* performing troupes fanned out across the countryside, visiting each courtyard in turn on the New Year, improvising songs and verses of a congratulatory variety considered auspicious for the New Year, exploding firecrackers, paying respects to the small shrine to Tudi at the main gate, and even exchanging *hong fengzi* gifts of money in red envelopes. Holm (1991: 160-2) shows, too, the ways in which culture became a battleground, as intellectuals resisted popularization policies and as the Party moved to replace such enshrined and popular cultural motifs as sexually explicit or lewd male-female bantering and to introduce contemporary mobilizational themes such as the production movement and rent reduction.

In light of the rational peasant perspective's emphasis on market-derived cash income, my research shows that such goals were widely shared among diverse social classes. But the quest for cash was never the exclusive preoccupation suggested by some rational choice theorists whose conception of rationality begins and ends with profit maximization and who rule out cultural factors entirely. Indeed, in the desperate times of blockade, pillage, and famine that consumed much of wartime rural China and above all the border areas, both Party and villagers prioritized subsistence guarantees over cash incomes. Moreover, the rural crisis placed a premium on familial, lineage, and village groupings and networks rather than on the striving of autonomous individuals. It is most fruitful in thinking about rural China to understand that "moral" and "rational" values were wedded in popular consciousness and that their relative weight changed in response to historical conditions. Prevailing conceptions of the good and moral life, a life that honored ritual norms from birth through marriage to burial, of course presupposed subsistence but looked beyond it.

The market made possible realization of the cash incomes essential for the fulfillment of ritual norms. It was also the locus of much culturally sanctioned activity from the performance of local opera to the brokerage of marriage negotiations. The resistance Party sought to ensure both subsistence and cash incomes and this meant encouraging, but also at times regulating, markets. In short, some of the polar

positions that have defined much discussion of peasant values and agrarian revolution dissolve in the face of Chinese rural realities with respect to the base areas and the chemistry of party-villager relations.

The preceding discussion has underscored the Party's success in some important base areas in building broad rural coalitions that included the destitute and sections of more prosperous strata around issues of tax reform, rent and interest reduction, and mutual aid. This political and economic program contributed to the unity and élan that made possible the survival of the base areas in the face of Japanese blockade. Important dimensions of the wartime program in Shaan-Gan-Ning, notably tax reform and mutual aid, and involving mass organizations and mobilization for local and regional elections, spread and took root in more stable base areas (Keating, 1993).[11] These programs facilitated the broadening of a social base and a reduction in the sharpest class antagonisms that threatened to divide the resistance. On these issues, the recent literature contributes to a broadening and deepening of approaches first proposed in *The Yenan Way*.

Subsequent research on the resistance has confirmed that essential elements of *The Yenan Way* can be applied, with appropriate attention to variations, to other base areas and the wartime movement overall. The periodization of the epoch proposed in *The Yenan Way*, pivoting on the institutional-political-ideological watershed of 1942-1943 and stressing the multifaceted response to the Japanese offensive that jeopardized the survival of several bases, remains generally valid not only for Shaan-Gan-Ning but also for the national movement. Similarly, the focus on the socioeconomic foundations of the relationship between Party and villagers in peripheral regions under wartime conditions offers a basis for the comparative study of the base areas leading to a deeper understanding of the dynamism of the resistance. Finally, the wartime resistance constitutes not only the most innovative period of the Chinese Communist movement but a seminal experience foreshadowing and influencing subsequent anticolonial movements throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In these dimensions, *The Yenan Way* has stood the test of time.

Is so positive an appraisal of the wartime resistance tenable during the 1990s in light of what we now know of the Communist Party that presided over the Great Leap famine, that led China on the devastating course of the Cultural Revolution, and that presided over the Tiananmen

massacre and much more? In the discussion that follows, I consider anew some of the core judgments of my earlier *The Yenan Way* in light of these issues and particularly in light of important new evidence on the period of the resistance. I insist, however, as in the earlier work, that judgments include, but not be limited to, comparative frameworks such as those of Qing and Republican China, other Asian colonial and semicolonial societies, and poor and divided agrarian nations then and subsequently. Let me turn then to a reassessment of *The Yenan Way* in light of the most important challenges to it.

TOWARD AN AUTO-CRITIQUE OF THE YENAN WAY

The central issues pivot on democracy and authoritarianism, fundamentalism, the cult of Mao, and the nature of political mobilization, all of which have been at the heart of debate over Yan'an Communism.

I begin with an example of a kind rarely encountered in the published documentary, or even the intelligence, record that provided the research base for *The Yenan Way*. Examples of commandism from a Hebei plains region, which could be multiplied many times, include an instance in which outsiders forced a small and struggling cooperative to accept norms of income distribution based predominantly on labor at the expense of return on land. To do less, the cadres claimed, would constitute "exploitation."[12] The new policy drove half the households, notably those that were better endowed with land, out of the struggling cooperative (membership at that time was genuinely voluntary). Responding to the virtual collapse of the cooperative, the leadership quickly restored former distribution norms, but it was too late to bring back those who had bolted.

In an instance of heavy-handed politics in the service of an exemplary cause, cadres promoted night schools for young women. They neglected, however, to undertake the preparatory work required to make such activity socially acceptable in a patriarchal community in which women were expected to remain within courtyard walls and many people viewed the education of women as irrelevant or worse. Irate family members responded by beating to death several young married women seeking education. Commandism, fundamentalism, and insensitivity to local values, where unchecked, sometimes pro-

duced deadly consequences. In extreme cases, they jeopardized the survival of the resistance. The issue is the distinction between mobilizational approaches responsive to local perceptions and needs, approaches that could expand the horizons of social justice and the imposition of externally derived and rigidly imposed formulas. Frequently a fine line separated effective popular mobilization from repressive commandism. Where the Party pressed reforms that lacked a popular basis, repression or violence could contribute to passivity, disunity, or worse. The fact that judgments had to be made under conditions of guerrilla warfare in the face of military repression and at times under pressure from Party officials with little knowledge of local conditions made the issues all the more poignant. Errors were sometimes fatal.

These examples illustrate tensions within the mass line that received too little attention in the original work. At its best, the mass line, an approach designed to mediate and resolve such antagonisms, rallied broad strata of the population in the service of shared national resistance goals and those of social and economic reform. *The Yenan Way* highlighted such instances of leadership praxis responsive to popular needs and values. Such a politics, where attuned to popular needs and desires, could contribute to social and economic equity. At its worst, however, it was capable of destructive forms of fundamentalism resting on Party claims to exercise a monopoly on morality and truth.

The dark side of mobilizational politics would be amply manifested in the political scapegoating, personality cult, repression, and manipulation that crescendoed during the late Mao years, particularly during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution and continued during the reign of Deng Xiaoping as well. Yet, under wartime conditions, where survival of the movement depended on sustaining popular support, the Party generally succeeded in curbing commandist and fundamentalist tendencies. It displayed a tactical and strategic flexibility and sensitivity in dealing with a range of social classes. For example, the Party pressed electoral campaigns that brought non-Communists into local administration, to be sure in ways that never challenged its predominance in the base areas it led. But successful democratic transitions almost invariably begin with some measure of elite continuity.[13] The evidence from the resistance suggests that there

was a significant democratizing potential within the Communist movement, if that was by no means the only potential. This was among the factors that contributed to the high levels of popular support the Party enjoyed, a fact amply noted by contemporary observers. Nevertheless, writing during the 1990s, my affirmation of the democratic promise of the movement would be more guarded than it was at the time of the original.

The movement achieved substantial success in implementing wartime reform programs responsive to popular needs (particularly those of poorer strata), in establishing socioeconomic preconditions favorable to democracy, and in broadening the scope of the political process. By what standards? Certainly by comparison to anything found in the rural areas under Guomindang, warlord, or Japanese rule and by comparison to most other contemporary poor and peripheral nations. Both in Shaan-Gan-Ning and in the base areas behind Japanese lines, the socioeconomic and political programs of this period rank among the most innovative to emerge anywhere during a century of national independence struggle and Communist revolution in the colonial and semicolonial regions of the periphery. The achievements include bringing substantial numbers of marginalized people into the political process and expanding their economic, cultural, and political resources. *The Yenan Way* recognized and highlighted these seeds of a democratic transition. Looking back from the 1990s, however, it is equally important to understand why the seeds of democracy sown in the resistance failed to germinate—or rather were decisively crushed—in the People's Republic. Among these is the fact that the resistance movement also carried within it the seeds of Party despotism, of ideological fundamentalism, and the cult of the leader.

I would like to take up two direct challenges to the original work. The first and most important centers on strains of Party despotism, even fundamentalism, that surfaced during the course of the resistance. The second disputes claims that the resistance pioneered effective new approaches to economy and society including self-reliance and cooperation.

Looking beyond the resistance to the People's Republic, it is now clear that centralist, authoritarian, and fundamentalist strains that were present in incipient form within the wartime movement came to the fore once the Party won power and posed obstacles to achieving many

of its developmental and political goals.[14] Many of the most promising elements of the Yan'an Way were then suppressed. The Mao cult and the Party's tight monopoly on power stifled the reformist sprouts that were associated with the influx of intellectuals, the united front, and social policy achievements of the resistance era; the spirit of mutual aid and cooperation that had been encouraged by the Party within the framework of a mixed economy was undermined by the imposition of giant collectives modeled on Stalin's kolkhoz but with little or no mechanization; the possibilities of a mixed economy of household, cooperative, and market after 1955 collectivization yielded to extreme forms of antimarket collectivism; and the interests of the countryside were sacrificed in the service of a vision of development that took large-scale heavy industry as its goal and the countryside as the primary source of accumulation to achieve it. Whereas the Party claimed legitimacy as heir to the Yan'an Way, during the late Mao years it defined its legacy as asceticism, hard work, class struggle, self-sacrifice, and boundless loyalty to the leader.

Reconsideration of the 1942 Party rectification movement permits us to address other critical issues. This study was the first to recognize the rectification as a vehicle for building consensus within the Party and preparing its cadres and intellectuals for the important political and institutional changes that would emerge during the years 1942-1944 at the heart of the Yan'an Way: the movements for mutual aid and tax reform, the production campaign bringing many women into the social economy, the expansion of the organizational economy, and innovations in education and health care. These and other initiatives, such as promulgating a cultural policy to face the countryside, were bound up with preparations for a transfer of cadres and intellectuals to the villages (*xiafang*). In short, the rectification contributed to building the organizational unity required to formulate, evaluate, and implement the far-reaching institutional changes in the base areas during the years 1942-1944.

The rectification was also a means of mediating intense intra-Party conflicts. In this respect, I contrast it to earlier resort to assassination and execution as a means of intra-Party conflict resolution. The original work supported the findings of Boyd Compton's (1952) study that the rectification was not a purge, although it did provide a venue for sharp political-intellectual struggle. The appearance of new evi-

dence and the subsequent course of the Chinese Revolution require rethinking of the rectification from the perspective of its repression of dissenting views, its significance for intra-Party political processes, and the administration of justice.

The rectification was a pivotal event in the creation of a cult of Mao and in crushing independent thought among intellectuals and party activists. These tendencies would be carried to disastrous extremes in the People's Republic. Dai Qing's seminal work in exhuming the case of the writer Wang Shiwei brings into focus perhaps the single most important case for gauging repressive dimensions of the movement. Wang's real crime, his scathing attack on elitist tendencies within what by most standards was a most egalitarian movement, was compounded in the eyes of Party leaders by the presumptuousness of a little known writer who persisted in judging the Party by its own highest standards. Wang charged the Party with hypocrisy in providing its own officials with privileged access to food, clothing, shelter, and sex. He derided "the three classes of clothing and five grades of food" (Apter and Cheek, 1993) as an unnecessary—indeed immoral—luxury at a time when all were asked to sacrifice for the survival of an independent China. When the 36-year-old Wang refused to back down by accepting criticism of his views at a time when the Communist writer Ding Ling and all others under attack made at least token self-criticisms, he was incarcerated. Finally, after five years of imprisonment on charges of Trotskyism, he became the victim of a grisly execution. David Apter and Timothy Cheek (1993: 3, 66-68; cf. Seybolt, 1986) correctly conclude that the issues are systemic, that is, emblematic "of Yan'an's dark side, as authentic a part of Yan'an's inner 'symbolic capital' as the outer manifestations of frugality, self-sacrifice, and national salvation."

I read the case at several levels. Most importantly, it, and the rectification movement of which it was a part, illuminates a stage in the formation of a thought-control apparatus within the Chinese Communist Party, a critical moment in creating mechanisms of repression and control that would intensify and expand in scope to become the norm once the Party consolidated power in the People's Republic.

Wang had staked out a position in the cultural-intellectual debates that led up to the rectification beyond the issues of promoting "absolute egalitarianism" for which Mao and others would attack him. The

case is also revealing in terms of the space and limits of dissent that were possible within the wartime movement. Wang was not without supporters during the early phases of the campaign. He succeeded not only in publishing his two dissenting essays but in mobilizing support for his position and fighting back within the Party with some initial success prior to his incarceration. Such opportunities to contest leadership decisions would subsequently disappear. Since the 1980s, as more information became available, Wang's case has rightly received attention in China and abroad, both as the most extreme case of its kind in this epoch and for its chilling impact on the political milieu in the border region and beyond.

The case of Wang Shiwei exposes the manipulative and coercive side of Yan'an Communism. Given the strength of populist, reformist, and even proto-democratic tendencies within the wartime movement, it is essential to understand why the authoritarian and repressive tendencies illustrated so tragically by Wang's case triumphed in the subsequent People's Republic, from the antirightist movements of the 1950s to the Cultural Revolution to the crushing of democratic aspirations during the 1980s.

In assessing the resistance period, Philip Huang (1991: 325) observes that "the Chinese Communist movement enjoyed much greater popular support than did the Guomindang," but he goes on to balance this judgment with another: "there can be no denying the strongly conspiratorial mentality and workstyle of the Leninist Communist Party, its protestations of a 'mass line' notwithstanding." The latter judgment is one that I share when applied to the years in power, particularly if couched in terms of an authoritarian rather than a conspiratorial mentality. I find, moreover, in facets of the rectification movement such as the crushing of dissent in the cases of Ding Ling and Wang Shiwei, the roots of the repression of intellectuals and the formation of a Mao cult that would so profoundly shape the movement subsequently.

Nevertheless, as a comprehensive judgment on the Party of the resistance epoch, Huang's perspective seems to me one-sided. In particular, it rests on reading back from the subsequent course of the revolution. If the dark side of Yan'an Communism was understated in *The Yenan Way*, as it surely was, we should not lose sight of distinctive

features of the movement in this, perhaps its most open and creative period. Only in this way can we begin to grasp how it succeeded in attracting extraordinary loyalty of a broad range of patriotic Chinese of diverse classes, many of whom sacrificed their lives in the wartime struggle. And only then can we understand the democratic voices within the Party who continued to struggle against authoritarianism after 1949.

This is not to condone manipulative, violent, or fundamentalist elements that surfaced in the Party during the resistance. It is, however, to suggest that these tendencies were generally held in check at the time not only by the imperatives of survival in the face of powerful enemies—that is, by an objective situation that required winning and retaining substantial popular support—but also by the populist character of the wartime movement whose constituency included many of China's leading intellectuals as well as broad rural support.

Yung-fa Chen (in press) has shown that during the years 1943-1945, the Shaan-Gan-Ning economy and government finance became heavily dependent on the production and sales of a "special product" that, he shows, can only be opium. Working with budgetary, sales, and export data as well as with private diaries, Chen demonstrates, and the unpublished findings of other researchers confirm, that during the years 1943-1945 the party-army responded to crushing budget deficits that threatened survival by growing and selling substantial quantities of opium. He presents strong circumstantial evidence that opium was controlled at various times by the 359th Brigade under Wang Zhen (the regional model of military self-sufficiency) and by the Nanchang Company (the regional model of state-supported cooperation). Moreover, Chen argues that Mao personally approved the opium sales in 1943, banning them only when the crisis eased in 1945. Chen (in press) sums up his discussion in the form of a critique of the findings of *The Yenan Way*:

> No one can deny the communists' achievement in developing the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region through the mass line in the 1940s. But ignorance of the role played by the revenues from the opium trade led Selden to exaggerate the economic accomplishments and overlook the internal constraints imposed by the poverty and backwardness of the Border Region. . . . As the size of opium trade testifies, the Border Region never achieved the goal of genuine self-reliance.

Chen's research provides compelling testimony to the desperation of the struggle for survival in the rural backwater that was Shaan-Gan-Ning. It also suggests dimensions of historical continuity linking modern revolutionaries and traditional rebels in a manner pioneered earlier by Elizabeth Perry (1980) in her studies of the Huaibei region.

With the poverty of the border region exacerbated by blockade and war, and with the end of Guomindang subsidies by 1939, the economic and financial options available to resistance forces were narrow. Even in the absence of war-induced resource constraints, the ability of the border region to support the substantial influx of soldiers, administrators, and students that followed the arrival of the red armies would have placed an enormous strain on the economy. Chen underlines the distinction between the Communists' desperate turn to opium and characteristic warlord behavior, noting that the Party effectively banned opium smoking within the border region and that it ended opium sales as soon as the crisis eased. Nevertheless, these findings call into question any universal claim that revolutionaries occupied the moral high ground. Chen's findings require reconsideration of the case for economic self-reliance in the border area, drawing attention to the critical role of the market in making possible the survival of the resistance in its time of trial.

Surprisingly, Chen did not directly address the findings of the most exhaustive effort thus far to analyze the economic performance of the region, Peter Schran's (1976) *Guerrilla Economy*. *Guerrilla Economy* provides detailed analysis of the range of state-directed efforts mounted in response to the economic and financial crisis of the early 1940s including the institutional economy, substantial tax increases coupled with tax reform, printing of currency, import-substituting industrialization, and mobilization of female and other labor in production campaigns. Schran shows that the border region administration sustained large and growing budget deficits each year between 1941 and 1944 despite increased revenues provided by the institutional economy. Presumably, the deficits would have been substantially larger, perhaps insupportable, in the absence of opium revenues.

Chen's new evidence is significant in the calculus both of economics and politics. Yet his critique of earlier scholarship is not quite persuasive. Neither Schran's *Guerrilla Economy* nor *The Yenan Way* contended that the self-reliant efforts solved the problems of poverty,

technological backwardness, or government deficits in the Shaan-Gan-Ning region. Both studies, and others probing economics and finance in other border areas, in fact emphasize the heavy fiscal pressures in the region and offer rather modest assessments of the economic and developmental results. At a time when the border region supported a large military and administrative population, facing blockade and protracted war, no economic breakthrough occurred. Nor could it have. *The Yenan Way*'s narrower claim was rather that the combination of rent and tax reform, mutual aid, the market, and attempts at self-reliance bolstered the war effort. It further hinted at the potential value of these approaches for subsequent development efforts. No claim of economic breakthrough was made.

Part of the process whereby the revolutionary armies and Party adapted to the harsh conditions of border region life, it is now clear, included continuing as well as attempting to control the opium trade, an important source of revenue for both cultivators and the state in an impoverished region. The continuing significance of the opium trade helps illuminate one of the ways in which survival in the poverty-stricken periphery was possible, and it underlines the point made earlier that border region officials encouraged even as they sought to control critical levers in the market.

Future understanding of economy and finance in the border region will incorporate the revenues derived from opium during the late war years (Chen suggests that it accounted for 27% of Shaan-Gan-Ning government spending in 1944 and 40% in 1945) and adjust accordingly in assessing the self-reliance. The opium factor is one of several domains in which the Communist movement will be seen less in terms of historic rupture and more in terms of continuity with ecologically and culturally conditioned patterns spanning the 1949 divide. That certainly includes the effort to take advantage of market opportunities, a key element of the wartime economy that now must be understood to include opium at least during the years 1943-1945. Opium is one of many examples illustrative of realms in which differences between Shaan-Gan-Ning and areas under Guomindang and warlord jurisdiction are less pronounced than many researchers, including myself, previously assumed.

The shift in research orientation from national to local and regional studies since the 1970s reflected the desire to examine closely the

interaction between Party and rural people in situ, to move from theoretical abstractions to experienced social processes at the grassroots level. *The Yenan Way* was among the earliest responses to this impulse. It sought to assess the character of revolutionary change in Shaan-Gan-Ning in relationship to the ecology of the area including its terrain, its demography and social structure, and its cultural and historical legacies. On this foundation, it offered broader hypotheses on the nature of the wartime resistance. Yet from the 1970s forward, writers from Robert Marks (1984) to Ralph Thaxton (1983) to Huang (1991: 327) have argued convincingly (in Huang's words) that "There has been no significant work on what happened when the revolutionary movement actually met rural society" or that historians have focused on the Party and its pronouncements, neglecting or relegating to obscurity peasant perspectives and self-activity.

Ironically, perhaps in no field of modern or contemporary history have researchers expended comparable energies and ingenuity to move beyond official documentation to approach the substance of rural society and gain insight into peasant values, consciousness, and action. It is nevertheless difficult to take exception to the critical judgments rendered earlier concerning the limits of existing scholarship. This is particularly, but by no means only, true of the earlier scholarship at arms length, including *The Yenan Way*, that was necessarily restricted to the realm of documentary and archival research outside China. We continue to have a much firmer grasp of official goals and policies than of popular values and responses, not only for the Republic but for both imperial China and the People's Republic. Moreover, we know vastly more about the behavior of intellectuals and officials than we do about the lives, beliefs, and social networks of various strata of the peasantry. From this perspective, the mass line may be understood as the Party's attempt to speak *on behalf of* a largely illiterate and frequently silent peasantry. If the mass line also constituted an attempt to articulate voices of the oppressed, it above all ensured that the voices heard spoke in "correct" (i.e., Party-approved) national and class categories and not in "inappropriate" (e.g., lineage, particularistic, or anti-Party) categories. The difficulties confronting researchers—even those most critical of Party fiat, who seek to break through the iron ring of official categories and to permit rural people to articulate their own ideas, hopes, and dreams—remain formidable.

Recent research permits us to address anew several of the most pressing issues pertaining to the party-peasant relationship. To what extent did the resistance constitute a "peasant revolution" in the sense that peasants not only provided the mass base of revolutionary armies but that their moral universe ultimately shaped the trajectory of revolution? This view has been advanced by historians of a moral economy persuasion, and for China most clearly by Edward Friedman (1974) for an earlier period and by Ralph Thaxton (1983) for the resistance era. Here the conventional wisdom concerning the Marxist-Leninist vanguard party is essentially reversed with the party learning from the masses and framing a socioeconomic and cultural program that springs primarily from popular values, particularly villagers' aspirations to right the wrongs of a world dominated by imperialist invaders as well as rapacious landlords and warlords and shaped by lineage and religious values. In this view the party, if it is successful at all, becomes the expression of rural values and aspirations.

The strength of this perspective applied to the resistance lies in its recognition of how a Party, whose membership was overwhelmingly rural and which spent two decades in the countryside en route to national power, learned from and was shaped by villagers and rural values. It is suggestive for understanding how the party-army regularly adapted programs and values in the attempt to win the support of diverse rural constituencies even when it assumed it was transmitting "correct ideology" to a feudal peasantry. It recognizes that rural people not only brought their values and beliefs into the Party but retained many of them, and it helps to recognize important ways in which the rural origins of the vast majority of Party members and soldiers shaped the character of the movement. This perspective can be used to explore areas of shared values linking Party activists and leaders, on the one hand, and villagers, on the other hand, ranging from egalitarian to patriarchal to religious values.

Critics of such a peasant-centered perspective have, however, attacked certain of its premises. Bianco (1986: 270) observes convincingly in his study of twentieth-century peasant movements that the Communists

> could not have won without the peasant armies and the support of so many villagers. Yet without the communists the peasants would quite simply never have conceived the idea of a revolution.

In the absence of the Communists or other extra-village forces, China's peasants throughout the twentieth century had mounted numerous uprisings and rebellions directed variously against the state, against local landlords and other elites, and against other communities. The very qualities that made possible the eruption of thousands of protests and uprisings made difficult their expansion from isolated locality to sustained national movement (Bianco, 1986: 274; cf. Perry, 1980). For millennia, the dynamic of large-scale and successful peasant rebellions and peasant movements was one that united a popular rural base with leadership drawn from those with wider horizons, whether cultivated by education, elite position, or extra-village experience.

The poverty, exploitation, and social disintegration shaping rural life constituted necessary preconditions for the Chinese Revolution. Yet, as Bianco (1986: 327) argues, the peasantry alone could not bring the revolution to fruition. The Communists, with their urban, cosmopolitan, and internationalist leadership and historical origins, and with commitments to national independence and ultimately to the building of a prosperous and powerful socialist China, succeeded in the course of protracted war in knitting together disparate forces including broad rural strata and urban intellectuals. This is not to deny the peasant character of armies whose recruits, and some of whose leaders, were of rural origin. Nor is it to overlook the shaping of Party programs and priorities in ways responsive to peasant values. The strength of this perspective lies in drawing attention to the diverse elements that coalesced and the points of tension within the movement: between coastal and inland, between values shaped in the cities and those shaped in the countryside, between military and civilian perspectives, and between Party and society. Its limit, in my view, lies in its complete dichotomization of Party and peasantry and its failure to recognize ways in which a two-way socialization process occurred in which peasants were not merely molded by the Party but in turn shaped the character of the Party.

This article has posed important questions concerning democracy in the base areas. I view the issues from several angles. *The Yenan Way* highlighted egalitarian, participatory, and cooperative achievements of the wartime resistance. In the course of the resistance, landlord

power was challenged, the position of the poor and of independent cultivators was strengthened, and fruitful forms of mutual aid were initiated, all within the context of a mixed economy resting on foundations of the family farm and market access. At the same time, the movement promoted literacy and education, and it introduced a mobilizational politics that embraced the rural poor and women. These were among the factors that seemed to me to constitute foundations for a socialist transition that ultimately required expanded political roles and the empowerment of villagers.

This approach, although suggestive, nevertheless now seems inadequate. From the perspective of the 1990s, the appropriate question is why, given promising beginnings conducive to a democratic transition, particularly the strengthening of an independent cultivator majority but also the unfolding of multicandidate electoral processes, was subsequent development of democratic processes so meager? Why did the reformist and democratic elements of the Party's New Democracy wither and die during subsequent decades? Why were important gains reversed as the Party exercised a tight monopoly on power? And why did villagers, who provided the core of the wartime revolutionary force and were in many ways beneficiaries of Party policies framed in the course of the resistance, experience such hardship during the era of mobilizational collectivism associated with the final decades of Mao's rule? Part of the answer—but only a part—lies in recognizing more explicitly the limits of democratic progress of the resistance era. In particular, it is necessary to grasp the ways in which democratic impulses remained subordinated to the dictates of party-army mobilization. In the course of the resistance, for all the gains associated with the revolutionary movement, it is necessary to grasp the elements of Party hegemony and ideological orthodoxy and to locate the origins of subsequent conflicts between Party and people and between city and countryside.

The Yenan Way rightly noted the significance of sprouts of democracy associated with the introduction of forms of electoral politics, the growth of an independent cultivator majority, and the emergence of a cooperative economy, but it insufficiently grasped the fact that these were part of a package associated with a Party-dominated mass line and a conception of mobilization that would pose formidable obstacles

to further democratic advance and economic and political empowerment of rural producers during the years ahead.

Reflecting on the Yan'an Way during the 1990s leads me to the following conclusions:

- The Yan'an Way, as the summation of the Party's experience in the resistance, constituted an important moment in the history of anticolonial resistance. It also offers hints applicable to the political economy of development, including the contributions of policies empowering an owner-cultivator majority through rent and tax reforms that constituted a "silent revolution," and preliminary steps toward mutual aid, cooperation, and democracy. This central thesis of the original work remains intact.
- The Yan'an Way also, however, encapsulated repressive and elitist tendencies that were insufficiently recognized in the original study. When carried to extremes in the People's Republic, notably in the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and the repression of democratic aspirations and movements from 1957 to 1979 to 1989 and beyond, the results were frequently tragic and certainly in conflict with the revolution's finest proclivities including those toward democracy, equality, and the uplifting of a poverty-stricken countryside.

We can trace these and other unresolved tensions in Chinese political economy back to the synthesis we have called the Yan'an Way. It is worth appreciating in all its complexity so as to keep alive its most humane possibilities while identifying the repressive forces detrimental to further progress toward social and economic development, cultural fulfillment, and human liberation.

NOTES

1. I have benefited from three incisive surveys of the literature and the period of the Sino-Japanese War: Hartford and Goldstein (1989: 3-33), Van Slyke (1986: 609-722), and Chen (1986: 499-523).

2. The most important Western chroniclers of the era, many of whose works are discussed later, were Edgar Snow, Agnes Smedley, Jack Belden, John Service, George Taylor, Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby, Nym Wales, Harrison Forman, Anna Louise Strong, Evans Carlson, Gunther Stein, and Michael Lindsay.

3. The argument received abbreviated discussion a year earlier in Hanson (1939: 274).

4. This position, articulated most brilliantly by Barrington Moore (1966), is at the heart of my understanding both in *The Yenan Way* and in *Chinese Village, Socialist State*.

5. The quoted passage from the introduction, and particularly the summary report prepared by General Paul Peabody, chief of military intelligence, exemplifies the organization weapon perspective. The complete report drew on a range of wartime observers with diverse views including John Service and Edgar Snow.

6. We can trace a series of cycles in American and Western China scholarship from the predominantly "external" perspectives of pioneer figures such as H. B. Morse during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the "internal" perspectives championed by the modernization school with John Fairbank as the representative figure, to the external perspectives of many Kremlinologists during the 1950s and the rather different external perspectives advanced by proponents of a view emphasizing the role of imperialism in shaping China, some of them associated with the rethinking prompted by the Vietnam War and the formation of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars during the sixties and seventies. The sharpest debate on these issues began with the exchange between Peck (1969) and Fairbank (1970) (see Friedman and Selden, 1971). These debates continued during the 1970s and 1980s with counter-critiques of the China field by Ramon Myers and Thomas Metzger (1983), Simon Leys, (1977), and Stephen Mosher (1990), whose charges and tone frequently evoked the specter of 1950s McCarthyism but without comparable political clout. With China's incorporation in the capitalist world economy from the nineteenth century forward, the internal-external distinction becomes more and more tenuous as a basis for gauging social formations, the economy, and much more. In a sense, *The Yenan Way* attempted to break through this internal-external distinction by providing a microsocietal study that was sensitive both to international forces, particularly Japanese imperialism, and domestic forces associated with patterns of socioeconomic and political disintegration and discontent that derived from impositions associated with state building. For an influential critique of American China scholarship, particularly of external perspectives, see Cohen (1984).

7. The first two issues of *The China Quarterly* present the seminal debate on the issues involving Karl Wittfogel and Benjamin Schwartz. Schwartz's analysis of Maoism as a distinctive and original development of Marxism-Leninism, particularly *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (Schwartz, 1951), marked an important step in advancing the study of the Chinese Revolution. *The Yenan Way* extends Schwartz's recognition of the creative and indigenous, as opposed to transplanted Soviet, roots of core elements of the synthesis of the wartime period, a perspective that seems to me stronger for the period of the resistance when the Chinese Communist Party achieved greater independence and when the Russians were preoccupied with survival in the face of the German invasion. Representative works of the 1950s focusing on Soviet machinations in China centering on, but not limited to, the Jiangxi period and deeply informed by the cold war premises of the era included Hsiao (1961), McLane (1958), and Wilbur and How (1959).

8. Six years after publication of *Peasant Nationalism*, Johnson casually abandoned his extreme monocausal thesis by recognizing the importance of rent reduction in the base areas (Johnson, 1968: 397-437). Compare the discussion in his celebration of the book fifteen years after publication (Johnson, 1977: 775).

9. Elizabeth Perry (1980) has added further important dimensions. Her study of a century of rural struggles in the Central China Huaibei region underlines the multiplicity of rebel targets including the predatory and protective strategies of entire communities.

10. The concept and consequences of diverse programs including tax reform and rent reduction that together constituted the "silent revolution" in Central Hebei are analyzed in Friedman et al. (1991: chap. 4).

11. Pauline Keating's close reading of contrasting patterns of mutual aid and cooperation in two subdistricts of Shaan-Gan-Ning suggests the centrality of the cooperative program not only

to the regional economy but to grassroots politics as well. The relationship between cooperation and democratic transitions, implied but not explored in *The Yenan Way*, is an important underresearched area of inquiry.

12. This and the following example are discussed in Friedman et al. (1991: chap. 3).
13. The issues are discussed in detail in Friedman (1994).
14. For full discussion see Friedman et al. (1991). See also Selden (1993).

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