Ten Theses on the Chinese Revolution

Joseph W. Esherick

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JOSEPH W. ESHERICK
University of California, San Diego

> The function of the historian is neither to love the past nor to emancipate himself from the past, but to master and understand it as the key to the understanding of the present.
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> E. H. Carr [1961: 29]

The twentieth century has been the century of revolution. Although the revolutionary model began with the eighteenth-century revolutions of North America and France, the nineteenth century was an era of failed revolution, and it was only in the current century that revolution swept the world—most notably in the revolutions of Mexico, Russia, Yugoslavia, China, Korea, Vietnam, and Cuba, but also in the national revolutions of Algeria, the Middle East, Indonesia, and much of Africa. Some would even subsume the radical changes brought by the Nazi and Fascist movements of Germany and Italy within the definition of "revolution" (Schoenbaum, 1966). Revolutions have reshaped the global environment and reordered the structures of daily life in this century (Arendt, 1963).

An enormous, useful, and insightful literature analyzes both the general phenomenon of revolution and the variety of specific national revolutionary movements. That literature provides an essential foundation for understanding the world in which we live. But as we approach the twenty-first century, we face a world in which, one after

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the other, revolutionary regimes are falling and revolutionary changes are being reversed. Gone are the revolutionary regimes of Russia, Yugoslavia, and Eastern Europe. Mexico is slowly dismantling the structures created by its revolution. Cuba waits only for Castro's death. China struggles to replace state socialism with a market economy while maintaining Communist Party dictatorship and the transparent fiction of revolutionary ideology. To all present appearances, the revolutionary era as we know it will end with the twentieth century. In this context, the narrative of revolutionary progress (and of progress through revolution) is no longer compelling. The revolutionized populations no longer accept its legitimacy. It is time to rethink revolution.

As Berenson's essay in this issue indicates, revolutions elsewhere—even the French Revolution, which inspired so many of our revolutionary models—are also undergoing radical reevaluation. My task in this essay is to suggest and provoke a rethinking of the Chinese Revolution, of the historical process that brought to power a revolutionary party that radically reshaped the Chinese polity, economy, and society. In the Chinese case, a rethinking is not only called for by world historical events, it is also facilitated by a wealth of new scholarship, an explosion of new materials on party history and the beginnings of access to archives and field work in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The ideas that follow have been inspired by this new scholarship and by my own archival and oral history research on the revolution in the Shaan-Gan-Ning border region. Although much of the argument here is derivative and even commonplace, the form I have chosen—ten theses—is designed to provoke debate. I subscribe to these theses with varying degrees of conviction. Some are old friends with whom I would be reluctant to part. Others are newer formulations, designed to fill out the logical structure and decimal integrity of this essay. All can be read as an autocritique of my own past thinking and writing on modern China. As a whole, I am striving for a reassessment of the revolution that acknowledges both the failings and the contingency of the revolution without reverting to the shibboleths of anti-Communist scholarship whose purpose is to deny all legitimacy to revolutionary change, and for an interpretation that recognizes the revolution's importance, but not necessarily its centrality, in China's modern history.

I. Guomindang rule was as much the precursor of the Chinese Revolution as its political enemy.

Journalistic writing on China during the 1930s and 1940s by authors such as Edgar Snow (1961), Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby (1946), or Jack Belden (1949) and much of the scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s were shaped by the political context of life-and-death struggle between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In that competition, each of the actors tended to paint its rival as a dialectical opposite. Much of the picture of the Guomindang era, even by judicious liberal scholars such as John Fairbank (1983 and earlier editions) and Lloyd Eastman (1974, 1984) is colored by the persuasive discourse of the Guomindang's leftist and progressive critics. The Guomindang is seen to be trapped in a conservative political culture, defending the forces of tradition, suppressing progressive intellectuals, and abandoning workers and peasants to their miserable fates. Its leaders were inspired by both fascism and Confucianism and opposed the democratic forces in China.

The problem with this picture is not that it is hostile to the Guomindang; the historian is not obliged to sympathize with the object of his or her scholarship. The problem is its failure to take due account of important continuities between the Guomindang and the CCP. William Kirby's work on the National Resources Commission is an important example of continuity in economic planning in the pre- and post-1949 period (Kirby, 1984: chap. 4). One aspect of Prasenjit Duara's work is its focus on state building under the Guomindang and the unprecedented attacks on the "cultural nexus" of traditional values and religion (Duara, 1988). But there are many more examples that could be raised: the structures of Leninism in the Nationalist Party, the attempts at mass organization especially among youth (Wasserstrom, 1991), the establishment of a party-army, the use of censorship to control culture and the press, the establishment of a national system of education and significant advances (especially during the war) in using this system to mold a modern citizenry, and the appeal to science against "superstition" and to "Chinese national characteristics" against foreign efforts to impose Western standards on Chinese politics and society.

The CCP did not only rise to power as the dialectical opposite of the Guomindang. There were important points of unity in the dialec-

tic—areas where the Guomindang paved the way for the Communists, where the latter built on the foundations laid by the former. Many activists joined both parties during the 1920s. Memories and friendships from that first Guomindang-CCP collaboration were never erased at the local level. Millions of Chinese rallied to the CCP during the war against Japan in part because the Communists seemed the proper heirs of the revolutionary anti-imperialism of Sun Zhongshan's (Sun Yat-sen) party during the 1920s—seemed better to embody the nationalist rhetoric of Guomindang propaganda and public school textbooks than did the Guomindang itself.

Corollary: 1949 was a watershed, not an unbridgeable chasm.

A corollary to Thesis I is the need to break the 1949 barrier. Already the best scholars of modern China are doing this: Philip Huang (1985, 1990) on rural China, Elizabeth Perry (1993) on Shanghai strikes, Jeffrey Wasserstrom (1991) on student protests, Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden (1991) in their *Chinese Village, Socialist State*. Fortunately, the time is past when historians worked on China before 1949 and political scientists and sociologists worked on the period since, neither attending the others' conferences or reading enough of the others' books. But we need to go further.

If we are really to understand the ways in which the PRC built on Guomindang foundations, we need to study specific continuities in models, discourse, and personnel. We need to understand both the magnitude of the social changes attempted in the PRC and the limits of the achievements in creating a wholly new socialist China. Topics in economics, popular culture, demography, gender relations, and political culture need to be studied across the 1949 barrier. The example of French historiography is instructive. When one turns to these areas of French history, the French Revolution looms a good deal less large; amid the significant political changes, there were important continuities in the daily lives of individual Frenchmen.

II. The revolution was not a Liberation but (for most) was the replacement of one form of domination with another.

In rethinking the Chinese Revolution, we must rethink the analytical baggage that comes with the term *revolution*. As a historical metaphor, the term revolution has, since the French Revolution, been

associated with *liberty* (Arendt, 1963: 25). Most Marxist historiography (which has been so important in shaping our understanding of revolutionary processes) has taken France as the original model for revolution (Furet, 1981: 81-9) and seen revolution as bringing *liberation* from the oppressive constraints of the old regime. The Chinese Communists themselves build on this implied meaning by calling their revolution a Liberation. Much of our own scholarship has accepted this conceptualization, as we have studied Chinese struggles for liberation from imperialist domination, peasants' and workers' struggles for freedom from landlords' exactions or employers' exploitation, and women's struggles to escape the bondage of patriarchy.

Whereas we should not deny that the revolution was fueled by the efforts of millions of Chinese actors to escape some form of oppression, we should also realize that there was probably an even greater number of Chinese who experienced the revolution as the replacement of one form of domination with another. Most Chinese did not experience the success of the revolution and the coming to power of the CCP as some form of personal liberation. It was a new world, in many respects, and for most it was a better world. But the PRC ushered in a better world in part because the CCP brought order and discipline to their environment, and this was probably as important to many as was any sense of liberation.

In the countryside, peasants demanded above all that the new regime be fair (*gongdao*), and the party made tremendous efforts in rectification campaigns to ensure that cadres not be guilty of favoritism, that they take the lead in making sacrifices, that they lead simple lives free of corruption, and that they ensure that the burdens of revolutionary struggle were borne equitably (Selden, 1971: chaps. 5-6; Chen Yung-fa, 1986: chap. 6; Madsen, 1984: chap. 3; Esherick, forthcoming). Thus peasants were highly approving of party efforts to force idlers and paupers (*erliuzi*) into productive work (Forman, 1945: 70; Keating, 1989: 188-9). When we consider that there was little to distinguish the Communist pauper policy from the poor houses of eighteenth-century England, it is difficult to see this as any sort of liberation of the poor. But the measures were welcomed because they were perceived as a discipline that was fair—idlers would have to work for an honest living like everyone else.

The importance of this principle is self-evident. Given the tight PRC controls over employment, residence, education, culture, political activity, and even biological reproduction, if one views the revolution as liberation, then one must view the postrevolutionary regime as a betrayal. Yet few Chinese saw it that way, and I would suggest that such a "betrayal" theory is ill-founded. It makes far more sense to recognize that the revolution was not so much a process of liberation as a process wherein a new structure of domination was created to do battle with, to defeat, and to replace another structure of domination. In this process, the Communists certainly empowered new actors and mobilized new social constituencies. They also broke down old structures of domination—eliminating, expelling, humiliating, and intimidating old elites. But those who escaped the domination of these old elites were not just liberated; they were also implicated in a revolutionary process, indebted to a revolutionary party, and subordinated to a new revolutionary regime.

III. Despite Mao's "Sinification of Marxism," the Soviet model of Lenin and Stalin exerted a powerful influence on the Chinese Revolution.

Since the 1950s, it has been a staple of anti-Communist propaganda to portray the Chinese Revolution as the product of a Moscow-directed conspiracy (Chiang Kai-shek, 1957). In reaction to such propaganda and right-wing scholarship, the liberal and progressive conventional wisdom has been to stress the nationalism of the revolution and Mao Zedong's "Sinification of Marxism" (Schram, 1969; Schwartz, 1960). There is no questioning Mao's creative adaptations of Marxist thought, the original development of a rural revolutionary model, the struggles of Mao and his cohorts against the "28 Bolsheviks" who adhered more closely to the Comintern's line, the importance of nationalism in the revolutionary movement, or the political independence of the CCP—an independence that ultimately produced the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s. These aspects of the conventional wisdom are beyond dispute.

Nonetheless, recent scholarship suggests that Soviet influence on the CCP was greater than once thought. The role of Comintern agents in founding the party and guiding its early members out of their intellectual study societies and into revolutionary work in combina-

tion with the reorganized Guomindang is now well known and noncontroversial. I would only revise the conventional wisdom by suggesting that, despite Stalin's mistakes in 1927, the net effect of Comintern advice was positive. Only the prodding of Comintern agents forced Chinese Communist intellectuals out of their Marxist study groups and into the work of organizing workers and peasants. Only the protective wing of its Guomindang ally allowed the CCP to grow from 100-250 members in June 1923 to more than 57,000 in April 1927 (van de Ven, 1991: 194). Especially in the interior, many Communists made important personal and political connections to local Guomindang leaders—contacts that would be revived to excellent effect during the war against Japan (Wou, 1994: 209, 289, 337). Whereas the White Terror of 1927 decimated the Communist Party, it also stained forever the Guomindang's reputation in progressive intellectual circles. The CCP's dramatic wartime revival would not have been possible without the stature it had acquired during the National Revolution of the 1920s.

Less well appreciated than the Comintern's role during the 1920s—and certainly obscured in official party histories—is Soviet influence during the War of Resistance. The conventional history of this period stresses Mao's struggle with Wang Ming as the triumph of the Chinese Communist over the Soviet stooge. Little mentioned are the important roles of others who returned on the same plane with Wang Ming: Chen Yun and Kang Sheng. Kang Sheng's role in the rectification movement of the 1940s suggests that, as security chief, although he may have substituted Mao's injunction to "cure the sickness and save the patient" for a bloody Soviet-style purge, he was nonetheless quite adept at Stalinist political struggle. Later, Ren Bishi brought the Soviet system of ranks and privilege to the supply system that supported cadres in Yan'an (Chen Yung-fa, 1990, 1993).

My point is not to suggest that Yan'an became a little Moscow. It is merely to urge a reassessment of the Soviet influence on Chinese Communist practice during this period. We must not forget that Mao's first act on assuming leadership of the Long March at Zunyi was to dispatch Pan Hannian and Chen Yun to report to Moscow (Salisbury, 1985: 134-5), that Mao's key contribution to the first session of the critical Senior Cadres' Meetings of 1942-1943 was to rehearse (in a three-day speech) Stalin's twelve conditions for achieving Bolshevism

(Seybolt, 1986: 53), that many of the key documents for study in the rectification movement were Stalinist tracts (Compton, 1966: x-xi, xxxix-xlvi), and that China is one of the few Communist states that defended Stalin's legacy after Khrushchev's secret speech of 1956. If we achieve a better appreciation of Soviet and Stalinist influences on CCP revolutionary practice, the systematic importation of the Soviet model during the 1950s looks much more logical. The degree to which so much of China's political, military, scientific, educational, and cultural apparatus continues to this day to follow the Soviet model becomes a good deal more understandable.

It should be possible to acknowledge Soviet influence without succumbing to silly cold war arguments that the CCP was a tool of Moscow. There is no questioning the fact that Mao, reacting against leftist mistakes made by Moscow-trained leaders in the Jiangxi Soviet, fought, in Yan'an, against the Internationalists' uncritical importation of "foreign models" from the Soviet Union. The evidence would seem to support Mao's claim that, during the civil war period, the CCP led the revolution to victory by acting contrary to Stalin's will. *Politically*, the CCP has certainly been an autonomous actor at least since 1935. But that political independence is not inconsistent with the notion that Mao and other CCP leaders would find the experience of the Soviet Union highly instructive, even essential, in their own search for a Chinese road to socialism (Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue Litai, 1993).

For the critical Yan'an period, I would suggest two important sources of Soviet influence. First, following the return of Wang Ming in 1937, Mao Zedong prepared himself for theoretical struggle with the Internationalists by engaging in the most intensive period of Marxist study in his life, and the texts studied were largely translations of standard Stalinist tracts on philosophy, political economy, and Bolshevik history (Fogel, 1987: 61-71; Schram, 1989: 61-5). Mao certainly did not absorb these texts uncritically, and the writings that emerged from this period of study managed to imbue Soviet Marxism with a distinct Chinese style. But there were certain products of this experience—a phrasing of problems in terms of "two-line struggle," an almost paranoid attitude toward the threat of Trotskyism, a concern for the leading role of cadres and the related commitment to seeing that cadres' thought and behavior be correct—that become enduring features of party life.

Second, there is the role, mentioned earlier, of key returnees from the Soviet Union who rather quickly signaled their adherence to Mao in his struggles with Wang Ming. Kang Sheng in the security apparatus, Ren Bishi in organizational matters, and Chen Yun in party rectification and economic policy were all returned students from Stalin's Russia, and all played critical roles during the 1940s and after. They were most important in the areas of economic policy, party organization, and rectification, and it is here that Soviet models were most important.

IV. The triumph of the CCP was the product of a series of contingent events.

In the summer of 1989, a retired cadre—aging, blind, and bitterly critical of recent corruption in the party—sat on a *kang* in his cave in Yan'an and talked about his experiences in the Chinese Revolution. At one point, he stated flatly, "Without the Xi'an Incident, the Shaanbei revolution could not have survived to the War of Resistance" (Shaanbei interview, No. 19, June 1989). The comment struck me because my own research was also suggesting that before the war, the Communist foothold in northern Shaanxi was very fragile indeed. In 1936, the Red Army totaled some 20,000 men and controlled only a few county seats. They were surrounded in a desolate corner of Northwest China by more than 300,000 Guomindang and Northeast Army forces (Braun, 1982: 149). It seemed reasonable to accept this participant's judgment that, without the Communists' spring 1936 truce with the Northeast Army and that army's December kidnapping of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek), the Guomindang might have tightened the noose and eliminated the Red Army.

The Xi'an Incident may indeed have saved the Red Army and been one of those critical turning points in Chinese history (Wu Tien-wei, 1976, 1984). But it was only the most striking of many points where the contingency of history was demonstrated. Obviously, the Long March is replete with instances in which the party and the Red Army were almost eliminated, saved only by a combination of extraordinary determination, incompetent adversaries, and plain old luck. In 1947, Hu Zongnan's pincer movement to trap Mao and the party center in northern Shaanxi between forces advancing from north and south failed when the southern force was delayed one day. In this case, even

had Hu Zongnan's trap succeeded in catching Mao, the party had ample forces elsewhere to survive for some time; but it is abundantly clear that without Mao, the Chinese Revolution would have taken a very different course. (Indeed, Mao came so close to embodying the revolution that one could argue that his death marked the end of the revolutionary era.)

If the contingency of the revolution is evident in these turning points of the national struggle, it is also evident in a vast number of smaller events and struggles chronicled in local studies of the revolutionary process. My research on the revolution in northern Shaanxi shows how local defections in reaction to the ultra-left *sufan* campaign of 1935 virtually wiped out the Soviet base on the Shaanxi-Gansu border until the arrival of the Central Red Army overturned the verdicts and reversed the process (Esherick, 1989). Similarly, essays by Gregor Benton, David Paulson, Kathleen Hartford, and Steven Levine in the volume *Single Sparks* stress the precarious nature of the revolutionary struggle in Jiangxi, Shandong, Hebei, and the Northeast, respectively—and how close the party came to failure in each of these cases (Hartford and Goldstein, 1989: 28-31, 124, 155).

My point is not to reduce the revolution to a series of historical accidents. It is simply to counsel against excessive determinism. We should be suspicious of suggestions that China's economic, political, or agrarian crisis predetermined China's revolutionary history. I suspect that, to some degree, broad theoretical approaches to the Chinese Revolution commit what David Hackett Fischer has called "the *fallacy of identity*"—the "assumption that a cause must somehow resemble its effect" and, in particular, that "big effects [such as a revolution] must have big causes" (Fischer, 1970: 177). It is intellectually unsatisfying to conclude that a momentous social and political transformation like the Chinese Revolution was simply the product of a series of contingent events—that, indeed, if things had happened just a little bit differently, it might not have occurred at all. This is the fundamental attraction of the grand theories of Barrington Moore or Theda Skocpol. I would not advocate the abandonment of these powerful and thought-provoking models, but we should not give them an overly deterministic reading. Our search for the causes of the Chinese Revolution must acknowledge that however much socioeconomic structures formed the preconditions for revolution, the revolution itself was

an extended historical process in which a series of contingent events interacted over time and space to constrain and ultimately determine the revolutionary outcome.

V. The revolution was produced by a conjuncture of domestic and global historical processes among which the worldwide depression and Japanese imperialism were particularly important.

Returning to the Xi'an Incident, I would argue that although we should recognize it as an important demonstration of the contingency of China's revolutionary history, we should not follow Guomindang apologists such as Ramon Myers and Thomas Metzger to suggest that the incident, and the war and revolution that they see deriving from it, were only accidents of history (Myers and Metzger, 1980: 26).[1] While recognizing the pivotal role of the Xi'an Incident, we should understand it as the product of a rising tide of anti-Japanese agitation among students and military men throughout the 1930s. Zhang Xueliang did not just act because the Japanese had invaded his Manchurian homeland. He was moved to action by public (and especially student) resistance to continued concessions to Japan's creeping imperialism in North China, including critical student demonstrations in Xi'an on the eve of the kidnapping (Wu Tien-wei, 1976, 1984).

Parkes Coble's (1991) fine book on the politics of the 1930s focuses on the Japanese challenge as Jiang Jieshi's Achilles' heel. From the time of the Manchurian Incident, Jiang's halfhearted and ineffective efforts to forestall Japanese aggression left the Nanjing government open to constant criticism from the Reorganizationists in Guangzhou, the Guangxi Clique in the Southwest, and students and intellectuals everywhere. Despite Guomindang censorship, a public opinion calling for an end to civil war and unified resistance to Japan slowly gathered force. When that public opinion began to infect the Northeast and Northwest Army troops sent to suppress the Communists in northern Shaanxi, their officers entered into a series of contacts with the Communists resulting in local and regional accommodations between the two sides. With this, the groundwork was laid for the Xi'an Incident and subsequent moves toward a United Front against Japan.

Should we then proceed along a reductionist course and say that Japanese militarism caused the Chinese Revolution by its insatiable

demands for power and resources in North China? That is obviously a question for Japanese historians to answer, but my own view is that Japanese imperialism during the 1930s cannot be understood apart from the Great Depression and the worldwide crisis of capitalism. The closing of Western markets to Japanese goods made Japan all the more intent on pressing a colonialist policy in its East Asian sphere of influence. Depression-caused distress in the Japanese countryside gave both cause and pretext for the military to seek new areas to colonize and develop as a Japanese-dominated East Asian co-prosperity sphere.

This was the global political-economic context for the Chinese Revolution, and it interacted with national and local politics in China to produce the revolutionary conjuncture. At a minimum, a satisfactory explanation of the Chinese Revolution will have to include (a) the Chinese state's military weakness in peripheral areas that gave the Communists their initial room to maneuver, (b) an agrarian regime that allowed the party to gain a measure of popular acquiescence and support on the basis of class (antilandlord) and tax-resistance (anti-state) appeals, (c) rising nationalist sentiment (especially in urban areas) to which the Communists successfully appealed in United Front declarations and which the Nationalists antagonized by pursuing the civil war, and (d) a world economic crisis that both weakened the Chinese state and economy and helped impel Japanese imperialism in Northeast and Northern China.

VI. The larger structures of China's state and society did not make revolution inevitable, but they imposed significant constraints on the agents of revolution and counterrevolution.

Recognizing the contingency of the Chinese Revolution does not require us to ignore the larger socioeconomic structures that constrained the agents of revolution and counterrevolution. These structures have formed the focus of some of the most fruitful comparative scholarship on revolution, especially the work of Barrington Moore (1966) but including that of Theda Skocpol (1979), Eric Wolf (1969), Joel Migdal (1974), and Jeffrey Paige (1975). Comparative analysis certainly suggests that China's largely agrarian but highly commercialized economy, its relatively weak and dependent bourgeoisie, and

its centralized bureaucratic political system were related to its modern revolutionary experience. But how are we to describe that relationship without violating our thesis on the contingency of the revolution?

The problem is both enormous and highly contentious, but I would venture the following. The apparent strength of the late imperial state (prior to the nineteenth century) lay in the absence of powerful rivals, either domestic or foreign. The Chinese landed elite, lacking judicial or military functions and weakened economically by the practice of partible inheritance, was a much smaller threat to central authority than were any of the European aristocracies or the daimyo of Japan. Internationally, the late imperial state was not seriously threatened prior to the arrival of the West. Precisely because it had no rivals, the Chinese imperial state was quite weak by world standards. It commanded an extraordinarily small portion of national revenues: the land tax, which was the basis of state finances, took only 5% to 6% of the harvest (Wang Yeh-chien, 1973: 131) against some 30% to 40% in Japan.

Low tax rates meant that, in comparative terms, the state's burden on the peasantry was quite light. In addition, the practice of partible inheritance restrained land concentration so that most peasants were guaranteed access to at least a small plot of land. These barriers to complete pauperization, plus the access to wage or petty trade incomes afforded by China's highly commercialized rural economy and the efficient safety net provided by the centralized Qing state's famine relief measures (Will, 1990), lay behind China's enormous population increase during the late imperial period.

These characteristics of China's political economy meant that during the modern era, China confronted the West and Japan with a weak state and an enormous population. The modern Chinese state was never able to control anything like the Meiji state's hefty proportion of the agricultural product, in part because population had now grown to an extent that even marginal tax increases were seen by peasants as subsistence threats and provoked violent resistance. In consequence, the weak and impoverished Chinese state was humiliated repeatedly by the foreign powers, and the massive indemnities of the Sino-Japanese War and the Boxer Protocol meant that just as China roused itself to a major state-building effort with the late Qing reforms, it was further drained of potential revenues.

During the twentieth century, the Chinese economy showed significant signs of real growth. Although one might quarrel with some details, Thomas Rawski's argument for an extremely respectable 8.1% growth rate in industrial production seems entirely plausible. His arguments for 1.4% to 1.7% annual growth in the agricultural sector are far more controversial (Huang, 1990: 137-9; Wong, 1992; Republican China, November 1992), but there is no denying that some growth in per capita earnings was taking place (Rawski, 1989: 275, 329). But there are two problems.

First, as Rawski acknowledges, virtually all of the recorded growth was taking place along the coast and in core areas. There is little evidence that real economic growth was occurring in the peripheries, and Kenneth Pomeranz (1993) has argued that the modernization process actually hurt the neglected hinterland. This meant that the peripheries still harbored a depressed peasantry left out of the modernization process. It was, of course, precisely in these peripheries that the Chinese Revolution took root.

Second, even in the coastal and core areas, the modernization process was not taking place fast enough to allow Chinese state making and military self-strengthening to keep pace with Japan. The modern sector of the economy furnished new sources of revenue for the republican state, but China was always playing catch-up to its primary rival and threat. In all its modern interactions with Japan, China came out on the losing end. In 1915, in part because many of its modern enterprises had gone heavily into debt to Japanese banks, China was forced to agree to Japan's 21 Demands. In 1917, warlord governments turned to Japan for the Nishihara Loans and, in exchange, acquiesced to Japan taking over Germany's sphere of influence in Shandong. Finally, during the 1930s, as Japan's designs on China became openly imperialist, Jiang Jieshi was compelled to retreat, trading space for time, hoping in vain that political unification and defense-related economic construction could be completed before Japan launched a full-scale invasion.

In short, the key byproduct of China's social structure and political economy was a weak Chinese state. Unable to protect the Chinese nation during an age of imperialism, the late Qing and republican states were constantly criticized and challenged by nationalist rivals in the urban classes and civil and military elites. Unable to penetrate

or bring the benefits of modernization to peripheral and "backward" areas of the country, the state left a vast hinterland where the Communists were able to organize those left out of the fragile modernization process.

VII. The determination, sacrifice, and commitment of individual Communist revolutionaries—the subjective element of the revolutionary dialectic—were both essential to the revolution's success and critical in shaping its nature.

The revolution was not easily made. One of the greatest weaknesses of determinist theories of revolution is their underestimation of the effort made by revolutionaries. The success of the revolution required dedicated revolutionaries and much sacrifice. Time and again, the Communist Party suffered catastrophic defeats: in Jiang Jieshi's White Terror of 1927; after the suicidal attacks on urban centers under the Li Lisan line in 1930; during 1933-1934 when, one after the other, the Red Soviets fell to Guomindang extermination campaigns; during 1941-1942 when Japanese counterattacks following the Hundred Regiments offensive reduced Communist forces and territory by roughly one half. Yet, brought to the brink of disaster, the Communists regrouped, retreated to safer havens, revised their strategies, and fought on. Any satisfactory interpretation of the revolution must acknowledge and explain the personal commitment and determination that led thousands of young men and women, often scattered in small groups across the map of China, to fight on against overwhelming odds.

The Long March is a tale filled with close calls and remarkable sacrifice. In the end, less than 4,000 of the 86,000 who started out arrived in Shaanxi with Mao (Salisbury, 1985: 2). Every river crossing was a potential disaster, and some—like the famous crossing of the Luding Bridge over the Dadu River—have been mythologized as acts of supreme revolutionary courage. China's revolutionary history is replete with such tales of heroism, large and small, and every local struggle saw comparable evidence of revolutionary commitment. Gregor Benton's (1992) rich study of those left behind when the Long Marchers departed the South is filled with examples of incredible determination and faith in the revolutionary cause, even as every rearguard unit was suffering losses of about 90% of its forces.

The period from 1927 to 1937 is critical in this regard because these years of civil war were certainly the most trying for the party. In North China on the eve of the war, there remained at best a few thousand Communist Party members—scattered in isolated party cells and many in jail. These men (and a few women) had survived years of political persecution as underground party members, and many of their comrades had been arrested and executed or had died in prison. Those who lacked the commitment to carry on—and there were many—dropped out or defected to the Guomindang. But a dedicated few struggled on. Then, with rising anti-Japanese nationalism in 1936, and especially after the Xi'an Incident, Communists were quietly released from jail and returned to their homes where they formed the core of the Communist resistance during the war (Van Slyke, 1986: 631). The rapid growth of the North China base areas during the early years of the war relied on the critical role of these local cadres. Their survival to play this role is testimony to a remarkable revolutionary dedication.

This revolutionary commitment helps to explain more than the success of the revolution; it also helps explain the *nature* of the revolution. The Long March did more than preserve the Red Army; it also changed forever the lives of the survivors. Remembering the lives lost, they fought on to ensure that their comrades had not died in vain. As the march itself (or other great watersheds of party history) passed from history to legend, the survivors became ever more committed to protecting that myth and their part in it—to ensuring that their contribution would be one chapter in a glorious tale of revolutionary triumph. They knew that should their revolution fail, should the Japanese or the Guomindang succeed in reversing the tide of history (and, struggling against great odds, *they* understood the contingency of revolution), they would lose not only their lives but everything that gave their lives meaning.[2]

At the same time, we must recognize that no one began with an intense commitment to Communist revolution. Even the senior party leaders were only slowly transformed from radical friends to Communist Party cadres (van de Ven, 1991). Among ordinary peasants, the initial commitment to revolutionary struggle was quite tentative. One peasant informant told me that he joined the Red Army in 1935 because it was the fad (*shimao*). Others joined because they were

hungry and the army fed them (Esherick, 1989). But once in the ranks, the very process of revolutionary participation increased commitment. Meetings and propaganda taught party discipline and party spirit; struggle sessions and rectification movements rooted out personal weaknesses and competing loyalties. The longer one survived, the higher one rose in the party and the greater one's commitment grew. In time, a fad became a cause, and the revolution became a way of life.

Those who made the revolution a way of life naturally sought comrades with a like-minded faith in the justice and certain victory of their cause. They were suspicious of those who wavered or showed signs of skepticism, cynicism, or doubt because these people might give up the struggle, defect to the enemy, or break under torture, revealing the identity and location of their comrades and endangering an entire local revolutionary base. This dynamic of revolutionary struggle helps to explain why Communist revolutionaries so frequently—even while fighting for their lives as small guerrilla bands in isolated mountain bases—turned on their comrades in bloody and destructive purges (Benton, 1992: 172, 198-9, 237-9, 283, 354-6). The revolutionary survivors were the winners of these inner-party struggles and, as their revolution became increasingly successful during the 1940s, they became convinced of the correctness of their methods. So purging the hesitant and cautious became integral to party life. The inevitable result was a pattern of party conflict that automatically favored the left—with well-known and often disastrous consequences in the PRC (Li Rui, [1988] 1994, provides a vivid example).

VIII. The CCP was a social construct of considerable internal complexity, not an organizational weapon of obedient apparatchiks commanded by the Party Center.

Few questions have provoked more contentious debate than the role of Communist Party organization in the revolutionary dynamic. Those stressing the role of organization have usually discounted social factors as a basis for revolution (Hofheinz, 1977; Levine, 1987). The organizational strengths of the party are deemed sufficient to explain Communist victory even in the absence of popular support. Drawing on early cold war scholarship such as Philip Selznick's (1952) *The Organizational Weapon*, organizational interpretations have often

been associated with a conservative anticommunist political stance that challenges the legitimacy of Communist rule (Hartford and Goldstein, 1989: 9-18).

Despite this political stance, some of the best scholarship on the revolution has demonstrated the essential role of the Communist Party and its military forces in mobilizing the peasantry for revolution and resistance to Japan (Chen Yung-fa, 1986; Kataoka, 1974). Virtually all close studies of the revolution have come to the conclusion that popular support for the revolution was always the product of painstaking efforts by party members to demonstrate the benefits of tax relief, rent reduction, defense against the Japanese, political participation in elections, land reform, production campaigns, mutual aid, cooperatives, and so forth. The party's own attention to party building and organizational questions is obvious in internal documents from this period. (Indeed, recent scholarship's stress on organizational factors in part reflects the concerns of the inner-party documents on which much of this research is based.) A recognition of the key role of party organization need not be read as either hostility to the revolution or an alternative to popular support but as evidence that support for the revolution depended on the new party-state's ability to penetrate village society and mobilize the populace for its program.

There are, however, two analytical traps waiting to snare those who rely too much on organizational explanations. First is the danger of fetishizing organization. My own research on the northern Shaanxi revolution during the 1930s suggests that significant success came only when the CCP's Shaanxi provincial organization was destroyed following the arrest and defection of its party secretary in 1933. The destruction of the provincial party apparatus freed the guerrilla forces under Liu Zhidan from higher party directives that they avoid "flightism" and "opportunism" and engage in suicidal attacks on major urban centers. Released from the discipline of a party organization following an adventurist line, Liu Zhidan built a significant guerrilla base on the Shaanxi-Gansu border. Then, in 1935, new representatives from the center arrived, arrested Liu and his officers, executed a number of his followers, and nearly destroyed the base until stopped by the arrival of Mao and the Central Army. As this case illustrates, disciplined party organization could be a recipe for disaster, not a guarantee of victory (Esherick, 1989).

Second, there is the danger of reifying the party. Because reference to "the Party" is a convenient stylistic shorthand and because party documents constantly stress the role of the party in the revolution, we stand in constant danger of writing and thinking about the party acting as some unified, disciplined historical agent. But we know that, in fact, this was not the case. Recent work on the origins of the CCP by Hans van de Ven has demonstrated that the party did not come into being full-blown with the First Congress in 1921. A gradual process turned local cells of friends into a national organization of comrades. Patterns of association among intellectuals, schoolmates, and fellow provincials were slowly transformed through experience and struggle into the new habitus of a Leninist party. According to van de Ven, a true Communist Party worthy of the name did not come into being until 1927.

If we turn from the founding of the CCP to the collapse of communist parties in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, we see that in every case but that of Romania, communist party leaders made key decisions not to resist with force the dismantling of the party-state. Thus, at the end of their historical paths as well, communist parties prove to be anything but monolithic machines. They are composed of a variety of historical actors with important identities beside their roles as party members. These people are not all mindless apparatchiks in a communist machine. They are also members of society—with families and social connections, personal lives and aspirations, and national, regional, and ethnic identities.

Party discipline at the height of communist power was no doubt more effective than it was at a party's founding or during its last days. Nonetheless, that discipline was never perfect. Even in the most secure bases such as Shaan-Gan-Ning, the rural party included an enormous number of peasants with marginal literacy, little education, and no knowledge whatsoever of Marxist-Leninist theory. These peasant communists' consciousness and behavior had little in common with the thinking and activities of the urban intellectuals of the Party Center who wrote the key documents that inform our thinking of what "the Party" represented. Rural cadres were deeply enmeshed in a variety of local networks from which they could never be completely separated. Between rural cadres and the Party Center were county party members who partook imperfectly of both worlds—but whom the

Party Center periodically recalled to work conferences in efforts to bind them ever more closely to the Party Center's way of thinking.

The CCP, at all its levels, was a historical product, a cultural construction, an association of human beings. Its successes were not just the successes of organization and discipline. They were also the successes of a complex interaction among central and base area strategists, county executives and enforcers, and village activists. Out of that interaction, new social roles were constructed. Rural cadres began as young village activists who placed a value on work and struggle over face and harmony. And then gradually, as their own actions tied their interests and identities ever more closely to the new regime, they were themselves transformed into leaders "not afraid to offend" their fellow villagers and eager to complete the tasks assigned by their party-state superiors. This certainly made them effective agents of state-directed social change. But the party-state of which they were agents was itself a multilayered social construct—full of new public rituals and confidential bureaucratic routines. To understand the workings of that party-state, we must deconstruct it, not reify it. We need a historical anthropology of the Chinese party-state that can chart the evolution of its customs and habits, its discourse and rhetoric, its methods of cooptation and patterns of domination (Esherick, forthcoming).

IX. Revolution is a process.

Between the extremes of a deterministic view of the revolution as the inevitable product of the political-economic structures of Chinese society and the analytically defeatist view of the revolution as a historical accident, we need to conceive of the revolution as an evolving historical process in which each stage built on the political consequences, the institutional creations, the evolving habits, and the collective memories of what went before. We need a processual model of the Chinese Revolution, similar to George Lefebvre's ([1939] 1957) conception of the French Revolution as a series of revolutions that followed from and built on one another. I would tentatively propose the following sketch of such a processual model.

When the 1911 Revolution left China without a strong central government or any elite consensus about what a legitimate government might look like, the way was left open for the Guomindang to

reorganize and revitalize itself as a claimant to national leadership. During the 1920s, with the advice and assistance of the Soviet Union, the reorganized Guomindang established some of the fundamental contours of twentieth-century Chinese politics: Leninist party organization, a party-army with political officers binding the military to the party's political agenda; party-directed mass organizations of students, workers, and peasants with nationalist and social reformist agendas; political rituals involving public celebrations of obedience to the national leader and the creation of a new citizenry (Wasserstrom, 1991); and a revolutionary discourse that stigmatized opponents as counterrevolutionary agents of imperialism and feudal reaction (Tsin, 1990).

Among students and intellectuals, the Guomindang's nationalist and social reformist agenda attracted growing support, especially after the May 30th Movement of 1925. But in part because the foreign and conservative Chinese press stressed the role of Russian aid and Bolshevik advisers in the movement, the Guomindang's Chinese Communist allies shared in the support garnered by the National Revolution. In consequence, when Jiang Jieshi purged the Communists in 1927, although his short-term success was complete, he created the impression among many that he had betrayed the revolutionary legacy of Sun Zhongshan. The Communists were able to claim that they were the true heirs to the revolutionary tradition of the 1920s.

Driven from the cities and forced into the hinterland in 1927, the revolution first required military forces. These were usually, in the first instance, defectors from the Guomindang armies—or, more accurately, men who saw the Guomindang betraying the revolution in 1927 (or, later, in their failure to resist to Japan)—who resumed some prior contact or affiliation with leftist forces. Second, civil adherents to the revolution worked through established elite networks to establish the basis for revolutionary action. Third, bandits, secret society members, and a variety of discontented individuals were recruited to join the initial Red Army units and form small but powerful guerrilla bands in isolated peripheral areas (Averill, 1987, 1990).

These initial guerrilla bands represented a miniscule portion of the rural population. At this stage, there was nothing resembling mass mobilization. However, by selective and "just" violence against hated state agents and cruel landlord and militia elites, they managed to

eliminate or neutralize their political opponents. Once this was done, they could spread propaganda, recruit more broadly into the party, organize mass organizations, and eventually abolish the old tax regime and carry out land reform or (during the War of Resistance) rent and interest reduction and progressive tax reform.

As successful as these efforts were, they could not have succeeded without the war with Japan. Economic development and Guomindang state-building efforts were proceeding well enough along the coast and in economic core areas so that the Nationalists were able to contain the Communist appeal to peripheral zones. As Japanese aggression intensified following their 1931 occupation of the Northeast, Jiang Jieshi and the Nanjing government lost political support in urban areas, but there was no urban opposition strong or cohesive enough to pose an alternative. Once full-scale war with Japan broke out in 1937, however, the rapid retreat of Guomindang officials and regular army units from North China left rural elites and former warlord forces to contend with the Communists (and Japanese) on their own.

In this situation, a number of factors favored the Communists. Many local Communists had contacts going back to the 1920s to establish their local credibility. Most of these had superior nationalist credentials to Guomindang rivals who had defended Jiang's attempts to appease the Japanese aggressors. Years in the political wilderness made these Communist leaders more capable of accepting the hardships of partisan warfare, and both their egalitarian ideology and their years of struggle led them to enforce a severely spartan lifestyle on all full-time political cadres and military officers. In the context of war with Japan, the new Communist party-state built support for a program of shared sacrifice in which the burden of progressive taxation and rent and interest reduction fell heavily on the elite. But in large measure because the regime's leaders could demonstrate that they were not benefiting materially from these new burdens, their demands were regarded as fair (gongdao) by the rural population—and fairness was all that was required.

These factors allowed the CCP to establish a number of reasonably stable bases in north and central China. But midway through the war, their victory was by no means assured. The New Fourth Army Incident of January 1941 effectively brought the United Front with the Guomindang to an end. The economic blockade of Shaan-Gan-Ning

was resumed, and the Guomindang subsidy for the Communist armies ended. At roughly the same time, Japanese mopping-up campaigns severely tested the other Communist bases. Faced with these challenges, the party-state was forced to increase significantly its demands on the rural population, but it also undertook a serious rectification of its own work (Selden, 1971; Schran, 1976).

The rectification campaign of 1942-1944 was one of the most important turning points in China's revolutionary history. To the extent that the party was transformed into an effective organizational weapon, this is when it was done. Three aspects of this movement strike me as essential. First, the initial campaign in Yan'an unified the revolutionary leadership around Mao. The Internationalist group around Wang Ming was finally eliminated as a force in the party. Equally as important, dissenting voices among the intellectuals were both cowed into submission by the vehemence of the attack on Wang Shiwei and won over to a new and deeper commitment by a process of criticism and self-criticism that ended by excusing their sins and welcoming them into the beleaguered revolutionary community.

With the revolutionary leadership in Yan'an thus solidified, the campaign was spread to other areas of Shaan-Gan-Ning and to other base areas. In the Shaan-Gan-Ning hinterland, antitraitor work took center stage. Intellectuals and the wealthier elements in rural society were subjected to intense examination. Large numbers were accused of traitorous activities—often for having voiced some discontent with the new regime. These people were treated harshly, although not executed, as Mao's injunction to "cure the illness and save the patient" was followed—in deliberate contrast to Stalinist purge practices. Nonetheless, the party made its power and will clear enough so that discordant voices were silenced.

The third and final stage of rectification was to raise political consciousness and improve discipline among rural cadres. Most of these had been hurriedly recruited during times of mass mobilization—often in the more leftist phases of the revolution. Largely poor and middle peasants of marginal literacy, their knowledge of either Marxist theory or Leninist discipline was minimal. Once the party apparatus had been unified and disciplined down to the county level, that apparatus could be brought to bear on the rural party. Petty corruption was rooted out, and less competent or activist cadres were

reformed or replaced. The end result was a party organization reaching right down to the village level that could effectively carry out a series of important mobilization campaigns during the late war years: for increased agricultural and handicraft production, cooperatives, mutual aid teams, elections, and conscription. The foundations of the new party-state had been laid.

The final test was to come during the civil war years, 1947-1948. Here, military advantage lay with the Guomindang, and the Communists no longer had the advantage of fighting a national enemy. By this time, the party leadership had been effectively unified and rank-and-file cadres had committed themselves to the revolutionary regime. Their past victimization of class and political enemies meant that any return of the old regime would leave them in great personal danger. Faced with an enemy that often had the option of fleeing to the cities or deserting, these communist cadres had a clear edge in political dedication. As for the ordinary peasantry, the poorest certainly benefited from the land reform carried out at this time. Middle peasants benefited politically from the new regime, with a larger voice in village affairs. Convinced in sufficient numbers that a return of the Guomindang would bring back the bad old days of arbitrary taxes and abusive officials, they too tended to side with the revolution.

The basic features of this processual overview of the revolution are not so different from the conventional wisdom. But the emphases and formulations support certain essential points. First, initial support for the Communist Party came from a small group of intellectuals and rural revolutionaries whose commitment to the revolutionary cause was steeled in years of bitter combat. Second, the experience of the wartime base areas allowed these Communist cadres to create a party-state whose influence permeated village life as never before. Third, the wartime and civil war demands of the new party-state were unprecedented in their extent, but they were tolerated because progressive taxes targeted those with the ability to pay and state cadres were able to demonstrate that they were not using their authority for personal enrichment. Fourth, land reform policies established guarantees that each peasant family would have sufficient land to guarantee a basic subsistence whereas the encouragement of handicrafts, cooperatives, and market exchange promised the revival of commercial activity.

The advantage of this formulation is, first, that it highlights the state-building activities of the Chinese Revolution. When we observe that, including officials, clerks, and runners, the Qing state probably had about 750,000 functionaries, or one for every 600 people, whereas the PRC had 5.3 million cadres in 1952 and 29 million cadres in 1988, or one for every 35 citizens (Lee, 1991: 207-9), it is clear that state building was a central facet of the Chinese Revolution. Second, a critical appeal of the new party-state was the selfless dedication of its cadres. Clearly, once the party's monopoly of power (together with the spread of a market economy) made corruption and abuse of privilege commonplace during the 1980s, the revolutionary era was over and the revolution's own legitimacy was called into question. Finally, nothing in the revolutionary process suggested popular support for an economic program that went beyond small peasant farming, private and (voluntary) cooperative ownership, and free market activity.

Seen in this way, it becomes easier to understand both the pervasive influence of the Chinese state and the current enthusiasm for market reforms. And if we understand the political demands behind the Chinese Revolution to be for fairness and order (far more than democracy or liberation), it becomes easier to understand both the crisis of 1989 and the current resilience of the authoritarian state in China.

X. The history of modern China is not a teleology of revolution.

Having devoted nine theses to analyzing the origins and nature of the Chinese Revolution, it is necessary to conclude by observing that one of the most pernicious characteristics of the historiography of modern China is an excessive focus on revolution. Modern Chinese history has been dominated and distorted by a teleology of revolution.[3] All history is seen as leading up to 1949 (or, for a time, to a broader revolutionary process culminating in the Cultural Revolution). The central problem of intellectual history was the rise of Marxism (Levenson, 1958-1965; Schwartz, 1951; Meisner, 1967). Economic history analyzed the weakness of Chinese capitalism (Feuerwerker, 1958). Rural society and peasant uprisings were studied to understand the roots of peasant revolution (Huang, 1985; Perry, 1980; Esherick, 1987). The 1911 Revolution was seen as the "first phase" of a

revolutionary process leading up to 1949 (Wright, 1968; Esherick, 1976). The May Fourth Movement was the start of a process leading to the founding of the CCP (Chow Tse-tsung, 1960).

This historiographic tradition is perfectly understandable. The history of the past is written in the present (Carr, 1961: 29). We seek answers about the past to questions formed in the present. For some time, that present has been one in which the CCP sat securely in control of a Leninist party-state and a fundamentally Stalinist economy. In ideology and organization, in political economy and cultural norms, the new revolutionary China was a radical break with the past. This was one of the great revolutions of world history (Moore, 1966; Skocpol, 1979; Goldstone, 1991), and the task of the historian was to explain the historical foundations of the remarkable political and social transformation wrought by the PRC.

During the 1990s, this sort of history is clearly outdated. The year 1949 was not the end of history. Indeed, within a few years, the era of revolutionary socialism may appear as much a transitional period as the republican era. Our study of the revolution must pay as much attention to the antecedents of China's postsocialist present as to those contradictions that produced the revolution itself.[4]

In the realm of politics, scholars have been impressed by the Chinese Communists' success in political mobilization. Supported by substantial contemporary evidence of popular support for the Communists during the 1940s, historians have seen that mass base as a key factor in the CCP's triumph over the Guomindang (Johnson, 1962; Selden, 1971). It would be excessively presentist to abandon inquiry into popular support for the CCP. On the other hand, it would be excessively naive to deny that much popular mobilization in contemporary China has been distinctly coercive. Amid its appeals to "new democracy," the party was building a structure that concentrated power (and increasing degrees of privilege) in the Party Center. The critical political process in modern China was state building. Founded on popular support gained through the revolutionary process, consolidated by the organizational efficacy of the Leninist party-state, inspired by nationalist pride in a new China, and supported by new technologies of violence, communications, surveillance, and medicine (especially birth control), the contemporary Chinese state has

brought unprecedented discipline and control over the lives of Chinese people.

In economic history, it will not do to see China's prerevolutionary economy as hopelessly trapped in a process of agricultural involution broken only by socialism and collective agriculture (Huang, 1985: 179-84). Although the recent boom in China's economy is more industrial than agricultural, and although agricultural advances under the new quasi-private farming have been made on a foundation in infrastructure and modern inputs built under socialism, the fact remains that small peasant farming has been quite successful during recent years and that, in the larger economy, foreign investments and private and small collective enterprises have been spectacularly successful. In this context, it is clearly dated for historians to focus on China's economic failures or the retarded development of capitalism. We need to recognize the substantial vitality of China's prerevolutionary economic structures—a vitality that is now able to flourish under a regime that provides national sovereignty, peace, a degree of political stability, basic technical education, and broad tolerance for market activity.

At the same time, we need to recognize an enduring contradiction between a dynamic coastal economy and a disadvantaged interior. It is no accident that China's current economic boom is concentrated in the coastal provinces of the south and east—long the most commercialized parts of China and the most tied to foreign trade—or that overseas Chinese are integral to the growing economic integration of "Greater China" and all of East Asia (Hamashita, 1988). The Guomindang-Communist conflict was in part the struggle between the modernized, overseas-connected coastal zones and the depressed and forgotten rural interior. The gap between coastal prosperity and interior poverty helped feed the revolution, was checked by the planned economy of the early PRC (Lardy, 1978), and is now regaining salience with the return of the market economy.

In the past, it has always been the powerful unifying forces of state power and official culture that have held such regional disparities and tensions in check. The state is now surely stronger than any prerevolutionary government. In the realm of culture, however, the penetration of the market economy is weakening the state's ability to subor-

dinate cultural practices to its centralizing purposes. The cultural history of urban China is increasingly characterized by a merging of styles and combining of resources of Greater China. In film, music, and dance, in clothing and material culture, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and coastal China are increasingly drawing together—a cultural blending tied to their economic integration. But the relevance and appeal of these cultural products to the rural interior is questionable.

Finally, it is likely that historians looking back from the next century will be impressed by the alteration and degradation of China's physical environment brought about by the twentieth century's tripling of China's already huge population combined with the prolonged and now very rapid growth of industrial production. Vaclav Smil (1984, 1993) has detailed the serious problems of air and water pollution, soil erosion, water depletion, and deforestation in contemporary China. China's cities become increasingly crowded, plagued by congestion and air pollution, and burdened by an unchecked influx of "mobile population."

In all of these changes—political, economic, cultural, demographic, and environmental—the Chinese Revolution has played a crucial role in the transformative process. But in the end, these historical processes are larger than the revolution, and it will be necessary to subordinate the history of the revolution to these larger patterns of change. Only then can we escape the teleology of revolution and gain an understanding of China's past that provides a better key to understanding its present.

NOTES

1. Recall E. H. Carr's observation that it is history's losers who stress the role of accident in history: "It is amusing to note that the Greeks, after their conquest by the Romans, also indulged in the game of historical 'might-have-beens'—the favorite consolation of the defeated" (Carr, 1961: 130).

2. The commitment of party survivors to the revolutionary myth has filled the speeches of elders such as Wang Zhen: "The leadership of the Communist Party is not granted by heaven, but by the countless revolutionary martyrs who, wave after wave, shed blood and sacrificed themselves for half a century" (quoted in Schell, 1988: 235). It was certainly no accident that when the fate of the revolution was called into question during the spring of 1989, it was to elders like Wang Zhen that Deng Xiaoping first appealed for guidance and support.

3. For an extended critique of the "revolution paradigm" in modern Chinese history, see Myers and Metzger (1980). Needless to say, I do not agree with much of this article, which is a defense of Taiwan as the truly worthy product of modern Chinese history and an appeal for support from the new Reagan administration. But we should not allow the political bias of the authors to blind us to an important argument they are making.

4. The following sections are inspired by the comments of Alexander Woodside on an earlier draft of this essay.

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Joseph W. Esherick is professor of history and Hsiu professor of Chinese studies at the University of California, San Diego. He has authored books on the 1911 Revolution and the Boxer Uprising and has coedited a volume on Chinese local elites. His current research focuses on the revolutionary experience of northern Shaanxi.