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EDITORS' NOTE: *To honor Professor Tang Tsou's memory, we publish here the last of his scholarly works—an essay containing his preliminary thoughts for a multivolume project to interpret the Chinese Revolution. Zhiyuan Cui, the youngest and most recent of Tsou's students in the profession, provides an introduction to set the essay in the context of the larger corpus of Tsou's work. And Marc Blecher, one of Tsou's more senior students, completes the tribute by highlighting the resonances of themes in this essay to Tsou's lifelong work. Professor Tsou was of course above all a political scientist, but colleagues in other disciplines, especially history, should find much that is instructive and relevant in these three essays.*

Introduction to Tang Tsou's "Interpreting the Revolution in China"

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Hegel once said that familiarity with a thing does not equate to knowing it. I could not help recalling this observation as I read Tang Tsou's (2000 [this issue]) "Interpreting the Revolution in China." Many aspects of the Chinese revolution with which I thought I was "familiar" became new and interesting again, thanks to Professor Tsou's insights.

To offer one example, I never thought Mao's strategy of "surrounding the cities from the countryside" was particularly innovative. It seems a natural path for peasant movements, which by definition begin in the countryside and rise to power later by capturing cities. But Tang Tsou has the following to say:

> Not all peasant movements consider securing their rural bases or the countryside a bigger priority than capturing the big cities. The Taiping rebellion in the mid-nineteenth century captured Nanjing at an early time and proclaimed the establishment of a new regime. Then they lost the countryside to the local militia, organized by the gentry and

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> supported by government troops, so that toward the end, the government forces surrounded the cities occupied by the peasant rebels and defeated them rather than the other way around. [Tsou, 2000: 214]

Surprising? Readers of "Interpreting the Revolution in China" will frequently be surprised by new meanings Tsou discovered in "familiar" things.

Tsou's essay was a draft prepared for a talk he delivered at the 1994 faculty luncheon of the University of Chicago Department of Political Science. To appreciate the significance of this talk, we need to understand that Tsou consistently drew on history and social science theories in his effort to interpret China's twentieth-century revolution and state building. His first prize-winning book, *America's Failure in China, 1941-50* (1963), should not only be read as a classic in the field of diplomatic history but also as his first effort to interpret the Chinese communist revolution in its complicated international context. As such, it fits with his later works focusing on China's domestic politics (see Tsou, 1986).

Two central questions drove Tsou's intellectual quest: (1) How can we interpret the Chinese Revolution and state building in the twentieth century? (2) Given the revolution, what is China's future? After his 1988 retirement, Tsou devoted himself to developing a comprehensive conceptual scheme to interpret the twentieth-century Chinese Revolution. He collected materials and read extensively about the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution, as well as newly available documents on the Chinese Revolution. What we have here is the first formulation of his general proposition regarding the "micromechanisms" of "macrohistorical change" in twentieth-century Chinese politics. If not for his health problems, we might now have a more fully elaborated research product. However, it is still invaluable to publish Tang Tsou's luncheon talk as an essay here, both for the stimulating insights it contains and for keeping record of the intellectual output of a leading scholar of contemporary China. As Tang Tsou concludes, "The French have debated the meaning and discussed the consequences of the French Revolution for more than two centuries. The Chinese Revolution deserves similar attention by scholars in China and abroad. Our work has only begun" (Tsou, 2000: 235).

I was fortunate to have a close intellectual relationship with Professor Tsou during his later years. What follows are notes regarding my understanding of key concepts of his article. It is hoped they will facilitate further discussion of Tang Tsou's ideas about twentieth-century Chinese politics.

ON THE "GENERAL PROPOSITION"

Tsou's "general proposition" is that

> the Chinese case shows that the processes of innovation, systematization, and strategic interaction in the choices made by the political actors are direct and readily observable micromechanisms leading to macrohistorical changes, particularly the transformation of one political system into another one. [Tang, 2000: 211]

Here, "the transformation of one political system into another one" is the transformation from the traditional authoritarian system of imperial times to the modern "totalistic" party state. Under the traditional authoritarian system, the political power of the central government did not reach below the level of county (*xian*), whereas in the modern totalistic state, state penetration into social life is limitless. The transformation occurred, according to Tsou, because the "total crisis" of the early twentieth century led to the breakdown of the traditional tripartite power structure of landlords, Confucian scholars, and bureaucracy, thus evoking totalistic responses focused on the revolutionary rebuilding of the state. Tsou paid particular attention to the micromechanisms of the revolution: the "innovation, systematization, and strategic interaction in the choices made by the political actors." This attention distinguishes his perspective from Theda Skocpol's (1979) "structural perspective." Skocpol believes, along with Wendell Philips, that "revolutions are not made; they come."[1] This difference also explains Tsou's appreciation of Roy Hofheinz, Jr., who found no significant correlation between structural conditions in various localities and the success or failure of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) there.

I examine the micromechanisms of CCP-led revolution identified by Tsou after discussing his notion of totalism.

NOTE ON THE NOTION OF "TOTALISM"

Professor Tsou explains his notion of totalism in his endnote:

> The regime type and state-society relations are two separate dimensions of a political system. While the regime type remains the same, state-society relations can undergo important changes. . . . The basic error of the concept of *totalitarianism*, as it was frequently used, is that it mistakenly lumps the regime type and state-society relations dimensions together, considering them as intrinsically linked characteristics of a "totalitarian regime." This is one reason why those who use this concept (1) do not see any possibility for radical change without a revolution and (2) cannot adequately explain changes in state-society relations that have been initiated or at least supported by those in power.
>
> After coming to this conclusion, in 1983, I began using *totalism* to characterize only state-society relations so as to disentangle it from an implied automatic link to regime type. [Tang, 2000: 236]

To appreciate Tang Tsou's reason for introducing the concept of totalism, we may think of two recent examples in Chinese politics—namely, the governmental repression of Falungong (defined as "heterodox religion" or "cult" by the government) and the absence of any popular demonstration against the government's arrangements to enter the World Trade Organization (WTO) (in sharp contrast to the 1999 anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle, WA and elsewhere). These two examples vividly illustrate the continuing relevance of totalism as characterizing the Chinese political regime, despite the liberalization in many areas of social life in the past two decades of reform. The defining characteristic of a totalistic political regime, according to Tsou, is that there are no legal, moral, or religious constraints preventing the state from intervening in any sphere of social and individual life. This does not mean that the totalistic state always penetrates into every sphere of social and individual life. Rather, the point is that the state can, when and where its leaders choose, intervene in society. In contrast, liberal states are subject to legal or moral constraints on their power to intrude on social and individual life.

Why not simply call this kind of political regime totalitarian? Accepting an honorary professorship at Beijing University in 1986, Tang Tsou stated that totalism in China originated in the process of social revolution and was used as a tool of social transformation,

whereas totalitarianism in Germany and Italy was intended to destroy or prevent social revolution (Tsou, 1994: afterword).[2] Therefore, there is a historical reason to distinguish totalism from totalitarianism.[3] However, there is a more important theoretical reason to make such a distinction.

We must remember that for Tsou, the regime type and state-society relations are two separate dimensions of a political system. In some "liberal regimes," the scope of state intervention into the social and economic life is more extensive than that of other "totalitarian regimes." One supporting comparison, in the area of intervention in the economy, is that of the liberal Sweden and fascist Italy. The Swedish government's involvement was more extensive than that of Mussolini's totalitarian regime. More important, those who accept the totalitarian conceptual model are prone to offer very different policy recommendations than those who grasp Tsou's totalistic conceptual model. In offering strategies to reform the economies of former communist countries, those who saw those countries as having been "totalitarian" tend to endorse "shock therapy" (of the sort applied in Russia). This is because they see the regime type and state-society relations as one and the same thing. Therefore, they consider gradual changes in state-society relations as impossible or undesirable. It is telling that the chief adviser to the Russian shock therapists advocated quick privatization on political rather than economic grounds (Boycko, Shleifer, and Vishny, 1995). However, Tsou's distinction between the regime type and state-society relations conceptually opens up the possibility of transforming the regime type through gradually reshaping state-society relations, a process that preserves or even strengthens some functions of the state during the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. This insight has important implications for our study of political economy of reform in China since 1978.

Another way to appreciate Tsou's use of the neologism *totalism* is to take notice of its "empirical" rather than "normative" nature. *Totalitarianism* has a strong negative normative meaning. But *totalism* is used by Tang Tsou as a tool to empirically describe a political regime. Normatively, the totalistic political movement or regime could be positive (as in dealing with foreign threat and social crisis in China in the first half of the twentieth century) or negative (as in the repression

of Falungong and the restrictions against demonstrating against the WTO). Thus, Tsou's empirical use of the notion *totalism* is rather similar to Alessandro Pizzorno's (1987) notion of "absolute politics."

As part of a research project on "the changing boundaries of the political," Pizzorno defines "absolute politics" as the following:

> No boundaries at all are set around the practice of political commitment and the exercise of political will. Everything social would then be placed sub specie politicae, interpreted through politics and seen as transformable by politics. I will call "absolute politics" the state of affairs reflected in that image. . . .
>
> Absolute politics will be taken, therefore, not so much, or not only, as representing a certain mode of organizing a political system but rather as a mode of conceiving of and possibly also handling the instruments meant to bring about a desired form of society. [Pizzorno, 1987: 29-30]

The normative indeterminacy of Tsou's totalism is similar to that of Pizzorno's absolute politics. As Pizzorno puts it,

> In the modern state, politics sets the boundaries between itself and the other activities. To define what is within or that is without the scope of politics, one needs laws, or abolition of laws, hence political decisions, political activity, and discourse. This we may call the "reflexive power" of politics. In it are the roots of the absolute conception of politics. If politics decides about its own boundaries, there will be times when these will overexpand, and be set, so to speak, nowhere. [Pizzorno, 1987: 28]

Totalism in twentieth-century Chinese politics carried within itself the dilemma of absolute politics: a transformative function in creating a new polity in a time of total crisis and an inherent danger of arbitrary use of power.[4]

Yet another way to appreciate Tsou's totalism is through Machiavelli's lens. Scholars have long puzzled over why Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* (advocating for the "new prince") and *Discourses on Livy* (for the republic) at the same time. Not long ago, Louis Althusser (1999) argued convincingly that the alleged contradiction between the two books in fact does not exist. The two books are about two "moments"; the new prince creates the new polity in the first moment by "absolute power" and consolidates it into a form of republic in the

second moment. Tsou's totalism indicates that China's revolution has yet to reach its "second Machiavelli moment."[5]

ON MICROMECHANISMS

Professor Tsou identified three basic micromechanisms of the Chinese revolution: innovation, systematization, and strategic interaction of political actors.

The first innovation is of a peasant-based revolution. It is innovative because both in the classical Marxist theory and the Russian model (as well as in Western social sciences before the 1960s), peasants were spurned as the repository of conservatism. "Making peasants revolutionary" is a great achievement of the Chinese revolution. As one of Tsou's favorite authors, Roy Hofheinz, Jr. (1977: 3), pointed out, "It is safe to say that China was the country where the present-day concept of peasant revolution was born." However, Tsou also realized that this innovation contained within itself the seed of a post-1949 problem in the policy toward intellectuals and cadres. As he put it,

> One of the many consequences of the peasant-based revolution for the political system established after 1949 was that its huge bureaucracy was staffed mostly by cadres who spent the best years of their lives in rural areas or by cadres of peasant origin. It has taken the regime a long time and much effort to transform it into a technically competent and modern organization. [Tsou, 2000: 213]

This recognition of the double-edged nature of this and other innovations is another marker of Tsou's intellectual acumen.

The second micromechanism Tsou discussed is that of "systemization." For him,

> To handle the complex affairs of a movement in a protracted revolution, the innovations made at one time or another or to deal with one problem or another must stand in certain relationship with each other so that they would have a combined impact rather than canceling each other out. [Tsou, 2000: 222]

Analytically but not necessarily chronologically, this process of systemization takes three forms: downward linkage, horizontal linkage, and upward linkage. What may be most striking is Tsou's discussion of systemization by "upward linkage," which he illustrates by pointing to the origin of the CCP's monistic leadership practices.

> The third form of the process of systematization is upward linkage (i.e., from the means to an end or a principle operating at a lower level to one operating at a higher level). The most important example is the high degree of coordination needed among the party, the army, and the people in the war against Japan and in the behind-the-lines struggle with the GMD. To address this, in 1942, the party adopted the principle of the monistic leadership of the party; that is, all army units [and organizations]... "unconditionally obey the Party Committee on that particular level" (Pang Song and Han Gang, 1987: 4). This principle continued to be affirmed and implemented after 1949. In 1962, it was elevated to be a general principle of the whole political system. . . . [In every sphere], the party plays the leadership role (Pang Song and Han Gang, 1987: 7). Thus, the "totalistic system" of the PRC had its local origin in the struggle against fighting foreign aggression and in pursuit of a social revolution. [Tsou, 2000: 223]

This institutional genealogy has deep policy implications. Many people assume that the principle of the monistic leadership of the party is an inherent feature of the regime. However, once we realize the contingent genealogy of the principle, we can start to imagine new ways of exercising the party's leadership.

Tsou's third micromechanism is "strategic interaction." For him, strategic interactions among political actors produce processes of innovation and systematization. To fully explain the mechanism of strategic interaction, Tsou borrowed on the insights of game theory. Game theory is a discipline of applied mathematics specializing in the analysis of interaction of strategic choices made by different people. For most of the twentieth century, Chinese politics was fundamentally a "winner-take-all game." From Yuan Shikai's 1915 machinations to Zhao Ziyang's 1989 removal, the major political conflicts ended with one side enjoying total victory. Tsou conceded that the *all* in the term *winner-take-all* is imprecise because it cannot be taken literally and may mean different things in different games. But the substantive

insight Tsou tried to convey by the winner-take-all game is not difficult to grasp: political power in China is monistic rather than pluralistic; it is indivisible in the minds of political actors. Perhaps the best way to understand Tsou's use of the winner-take-all game is to read his essay on the 1989 Tiananmen tragedy (Tsou, 1991). In that essay, Tsou demonstrated that the winner-take-all tradition of the Chinese Communist Party prevented its leaders from seeking an overt compromise with the students. Moreover, the students had also internalized the mores of the winner-take-all game, so that they could not accept the "tacit compromise" offered by the moderate party leader Zhao Ziyang.

My brief introduction cannot match the richness of Professor Tsou's original essay. I have only discussed several of his key concepts and have not touched on the second major theme of the essay at all—namely, the constraints imposed by the "macrostructure" on individual choices.

> The set of observations is the following: the process and outcomes of the deradicalization of the Chinese Communist movement from 1927 to 1946 and the process and outcomes of the reradicalization from 1949 to 1961 furnish social scientists with factual events to describe, at least in this case, the range of human choices permitted by the existing socioeconomic structure; which choices would bring greater success than others within a given socioeconomic structure; and what absolute limit is imposed by the socioeconomic structure on human choice so that if one oversteps the boundary, one runs into disaster. Perhaps general propositions about the boundary between structural constraints and human choice can be arrived at after careful examination of a number of cases in Chinese history and elsewhere. [Tsou, 2000: 211]

Professor Tsou's essay merits careful attention, raising as it does essential questions and also demonstrating the productive cross-fertilization of history and the social sciences.

NOTES

1. Skocpol has changed, or at least elaborated, her "structural perspective" since her *States and Social Revolutions* (1979). She now acknowledges the crucial importance of revolutionary leaders and parties in mobilizing peasant-based revolutions (Skocpol, 1994: 227).

2. Fewsmith (1995) is a good review of Tsou (1994).

3. The conceptual pair *totalism* and *totalitarianism* can be related to the pair *communism* and *fascism*. For a recent but very problematic treatment of the latter pair, see Furet (1999).

4. Jon Elster, Tsou's close intellectual friend at the University of Chicago, offers the following comment on totalism: "Perhaps the idea of totalism can be understood in the light of the theory of act-utilitarianism. Even when government is not constrained from below, by the people, it may try to constrain itself by adopting a form of rule-utilitarianism. Yet when all power is concentrated in the government, it may be unable to resist the temptation of short-term benefits" (personal communication to the author, Dec. 1999).

5. Tsou referred to Althusser in his study of Mao Zedong Thought (Tsou, 1986: 115). If Professor Tsou were alive to see the publication of Althusser's book on Machiavelli, he may well have noticed the affinity of his "totalism" with Machiavell's "first moment."

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