

**The Prophecy and Crisis of October:
In Commemoration of the 1917 Centenary of the Russian Revolution¹**

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How to think about the revolution and it's "failure"

If the nineteenth century was demarcated by England's 18th century Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, then the twentieth century was defined by the Russian and Chinese revolutions. These two revolutions not only aimed to create a new society within their own countries; they also understood their revolutionary paths as part of a grand experiment to seek out a future for the world. Consequently, the Russian and Chinese revolutions have aroused praise and curses, support and opposition, ardour and enmity from people all over the world. From 1917 to 2017, betwixt earth and firmament in the very birthplace of these two great revolutions, their once revolutionary visage has long since grown obscure. In the 1990's, following the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, the slogan "farewell to revolution" took the Chinese intellectual scene by storm, articulating the Asian version of America's proposed "end of history"² In Russian and western intellectual spheres, the "October Revolution" is often seen as the "original sin" of the Soviet bloc's dissolution, concealed there from its outset; meanwhile, all talk of socialism and communism has already transformed into discussions of why the former failed and the latter is impossible. As early as November 5th, 1994, Russia's Chief of Presidential Administration Sergei Aleksandrov Filatov asserted: "In formal terms, Russia

¹ The following text was prepared with celerity, integrating ideas and formulations from my essays collected in *The Politics of Imagining Asia*, *The End of Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity*, etc. This much should be explained in advance.

² Please see suggested translators note at end of this document.

experienced a coup d'état in October, 1917; consequently, state power was usurped by a small but tightly knit party on the radical left...October 1917 was the start of the most violent revolutionary disruption of Russian social progress." "It broke with the gradual process of transformation from Russia's 19th century Great Reforms towards an industrialized, democratic society. February 1917 became the endpoint of the country's path to democratic development, and eight months after the February revolution Russia established a repressive system of centralized authority" (Filatov and Volobuev 1997; 305, 307).³ Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, all manner of oppositional and revisionist views had already resurged. In the subsequent post-Cold War atmosphere, even revisionist positions became outmoded, "declassified files" having experienced a momentary surge of popularity. These fabrications presented new versions of long since refuted stories (i.e., the tale that Lenin was a German spy), which spread like wildfire throughout the media in the West (e.g., Germany's weekly news magazine, *Der Spiegel*) and in Russia.

Amidst this massive wave of anti-revolutionary sentiment, there are some views on current revisions of orthodox narrative that warrant discussion. For example, Alexander Rabinowitch, a senior scholar of the October Revolution, acknowledges the revolution's inevitability while affirming that there were alternative choices to its errors; namely, "establishing a multi-party system, a democratic, socialist political system, a system founded on the soviet, which certainly could have implemented urgently needed,

3 This was from "October of 1917 and Russia's Bolshevik experiment", a speech by S. A. Filatov at the Moscow Conference on Science and Experimentation, appearing in the 1995 book *October 1917 and the Bolshevik Russian experiment* published in Moscow. This article draws on the Chinese translation, *Regarding debates on the Bolshevik experiment*, published in *The "October" Choice: 90's discussion of the October Revolution by scholars abroad*, eds. Liu Shuchun, Di Mingang, Wang Lihua. Beijing: Central Press of Editing and Translation, 1997.

profound changes while striving to realize peace” (Bushuyev, et. al., 1997; 25).⁴ In fact, investigating other possible outcomes to 1917 raises two related problems: one is concrete historical judgement, specifically about the problem of the relationship between the February and October revolutions. For example, Anatolii Ivanovich Fomin undertook an interpretation of Lenin’s *April Theses*, reaffirming Constitutional Democrat Party member Pavel Milyakov’s view that the October revolution was a continuation of the February revolution. That said, Fomin (1997: 367) did not assume an antagonistic position vis-a-vis the Bolsheviks; rather, he sought to salvage a revolutionary tradition, believing that “while the October revolution did not usher in human history’s first socialist revolution of the Communist era, there is still reason to believe that the October revolution was this century’s last great revolution. It consolidated the triumph of industrialized society, helping establish the foundation of civilization for a post-industrialized society.”⁵ In other words, the October revolution was a bourgeois-democratic revolution which transferred political authority into the hands of the proletariat and peasantry; it was therefore distinct from a dictatorship of the proletariat or dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry (351). From an economic perspective, this dictatorship was what Lenin (quoted in Fomin 1997; 351) already described as “the state monopolizing capitalism within a truly democratic, revolutionary country.”⁶ In fact,

4 This comes from a recorded interview by B. Bushuyev, editor of the history section in the Soviet publication *Communists*, with Indiana University Professor and vice-chair of the International Committee on the History of the October Revolution, Alexander Rabinowitch. It was published in 1990, issue 16 of *Communists*. This article cites the Chinese translation.

5 This is the view of University of Luhansk Professor Anatolii Ivanovich Fomin, from “Reflections on the major incidents of the revolutionary period,” published in Russia’s *Free Thinking* magazine in issue 10, also drawn from the above-cited *The “October” Choice*.

6 This is an original citation by Lenin, but Fomin used it accordingly to advance his own argument. See (Fomin 1997; 352).

this interpretation uses Lenin's analysis of the Russian revolution, developed over the course of 1905-1907, in order to negate Lenin's subsequent redefinition of the character of socialist revolution, made following the 1917 February revolution.

Directly related to this judgement is a re-evaluation of the revolution's character: was the October Revolution a socialist one, or an "Asiatic social revolution"; was the Soviet nation it founded state capitalism, or a socialist state? Such questions were already concealed within discussions of the relation between the February and October Revolutions. As early as the eve of Soviet collapse, E. T. Borodin (Borodin 1997: 137–138) judged that:

The goal of Russia's 1917 revolution was to oppose Asia's wholly decrepit feudalism; at the same time it also opposed the private ownership capitalism which had already developed in Asia. Its mission was to thoroughly divorce the peasantry from its means of production and build the conditions for socialized production on the basis of a system of state ownership. If we do not understand this exceptional quality of revolution, then we cannot understand the revolution's process and consequences and are thus unable to grasp why, objectively, it is capable of and in fact already has ushered in a program of state capitalism.

In order to define the October Revolution's mission as the establishment of "state capitalism", the author explains this process from an economic perspective as a kind European capitalist primitive accumulation, in which peasants are thoroughly divided from their means of production. Consequently, this completely negates the many experiments undertaken to establish a socialist economy, which re-integrated laborers (peasants and factory workers) with their means of production.

The arrival of Putin's epoch has been a turning point, prompting reconciliation amongst contending revisionist views. The October Revolution rescued Russia from the war; and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which had been maligned by the Bolsheviks'

enemies for a long time, was also abolished by the Soviet government in the wake of Germany's military defeat.⁷ After the October Revolution, there were debates even amongst the drifting fragments of the White Army. This was due to the belief among a portion of the White Russian Eurasianists that the October Revolution was a detour taken by Russia in order to maintain its own capacity to act in the face of intense pressure from Western powers. For this reason, it could not be negated outright. The national self-determination promoted by the October Revolution ultimately took the form of an alliance, preserving to the greatest extent and even expanding upon czarist Russia's territory, population, and authority. In sum, for modernizers the October Revolution used industrialization to clear out feudal impediments; for nationalists and patriots, the Soviet war of self-defence to resist and defeat Nazi Germany's assault amounted to a historic achievement; and for Eurasianists of the epoch, the October Revolution rallied the country for a decisive transformation of the Russian Empire. The October Revolution could not be totally negated.

One century later, the true challenge faced by this revolution is the negation of the first proletarian state, or the first state governed by a proletarian dictatorship which was created by the revolution. The possibility of the proletarian state is not only inadmissible within the epistemology of Western liberalism, but it is also leagues apart, as a political form, from the road taken by the contemporary Russian state. And it is precisely within this complex and contradictory atmosphere that we see an ambiguous form of

7 Lenin ([1960] 1977 31:439) had already said: "Brest-Litovsk was significant in being the first time that we were able, on an immense scale and amidst vast difficulties, to take advantage of the contradictions among the imperialists in such a way as to make socialism the ultimate gainer."

commemoration. On December 19, 2016 President Putin issued a directive for preparations to commemorate the centenary of the Russian Revolution:

The Russian Historical Society has been recommended to establish an organising committee to prepare and hold events to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1917 Revolution in Russia. The Organising Committee is to draft and approve within one month of its establishment a plan to prepare and hold events to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1917 Revolution in Russia. In accordance with the instruction, the Culture Ministry shall provide organisational and technical support to the Organising Committee. The regional authorities of the Russian Federation, local authorities, public associations, and relevant academic and educational organisations are to contribute to preparing and holding the events to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1917 Revolution in Russia. (Kremlin.ru “Instruction” 2016)

But at the same time Putin indicates that commemoration activities will not be restricted to the October Revolution, but will also include the February Revolution. At a preliminary meeting, Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky announced:

Looking back now at the incidents which occurred 100 years ago, we absolutely cannot deny our elders’ efforts in attempting to establish a new, just society on this earth. This not only changed the course of Russia’s historical development, it was also a decisive event of momentous influence for the development of each nation the world over.⁸

According to the interpretation of Wu Enyuan (Wu 2017), head of the Research Institute for Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences:

What Minister Medinsky indicated about the founding of the Russian Revolution, as well as the momentous, global influence of its “new, just society”, refers to the Soviet authority established after the October Revolution, and cannot possibly include the February Revolution’s provisional government, which only existed a brief span of a few months. This should be seen as Russian officials’ affirmative evaluation of the October Revolution.

However, it is not Putin’s goal to reaffirm the political value of the October Revolution; rather, it is to bring about reconciliation between descendants of the “reds” and “whites”. Apart from maintaining the unity of the Russian state and social cohesion,

8 Cited in (Wu 2017), footnote 3.

this “affirmative evaluation” of the revolution has been admittedly ambiguous. In fact, early in 2016 Putin had already expressed a critical attitude toward several issues, including the Soviet execution of the Tsarist royal family and servants in the summer of 1918, repression of the clergy in the same year, as well as the verity of a questionable letter from Lenin to Molotov authorizing said repression. Furthermore, Putin’s doubts spurned the development of investigation and debate in the Russian academic community on related topics.⁹ On May 25th, 2017, Putin (in Wu 2017) clearly indicated: “the principle historical lesson which the February and October revolution centenary has left us is to guard against division and achieve social harmony”. In order to quell suspicions against commemorations of the 1917 revolution at home and abroad, on September 30th, 2015, September 3rd, 2016,¹⁰ issues successive presidential orders, signing legal decrees to “establish a monument forever commemorating victims of political violence”, but “the text never indicated ‘in what period of Russian history this violence was carried out’. More important still, the laws never indicated, with regards to said violence, who was the aggressor subject nor the aggrieved object” (Wu 2017). In spite of this, political implications of establishing this memorial are clear: commemorating the 1917 revolution is by no means a re-evaluation of Russia’s future direction (the message expressed to the Russian people); it also cannot go against the universal “principle of human rights” (the message conveyed to Western countries, as well as to Russian liberals).

On October 30th, 2017, at the unveiling of a “Wall of Grief” memorial to victims of political repression, Putin’s speech (Kremlin.ru, “Opening” 2017) was pronounced in a

9 There are different views of the above-mentioned issues amongst Russian scholars. See (Li Yan 2017).

10 As cited in (Wu 2017), footnotes 14 and 15.

manner of firm assurance that was nevertheless pregnant with unspoken implications: this day was “the day all peoples of my country come together to commemorate the victims of political purges”. His speech concluded by citing Solzhenitsyn’s wife, Natalya Dmitrievna Solzhenitsyn:

“to understand, to remember, to condemn and only then is it possible to forgive.” I fully agree with these words. Yes, we and our descendants should remember the tragedy of the Great Purge, remember its root cause. But this does not mean settling scores. We must not allow society to once again be pushed toward a state of conflict. Now, for us the most important is mutual trust and stability. Only by making this our foundation can we resolve the problems faced by our society and country, by Russia, which is one and the same to all of us.

Even if Chinese and Western media reports see this founding commemoration for the “Wall of Grief” as a condemnation of the October Revolution, Putin’s speech does not even mention the October Revolution; moreover, he makes no direct link between it and the Great Purge. The question of what ultimate connection there may be between the two still warrants reinvestigation. This is an ambiguous form of commemoration, but its implicit strategy is quite clear: it is an ambiguity which accommodates for the various aspects of historical conflict within modern Russia’s social relations.

With respect to societies that have undergone ruptures, unrest, dissolution, and war, appeals for social unity bespeak of a kind of common social understanding, which must not be rashly mocked. However this manner of ambiguous expression is utterly unable to tame the legacy of the October revolution. This incident not only transformed Russia, it changed the world. Intense debates and struggles spread from areas of “transformation” to reach diverse regions and peoples, including leftists and the theoretical inheritors of leftists who pursued this revolution and supported revolutionary thought. Great historical changes, especially those major, contradictory transformations defining an epoch, can

modify the tone of all sorts of commemorations, but what they cannot change in this event are the many, irreconcilable and intense attitudes surrounding it. At this juncture, we might combine this problematic with an overview and reflections on China's revolution. As it was a different era, we can turn back to it in order to identify different approaches for explaining the October revolution.

The first approach comes from the revolutionaries themselves. While their views and strategies were distinct, they shared a common objective of struggle. Even though they did not belong to the same country, they understood themselves as belonging to the same movement. They sought the correct revolutionary path, strategy, and tactics within the actual process of conducting revolution. Debates and divisions were intense when the 1917 revolution burst forth, especially within the Bolshevik party. For example, when it came to their views on the February revolution and the government currently in place, Kamenev and *Pravda* widely diverged from Lenin. Plekhanov, meanwhile, scoffed that Lenin's *April Theses* were "dream talk." Amid this intellectual debate, Stalin had also taken a stance diametrically opposed to Lenin for a short period, but subsequently changed to support the *April Theses*. On the eve of the October Revolution, no matter if it was a question of whether to attend the All-Russian Congress Pre-Parliament (this directly related to whether one should halt or promote a bourgeois-democratic revolution in view of turning it toward socialism) or the question of whether one should promote armed insurrection, the Bolshevik party central committee and its leaders (not only Kamenev and Zinoviev, but also Trotsky) all had voiced their opposition to insurrection (however Trotsky quickly moved to support an armed insurrection, and in fact became

the insurrection's most renowned leader); furthermore, fierce conflicts erupted between leaders and Lenin.

These strategic and tactical divergences have many points in common with the critique of revolution in contemporary intellectual life, but are fundamentally not the same. These earlier debates were a series of strategic divergences arising from within the same camp. In 1918, whilst Rosa Luxemburg ([1961] 1972: 79–80) sharply criticized Lenin, Trotsky, other leaders of the October Revolution and the policy of the Bolsheviks, she still mounted a defence of the revolution in the following terms:

criticism is not an expectation of miracles, because achieving a model and faultless proletarian revolution in an isolated land, exhausted by world war, strangled by imperialism, betrayed by the international proletariat, would be a miracle. What is in order is to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, the kernel from the accidental excrescences in the politics of the Bolsheviks.

On the one hand, she criticized the serious deficits and even mistakes of the October Revolution, but on the other hand, she praised “the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the *first*, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the *only ones* up to now who can cry with Hutten: ‘I have dared!’” (80; original emphasis). Just like Marx and Engels regarded the Paris Commune, in the eyes of Luxemburg the October Revolution had suddenly erupted without having undergone meticulous preparations; and yet, like a seed, it contained the essential fact of belonging to the future. Luxemburg’s criticism of the October Revolution, as I would term it, issues from the perspective of “the essential futurity that is contained in an immature revolution.” For revolutionaries, it is only by relying on the essential futurity of an actual revolution that one might produce a correct critique and evaluation of its

difficulties, together with revolutionaries' strategic errors, and thereby avoid lapsing into a negation and betrayal of the revolution itself. The criticism of Luxemburg toward the Bolshevik Revolution opened, from the perspective of a participant in the revolutionary project, the possibility of re-examining this revolution itself; namely, the notion that one could not be picky over revolutionary strategy and tactics. For Luxemburg, one should rupture the narrative of necessity which had been woven together by the revolutionaries themselves for reasons of imminent necessity, in order to examine other possibilities. Precisely for this reason, she devoted yet more space to the critique of the Bolsheviks, believing that they had made a virtue of necessity, by falsely presenting those "actions they had been forced to take" under specific conditions (that is, the conditions of the era, the balance of the forces, theoretical preparation and discussions of tactics and strategy having not yet come to maturity) as universal truths to be adopted by the whole of the socialist movement as a model of revolution.

To the extent that we understand divergences in twentieth century revolutionary strategy as having been premised on the existence of an actual process of revolution as well as the continuous formation of a revolutionary subject, then we can also understand failure as the point of departure for the contemporary left's re-evaluation of the Russian and Chinese revolutions and their principles.

This so-called failure is not a kind of tactical withdrawal, nor is it some sort of strategic setback. The most external pattern of this "failure" is the dissolution of the socialist system that was formed through the revolutions of the twentieth century—the fact that the Soviet Union and the socialist states of Eastern Europe no longer exist, the process by which China, Vietnam, and other states are transitioning from being states under the rule

of Communist Parties toward integration with global capitalism. A deeper level of meaning implicit in “failure” is the end of the revolutionary process and the decline of the revolutionary subject who had come into formation through the very advance of said process. The division into classes continues to deepen, and yet there is no means of once again forming the kind of political class that served as the motive force for revolution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The revolutionary vanguard born of this political class, fostered throughout the twentieth century revolutionary process, has already experienced a profound transformation. Reform and restructuring have often exceeded people’s expectations for stabilization and transformation. How this relates to socialist history, or what kind of future is buried within it, remains a difficult problem not only for researchers abroad, but even for Chinese intellectuals who have personally experienced it. According to Alain Badiou (2008: 35), a philosopher who has never renounced his relationship with the revolutionary tradition, the “essential thing” of revolution about which Luxemburg spoke no longer exists within analyses of Bolshevik policy or within the disagreements of the revolutionaries that opened up around questions of tactics and strategy. It can only exist in the form of a “communist hypothesis.”:

A communist hypothesis means first, that the logic of class—the fundamental subordination of labour to a dominant class, the arrangement that has persisted since Antiquity—is not inevitable; it can be overcome. The communist hypothesis is that a different collective organization is practicable, one that will eliminate the inequality of wealth and even the division of labour. The private appropriation of massive fortunes and their transmission by inheritance will disappear. The existence of a coercive state, separate from civil society, will no longer appear a necessity: a long process of reorganization based on a free association of producers will see it withering away.

The reason why communism can only exist in the form of a hypothesis is exactly because the practical attempts of twentieth century socialists to realize this hypothesis have failed. “The party proved,” Badiou continues, “ill-adapted for the construction of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ in the sense that Marx had intended—that is, a temporary state, organizing the transition to the non-state: its dialectical ‘withering away’. Instead, the party-state developed into a new form of authoritarianism” (36). As a result, reposing the “communist hypothesis” indeed means taking failure as its premise. To do so is to recognize that the principle content of the second sequence of revolutions (Marxism, the labor movement, mass democracy, Leninism, the vanguard party, the socialist state) is no longer effective. According to Badiou, this second sequence refers to the historical process from the 1917 October revolution to the 1976 conclusion of the Great Cultural Revolution. He contrasts it with the period of the first sequence, from the French Revolution to the Paris Commune (1792-1871). Conditions of the first sequence defined the scope of the Communist imagination; conditions of the second sequence, however, sought to transpose that imagination into actual practice. Reflecting on the failure of the second sequence’s principle content, Badiou concluded that “The second sequence is over and it is pointless to try to restore it” (37).

Luxemburg’s thought takes the actual existence of a revolutionary subject as its objective premise, it is one that expresses, as its subjective condition, the feeling that “I can say ‘our’, for I was part of it, and in a certain sense, to quote Rimbaud, ‘I am still there, I am still there’.” (Badiou 2010: 101–2). If the governing party that functions as the proletariat in its capacity as the ruling class, and which functions as the revolutionary vanguard, tends toward fundamental transformation, dissolution, or destruction, then any

debate from an internal perspective about developing values or tactics and strategy is no longer possible. The majority of contemporary controversies surrounding the Russian Revolution and the Chinese Revolution—regardless of the name under which they take place or their form and content—are all taking place under conditions of the *displacement of the subject*. All manner of criticism and mockery directed toward the October Revolution today sounds a great deal like a repetition of the partial perspective of debates that broke out among the revolutionaries themselves during the epoch of revolution. This mockery and criticism, however, has the aforementioned “displacement of the subject” as its premise, and for this reason, the criticism of the contemporary intellectual scene is not posed from the perspective of “that thing which is essential and which endures” articulated by Luxemburg, and is also never that mode of debate that operates from within the revolution in order to expand questions of strategy and tactics. I understand these historical narratives of revolution as a “historiography of regret.” They are a symptom of the post-revolutionary epoch’s arrival, a condemnation of revolution by the new subject who operates under the name of posterity. What these condemnations omit is an analysis of capitalism, particularly the contradictions of political economy in the imperialist epoch. It is as if revolution had no necessary connection to these contradictions and was merely the result of revolutionaries plotting in a hideout. As with the large majority of countries that went through socialism in the twentieth century, China is currently witnessing the same condition. “Regret” here is not only the prelude to a thoroughgoing renunciation, it is also a means for the contemporary world to justify itself. In this respect, a reissuing of the “communist hypothesis”, which is in turn a negation of the contemporary world order’s permanence and veracity, is necessary. But the problem

remains: how to appraise Communism as it was in actual practice? How to think about the Communist movement's possible future? There are none among us who would deny the errors, setbacks, and tragedies of the practice of socialism and revolution in the twentieth century. But is this indeed a "failure"? If it is not, or at least not purely a failure, then how are we to assess its achievements? Delving into the lessons of an ultimate failure and reappraising its success are one and the same; and yet, given contemporary trends, this new assessment, success, and even recognition of failure are more urgent and difficult than ever. From a historical perspective, there is a great discrepancy between the historical trajectories and contemporary destinies of, on the one hand, China and, on the other, Russia and those other socialist countries. We cannot simply group all of these experiences within a shared category of "failure". The Russian revolution burst forth from the total crisis of European capitalism and war. The revolutions that it instigated and influenced took place under distinct historical conditions. In addition, there were different, concrete social goals; respective levels of maturity amongst revolutionaries and revolutionary troupes were vastly different. Even if wanting to summarize "failure," we still cannot abandon an analysis of these concrete processes. The question of the governing party is decisive but cannot account for the whole. What ultimately did the revolutions of the twentieth century, especially socialist revolutions, bring to human history? As compared to the world that existed before the revolution, in what respects did these surging and tumultuous revolutions alter the lives of human beings? Apart from the necessity of restating the "communist hypothesis," could we, perhaps, in the real practice of revolution, amid history that is full of success and failure, triumph and folly, necessity

and contingency, still search for the seeds of the future, or that which Luxemburg called the “essential thing” of revolution?

The Right to National Self-Determination and the Chinese Revolution

With respect to explanations and evaluations of the Russian revolution, there have always been two horizons: the European perspective and the non-European (particularly Asian) perspective. While mutual points overlap in each view, their differences have always remained clearly distinct. In terms of the political movements of the epoch, the European perspective has developed according to the overall context of the European workers’ movement and Communist movements, as well as their antithesis (their critiques posed against liberal democracy, the rights of man, and the market economy, amongst others). The Asian perspective, by contrast, focused on aspects of imperialism, problems of colonialism, and movements for national liberation. Amongst the myriad debates surrounding the October revolution, at the core three fundamental problems come from the European view, or emerge from the perspective of the European socialist movement. These are: the question of war and peace, especially Lenin’s advocacy for withdrawing from the war and the dilemma of seeking a revolutionary strategy within Russia; the question of the right to national self-determination, especially the right of national minorities to “secede,” including the problem, deriving from this, of the relationship between a national revolution and a class revolution; and, finally, the question of proletarian dictatorship, or the problem of the relationship between democracy and the transitional state. As radical leader of the European Socialist

movement, Luxemburg ([1961] 1972 : 79) enumerated several specific conditions under which to understand “all the tactics forced upon” the Bolsheviks (these actions having been presented at the time as a general truth to be given to the international communist movement). These included the following points of crucial importance: in order to secure peasants’ support for the revolution, it was necessary to allow the peasants to occupy the land rather than pursuing its nationalization; furthermore, in order to gain the support of the national minorities, the principle of “national self-determination” that had been put forward in opposition to the war strategy of Milyukov and Kerensky, (especially the slogan concerning the right of each national minority to independently decide their own destinies, up to and including the right “to secede from the Russian state”) was made into a key state policy after the revolution. Before the October revolution, the Bolsheviks had demanded the formation of the Constituent Assembly and strongly attacked policies prolonging the existence of the Kerensky Provisional Government; and yet, after the revolution, Lenin and his comrades dissolved the old Constituent Assembly and had no intention of carrying out elections for the formation of a new Constituent Assembly. Luxemburg ([1961] 1972: 48) writes:

While they showed a quite cool contempt for the Constituent Assembly, universal suffrage, freedom of press and assemblage, in short, for the whole apparatus of the basic democratic liberties of the people which, taken all together, constituted the ‘right of self-determination’ inside Russia, they treated the right of self-determination of peoples as a jewel of democratic policy for the sake of which all practical considerations of real criticism had to be stilled.

For Luxemburg, the right to self-determination was an unforgivable crime that the Russian revolutionaries had committed toward the international movement of the working class.

Unlike the European socialists, who responded to the October revolution with theoretical critique and political censure, China and other Asian countries only knew a limited amount about the political struggle that had erupted in Russia or the policies of the Bolshevik party. The first reaction toward the revolution concentrated on the position of the Russian revolutionaries concerning the Eastern Question and Oppressed Peoples, which differed radically from the attitude of Western powers. European revolutionaries grasped the importance of the imperialist epoch and the Eastern Question; however, their understanding of the latter was restricted, by a large degree, to nineteenth century European views. For them, the “Eastern Question” principally referred to problems that Europe’s near eastern territories were confronting, problems related to the expansion of Russian imperialism and the Ottoman Empire’s gradual decline. In other words, the “Eastern Question” was no more than imperialist jousting for hegemony between Russia, Austria, England, France, the Ottoman Empire and Prussia. West European Marxists and Communists believed that nineteenth century western Europe was facing a revolutionary wave of the working class, struggling to take power for themselves. The “Eastern Question,” on the other hand, was merely a passé problem of imperial hegemony. Consequently, their attitude towards the national question was totally different from that of the reformers and revolutionaries who were their “Eastern” contemporaries. On the eve of revolution in 1847, Marx ([1975] 2010: 6:388) issued a famous statement about Poland’s crisis: “Poland must be liberated not in Poland but in England.” This position could be extended even to other Eastern nations; however, in Marx and Engels’s analyses of Poland and Ireland from approximately 1866 to 1869, they already acknowledge that there is no shortcut between the emancipation of the working class and national

movements. In 1866, from late January to April 6th, Engels ([1975] 2010: 20:152-162) wrote “What have the Working Classes to do with Poland?” in response to a request by Marx. This article elucidates the Communist International’s position toward the national question: on the one hand, he criticizes Proudhon’s national nihilism and exposes, on the other hand, Bonapartists’ “principle of nationalities”: “The consequence was that for Poland, Germany, and Italy, the very first step in every political movement was to attempt the restoration of that national unity without which national life was but a shadow” (155). In 1866 Marx himself drafted a talk ([1975] 2010 20:193) dedicated to the “Polish Question” as part of the “Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council: the Different Questions.” The heading for the French edition of this same piece reads: “Necessity of annihilating Russian influence in Europe by implementing the right of nations to self-determination and restoring Poland on a democratic and social basis” (193). This suggests the following: as early as around 1866, the question of national self-determination had already appeared within the European Communist movement’s agenda, but it was only with the evolution of the “Eastern Question” that this became a question central to revolution.

By the time revolution broke out in 1917, the “Eastern Question” was no longer, as Marx asked, “What shall we do with Turkey?” nor was it how to treat Russian expansionism (Marx and Engels [1974] 2010: 2:6). Now, it was a question of how to seek out a new revolutionary turning point in the East, especially amongst Asia’s weakest links of the imperialist chain. To use Lenin’s words: “In Eastern Europe and Asia the period of bourgeois-democratic revolutions did not begin until 1905. The revolutions in Russia, Persia, Turkey and China, the Balkan wars—such is the chain of world events of *our*

period in our ‘Orient’” (Lenin [1960] 1977: 20:406). It was also precisely in this manner that revolutionaries from colonial societies had different feelings and understandings about the question of national self-determination than European socialists. In fact, the stance of Russian revolutionaries on the national questions was interconnected with the progression of the “awakening of Asia”. With respect to self-determination, Luxemburg posed her criticism from the viewpoint of Europe’s working-class. She emphasized the unity, solidarity and common struggle of the working class, whereas Lenin’s understanding of revolution took as its premise the search for the revolutionary moment in the epoch of imperialism. The weakest links of imperialism may well lie beyond Europe. Amongst the experiences of the 1905 Russian Revolution, the 1907 Iranian Revolution, the 1909 Turkish Revolution, and, above all, the 1911 Chinese Revolution, Lenin had already discovered the potential for socialist revolution contained within the “awakening of Asia.” In the epoch of the Russian revolution’s outbreak, not only Western European revolutionaries such as Luxemburg, but even Bolsheviks like Trotsky had not yet begun to reflect deeply on the possibility of an Asian revolution. Nor had they come yet to think about the Russian revolution as being situated in the order of Asia’s awakening.

Within the discourse of “failure” in contemporary, western leftist thought, critiques of class revolution, the politics of the party-state, and state capitalism have all basically lumped the right to national self-determination together with the broader category of nationalism. As such, self-determination and nationalism have been placed together on the side of “compromises” made within the scope of twentieth century revolutions. Consequently, amongst western leftists’ reflections on the Russian revolution, we can

quite clearly see a tactical and strategic divergence deriving from working-class movements and the social-democratic parties of Europe. Another part of this revolution's lineage, however, is nearly invisible: Asia's revolutionary lineage. Within this lineage, Russian revolutionaries took Russia to be a cruel and decadent empire, while Chinese revolutionaries understood China as an oppressed nation. Together, these understandings produced an accumulation of common knowledge which served as the shared premise for the distinct routes these two revolutions took. While these two revolutions had extreme differences in their character and execution, they were nevertheless intimately related. Consequently, it is reasonable to ask: if we place the Russian revolution, which was a derivation of European revolution, within the ranks of the "awakening of Asia," might we see things differently?

The October revolution erupted in the final years of the First World War, and in 1918 Wilsonian liberalism appeared on the scene with the war's conclusion. At that time, countries of Asia and other oppressed nations did not grasp that Wilsonian liberalism, with its advocacy of self-determination, would grant concessions and protection to European colonialism. In the case of "Chinese progressives," they could not yet even distinguish between Lenin's advocacy for self-determination and Wilsonian liberalism. At the Paris Peace Conference, it was the bankruptcy of Wilsonian liberalism on display that revealed the Russian revolutionaries to be marching to an altogether different tune. People suddenly discovered that the Bolsheviks had immediately announced a "Decree on Peace" following the October revolution. The decree critiqued the war of the imperial powers while proposing, at the same time, immediate peace talks and a proposal to end hostilities. They also announced the cancellation of all secret treaties that had been signed

by the czarist state and Provisional Government. Beginning on November 9, 1917, within the brief span of a month, the Bolsheviks released over one hundred secret diplomatic documents. On December 3, 1917, the Soviet Government issued the text “To all the Muslim workers of Russia and the East,” drafted by Lenin and Stalin, in which they announced the cancellation of the secret treaties that had aimed at the carving up of Persia and Turkey and the Russian occupation of Constantinople. At the same time, they also reaffirmed the principle of self-determination and support for the national liberation movements of all oppressed peoples. On January 25, 1918, the third All-Russia Congress of Soviets announced the “Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People,” drafted by Lenin, Stalin, and Bukharin, in which they restated the right to self-determination and the cancellation of all secret treaties and announced “a complete break with the barbarous policy of bourgeois civilization” (Lenin [1960] 1977: 26:424). The latter clearly indicates that the “Eastern Question” of the old European horizon had already changed into an “Eastern Question” situated amongst new global relationships. In the wake of the October revolution, Eastern nations and progressive European nations were organizing, at the same time, to join in a common struggle against imperialism.

Consequently, the national right to self-determination was no longer disconnected from the European socialist movement. No longer was it merely a part of Eastern struggles against national oppression and enslavement. Now, it was a matter of practical strategy for building a global battlefield for anti-imperial revolution. All of this not only indicates currents of thought in socialist foreign diplomacy and their initial implementation, but it also means that Russian revolutionaries had already brought subjugated nations into the category of “revolutionary classes.” Twentieth century

revolution was by no means just a revolution of the working class; it was also a revolution of all oppressed nations. It is therefore clear that China, Eastern Muslim countries, and their political leaders never regarded the Russian revolution as Luxemburg did in her critique of national self-determination. They looked on the Russian Revolution not from the perspective of the European workers' movement but from the perspective of national liberation in the imperialist epoch. It was from this latter starting point that they sought out a mutual connection between a national movement and a class movement. The people, or the popular masses, a political category born amidst the Chinese revolution whose internal content and external limits were always in motion, was also evoked within this new global horizon. The difference between the revolutionary thought of European working class movements and that of Chinese and Third World liberation movements is of an inestimably massive significance. This was determined by the imperialist period and its transformation of global relationships; at the same time, it was also defined by the historical connection between the Russian Revolution and the Asian revolution (even a revolutionary of the stature of Trotsky could only understand China's hidden revolutionary potential after a prolonged period of time).

Shortly after the outbreak of the Chinese Revolution of 1911 and the formation of the Provisional Government of the Republic of China in the following year, Lenin published his articles "Democracy and Narodism in China" (1912), "The Awakening of Asia" (1913) and "Backward Europe and Advanced Asia" (1913) in which he praised China as "a land of seething political activity, the scene of a virile social movement and of a democratic upsurge" and condemned "civilised and advanced Europe, with its highly developed machine industry, its rich, multiform culture," which, under the leadership of the

bourgeoisie, had come to the “support of everything backward, moribund and medieval” (Lenin (1960)1977: 19:99). Lenin’s evaluation was an important organizational component in his theory of imperialism and proletarian revolution. In his view, as capitalism enters its imperialist stage, the social struggles of oppressed peoples in every part of the globe come to be organized within the scope of a world proletarian revolution. This method of conducting analysis by linking the European revolution together with the revolutions of Asia can be traced to Marx’s “Revolution in China and Europe,” published in the *New York Tribune* in 1853. Lenin regarded Russia as an Asiatic state, yet this orientation was not based on geography, but on the degree of its process in capitalist development; Lenin defined Russia as Asiatic with reference to the course of its historical development. In his text “Democracy and Narodism in China,” he noted that “in very many and very essential respects, Russia is undoubtedly an Asian country and, what is more, one of the most benighted, medieval and shamefully backward of Asian countries” (Lenin [1960]1977: 18:163). Lenin had great sympathy toward the Chinese Revolution; however, when the problem shifted away from the Asian revolution toward the international transformations of Russian society, his position was that of a “Westernizer.” From the nineteenth through the twentieth century, Russian intellectuals understood the Russian spirit through struggles and collisions of East and West, Asia and Europe. In “Democracy and Narodism in China,” Asia is lumped into the same category with barbarism, medievalism, backwardness, and other such concepts; yet it was owing precisely to this that the Russian revolution possessed a profoundly Asiatic character (e.g., this revolution was in fact directed against all those “barbaric,” “medieval,” and

“backwards” social relations that Russia possessed as an Asiatic society) while at the same time possessing global significance.

The specific position Asia occupied within the rhetoric of world history determined the understanding of socialists concerning the tasks and direction of modern Asian revolutions. Having read Sun Yat-sen’s “The Significance of China’s Revolution,” Lenin criticized the Chinese revolutionary’s proposals for a socialist and democratic program to overcome capitalism, arguing that Sun’s perspective was utopian and populist. In Lenin’s view, “the chief representative, or the chief social bulwark, of this Asian bourgeoisie that is still capable of supporting a historically progressive cause is the peasant” (Lenin [1960] 1977: 18: 165). As a result, the Chinese revolution would have to first complete the revolutionary tasks of the European bourgeoisie, and only then could one discuss the question of socialism. Lenin skillfully used historical dialectics to assert that, on the one hand, Sun’s program of agrarian revolution was “counter-revolutionary” because it ignored or exceeded the demands of historical development. On the other hand, Lenin also pointed out that, owing to the “Asiatic” character of the Chinese Revolution, this “counter-revolutionary program” would in fact complete the mission of capitalism: “the irony of history is that Narodism, under the guise of ‘combating capitalism’ in agriculture, champions an agrarian programme that, if fully carried out, would mean the *most* rapid development of capitalism in agriculture” (Lenin [1960] 1977: 18:168).

Lenin’s understanding of the Chinese revolution had its origins in his long-term theorization concerning the reforms implemented in Russia in 1861, and the failure of the 1905 revolution. In 1861, following the defeat of Russia at the hands of Britain and France in the Crimean War, in which Russia had sought to gain control of the Balkans

and the Black Sea, Alexander II initiated reforms to abolish serfdom. Summing up the key points of this reform in the simplest terms, there are two points that cannot be ignored: first, this reform did not arise from within Russian society itself but was, rather, the result of external pressure. Second, the Emancipation Decree released on February 19, 1861 was implemented under the premise of guaranteeing the interests of the landlord and ensured that the peasants would pay a heavy cost for a top-down process of Russian industrialization. This was why Lenin asserted that 1861 ultimately led to 1905.¹¹ From the reform of 1861 to the revolution of 1905, the phenomenon of land concentration did not lead to a capitalist agrarian economy; instead, it gave rise to strong demands from the peasants of the communes for the expropriation and redistribution of lands held by landlords.¹² Did such demands resemble the kind of Narodnik utopianism that turns back to an already annihilated form of village society, or were they in fact seeking out another path of development? It was against this kind of background and thinking that Lenin closely linked his summation and reflections on the 1905 revolution to the question of how to solve Russia's land problem. In 1907, Lenin wrote "The Agrarian Program of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905–1907," where, taking the Russian land problem as his focus, he posed two models of capitalist agriculture, namely, the "Prussian Road" and the "American Road."¹³ The so-called Prussian Road would

11 Official statistics from 1889 show that various "dues and obligations" comprised 70 percent of the net income of a typical peasant household, and that these "dues and obligations" totaled more than twice the net cash income of the peasantry; "the corvée payments due under the serf system were not necessarily this high." Bankrupt peasants, even when they wanted to abandon their land, also had to pay a special "quit rent" fee on the land. (Lenin 1988 [1960]; 17:84-95).

12 For a discussion of Russian agrarian reform, see (Lu 2004; 143-215).

13 Lenin's 'The Agrarian Program of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905-1907,' was written over November-December of 1907 and printed in St. Petersburg in 1908, but not published, as it was confiscated and destroyed by the Tsarist secret police and only one copy survived, lacking a conclusion. In September of 1917, it was published as a single volume, with the addition of a conclusion. In summer 1908, however, Lenin, acting as an author, responded at the invitation of the

proceed through the unification of the state and the landlord class, using violence to expropriate the peasants, eliminate village society and the village system of land ownership, and transform the serf-landlord economy into a Junker-capitalist economy. The American road, on the other hand, was a land program which “may be carried out in the interests of the peasant masses and not of the landlord gang” (Lenin [1960] 1977: 13:423), those interests being “the nationalization of the land, the abolition of its private ownership, and the transfer of all land to the state, which will mark a complete break with feudal relations in the countryside. It is this economic necessity that has turned the mass of Russian peasants into supporters of land nationalization” (Lenin [1960] 1977a: 13:424–25). Through his summation of the reasons regarding the failure of land reform in Russia and the failure of the 1905 revolution, Lenin posed a basic conclusion: under Russian social conditions, “nationalization of the land is not only the sole means for completely eliminating medievalism in agriculture, but also the best form of agrarian relationships conceivable under capitalism” (Lenin [1960] 1977: 13:426).

Lenin believed that the land program of the Narodniks in Russia would lead Russia to return to a small peasant economy based on the parcelization of village lands, and that this kind of economic system would not be able to provide the motive force for the development of capitalism. He approved of the “American road”: first, because it would be possible by means of nationalizing the land to abolish medieval land relations and provide the possibility of developing a capitalist, agrarian economy; second, because Russia possessed vast expanses of uncultivated land and thus had the conditions to follow the “American road” and not that of other Western countries. The development of a

Polish Social-Democrat Party and published a summary introduction in the Polish journal *Kritika*. See (*Biography of Lenin* 1960; 204).

capitalist agriculture would necessarily require the enforced reshaping of old social relations:

In England this reshaping proceeded in a revolutionary, violent way; but the violence was practiced for the benefit of the landlords, it was practiced on the masses of the peasants, who were taxed to exhaustion, driven from the villages, evicted, and who died out, or emigrated. In American this reshaping went on in a violent way as regards the slave farms in the Southern States. There violence was applied against the slaveowning landlords. Their estates were broken up, and the large feudal estates were transformed into small bourgeois farms. As regards the mass of “unappropriated” American lands, this role of creating the new agrarian relationships to suit the new mode of production (i.e., capitalism) was played by the “American General Redistribution,” by the Anti-Rent movement (*Anti-Rent Bewegung*) of the forties, the Homestead Act, etc. (Lenin [1960] 1977: 13:275–76).

As such, “the Narodnik thinks that repudiation of private landownership is repudiation of capitalism. That is wrong. The repudiation of private landownership expresses the demands for the purist capitalist development” (Lenin [1960] 1977: 13:314).

From this perspective, Lenin recognized the genuine, revolutionary potential concealed within Sun Yat-sen’s program. He marvelled at this “advanced Chinese democrat” who understood nothing about Russia and yet resembled a Russian in his arguments, having posed “purely Russian questions”: “land nationalization makes it possible to abolish absolute rent, leaving only differential rent. According to Marx’s theory, land nationalization means a maximum elimination of medieval monopolies and medieval relations in agriculture, maximum freedom in buying and selling land, and maximum facilities for agriculture to adapt itself to the market” (Lenin [1960] 1977: 18:168). In contrast, “our vulgar Marxists, however, in criticizing ‘equalized redistribution,’ ‘socialization of the land’, and ‘equal right to the land,’ confine themselves to repudiating the doctrine, and thus reveal their own obtuse doctrinairism,

which prevents them from seeing the vital life of the peasant revolution beneath the lifeless doctrine of Narodnik theory” (Lenin [1960] 1977a: 13:282). Through examining Sun’s revolutionary program against the background of Russia’s specific history, Lenin was able to decide that “the Russian revolution has conclusively proved that it can be victorious only as a peasant agrarian revolution, and that the latter cannot completely fulfil its historical mission unless the land is nationalised” (Lenin [1960] 1977a: 13:425–426). If one were to say that the feature demarcating the “American road” from the “Prussian road” and “English road” consisted in land nationalization, then the “Chinese road” represented a “peasant agrarian revolution” from below.

The transformation of Russia opened up against the background of the Crimean War, the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, and the First World War. Lenin’s understanding of the Russian road of transformation must be linked together with the international relationships produced by European imperialism. If the Russian land problem could only be resolved through nationalization, then what kind of state would be able to assume the heavy task of this transformation? Lenin wrote:

the national state is the rule and “norm” of capitalism; the multi-national state represents backwardness, or is an exception . . . this does not mean, of course, that such a state, which is based on bourgeois relations, can eliminate the exploitation and oppression of nations. It only means that Marxists cannot lose sight of the powerful *economic* factors that give rise to the urge to creation national states. It means that “self-determination of nations” in the Marxists’ Program *cannot*, from a historico-economic point of view, have any other meaning than political self-determination, state independence, and the formation of a national state. (Lenin [1960] 1977: 20:400)

Therefore, when Lenin discussed the “awakening of Asia,” he was primarily concerned not with the problem of socialism but that of national self-determination, a problem of how to create the political premises for capitalist development. There are two points

worth taking note of here. First, “the nation-state” and “multi-national state” (that is, “empire”) constitute a contrast, with the former being the “norm” of capitalism and the latter its opposite. Second, national self-determination is “political self-determination.” In the conditions of Russia and China, the necessary form of “political self-determination” used a socialist form in order to create the political conditions to develop a capitalist economy, this being the political structure for a political nation or nation-state. “Capitalism, having awakened Asia, has called forth national movements everywhere in the continent, too . . . the tendency of these movements is towards the creation of national states in Asia; it is such states that ensure the best conditions for the development of capitalism” (Lenin [1960] 1977: 20:399). Under “specifically Asian” conditions, the premises for capitalist development required undergoing a peasant agrarian revolution and socialist state-building movement. It was therefore necessary to reject all reform programs that opposed peasant liberation and land redistribution. Lenin said: “mankind can achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations...” (Lenin [1960]1977: 22:146);“...national and state distinctions exist among peoples and countries—and these will continue to exist for a very long time to come, even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world-wide scale...” (Lenin [1960]1977: 31:91). This signifies that the national right to self-determination is not only embodied in the demands an oppressed nation makes against its imperial oppressor, but it presents the absolute necessity to achieve equality amongst different peoples, as an integral part of the construction of a new popular state by an oppressed nation.

There is no need to exaggerate the influence of the first Chinese Revolution on the

Russian Revolution. In fact, though we cannot determine any direct influence on Russia's revolution by the first Chinese revolution, we can on the contrary confirm that the 1917 October Revolution, emerging against the background of the European war, had a deep and visible influence on China's socialist revolution. Lenin's stress on the events of the Xinhai Revolution was guided by his long-term considerations around the problem of the state, the socialist movement, and the people's democratic dictatorship.¹⁴ Yet, only very rarely do we take proper consideration of the following two facts. First, the October Revolution took place after the Xinhai Revolution; consequently, the method of using a transformation in the state form to pursue socialist development can, to a very large extent, be seen as a response to Asian (e.g., Xinhai) revolution. From the perspective of socialist movement history, the first modern revolution in China demonstrates that the European socialist movement, which was both anti-capitalist and against the nation-state, began to shift under Asia's social conditions toward a movement for national self-determination. Lenin's theory of the right to national self-determination (1914), and his understanding of the significance of revolution in backwards nations in the epoch of imperialism, were both developed following China's 1911 revolution and had a close theoretical relationship to it. Second: the Russian revolution had a massively shocking and lasting impact on Europe. It can be seen as the historical event that separated Russia and Europe from one another. Lenin's evaluation of revolution did not have a fundamental difference from the narratives of Smith and Hegel concerning Asia; they all

14 As early as 1905, in the midst of the "New *Iskra*" debates, Lenin ([1960] 1977: 9:81) marked a distinction between the concept of "revolutionary communes" and "the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry," denouncing the former as "revolutionary phrase-mongering" and affirming the latter as necessary "to administer (even if provisionally, 'partly, episodically') *all* the affairs of state." One must not mistakenly link the "commune" to a political form. The "provisional revolutionary government" therefore signifies that Lenin was thinking of a new kind of state form.

narrated the history of capitalism as a historical process of turning from the ancient Orient to the modern West, a necessary development from relations of production based on agriculture and hunting to those based on commerce and industry. Yet, for Lenin, this framework of world history came to include a double significance. On the one hand, world capitalism and the 1905 Russian Revolution it triggered were the main forces serving to awaken Asia, the latter having been long stagnant and without history.¹⁵ On the other hand, the Chinese Revolution represented the most advanced forces in world history, and so for socialists it signalled a clear path to breaking up the imperialist world-system.

Among Russian intellectuals and revolutionaries, long-term debates had been underway between Slavophiles and Westernizers.¹⁶ Lenin himself, speaking from the position of a Westernizer, constructed a new logic by posing a dialectical comparison between “advanced Asia” and “backwards Europe,” one of “leaving Europe (imperialist Europe) and entering Asia (the progressive content of revolution in a backwards region).” From the perspective of seeking modernization via capitalist development, this line of “leaving Europe and entering Asia” still existed within the logic of “leaving Asia.” However, given the imperialist war and his recognition of the imperialist epoch, Lenin linked agrarian revolution and national self-determination, two problematics of bourgeois revolution, to anti-imperialism and the historical task of its economic social system. He also connected this to the history of socialism. This new formation alleviated the long-

15 See Lenin’s “The Awakening of Asia” (Lenin [1960]1977: 19: 447-448).

16 The perspectives of Russian intellectuals on Europe and Asia were clearly influenced by contemporary political developments in Western Europe as well as the Enlightenment view of history. Lenin’s usage of Asia as a concept closely linked to absolutism is derived from the political and historical perspectives of contemporary Europe. Concerning the debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers, see Berdyaev 1995: 1-70).

standing divisions surrounding revolutionary character between Lenin and Trotsky.

“In 1905–6 Trotsky had foreseen the combination of anti-feudal and anti-capitalist revolutions in Russia and had described the Russian upheaval as a prelude to international socialist revolution. Lenin had then refused to see in Russia the pioneer of collectivist socialism. He deduced the character and the prospects of the revolution from Russia’s historic stage of development and from her social structure, in which the individualistic peasantry was the largest element. During the war, however, he came to reckon with Socialist revolution in the advanced European countries and to place the Russian Revolution in this international perspective. What now seemed decisive to him was not that Russia was not ripe for socialism, but that she was part of Europe which he thought to be ripe for it. Consequently, he no longer saw any reason why the Russian Revolution should confine itself to its so-called bourgeois objectives. The experience of the February régime further demonstrated to him that it would be impossible to break the power of the landlords without breaking and eventually dispossessing the capitalist class as well; and this meant ‘proletarian dictatorship’.” (Deutscher 2003: 256-257)

The revolutionary situation in Europe provoked by the First World War, together with the behaviour of bourgeois Provisional Government in the wake of the February Revolution, compelled Lenin to change his thinking. His April 1917 “The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution,” also known as the above-cited “April Theses” is the clearest indicator of this. The heart of the socialist program was not a broad demand to reform an agrarian empire into a nation-state; rather, it was the construction of a popular state of a socialist character, or one embarking on a transition to socialism, formed under a trinity of conditions: national independence, national liberation and popular revolution. It was precisely according to this logic that China’s revolution provided a unique path , one which combined a movement for national liberation with socialist method; furthermore, it was a route premised upon the appearance a new form of revolutionary subject. The path I refer to here is that of a peasant-worker alliance in which China’s peasantry was the principle subject and a People's Republic embarking on a transition to socialism.

From the perspective of the revolutionary movement of 1911, and, one might say,

from the perspective of a program that “stands for complete democracy and the demand for a republic,” the republic of the capitalist class and the independent nation-state are the external political form for the development of capitalism, and there are several factors that might impede the formation of this external form: the attempts of imperialism to carve up China, the conservative forces of the Chinese countryside, and the so-called backward north, represented by the Qing court and the Northern military clique. The *backward north* is a term used by Lenin in a judgement about the 1912 conflict between the north and the southern regions of China: “Yüan Shih-k’ai’s [Yuan Shikai’s] parties are based on the backward north of China,” that is, “the capitalists, landlords and bureaucrats of China’s most backward region” (Lenin [1960] 1977 41:281–82). As early as 1912, Lenin predicted that Yuan Shikai would seek to have himself declared Emperor, and he linked this problem to the “problem of the north” faced by the Chinese Revolution. Yet, Lenin’s understanding of the “backward north” was concentrated entirely on class analysis, especially the collective interests represented by Yuan Shikai and his clique; Lenin ignored, however, factors of territory, ethnicity, and religion as they related to “the most backward region,” that is, this region which impeded capitalist development. From the perspective of the theory on the right to national self-determination that Lenin came to develop afterwards, he took the nation-state as the “norm” of capitalism, and he maintained that since the multinational empire impedes capitalist development, this latter political form must be eliminated. Under his leadership, the support given by the Bolsheviks to the independence of Poland and the Ukraine on the basis of the right to national self-determination was an extension of this political logic. But at that time, Europe’s experience with imperial war and Russian’s revolutionary situation provoked

Lenin to give an account of national revolution's new significance: this explanation was not purely from a perspective of promoting capitalist development, it was also from a position that would benefit international revolution in the imperialist epoch. This meant abandoning the question of liberating oppressed nations. This shift from national self-determination to an international socialist alliance was the conclusion compelled by the above-described, two-fold logic.

When Lenin was discussing China's revolution, why did he not only give a high estimation of Sun Yat-sen's program for national construction, but support the demands for the independence of Mongolia, Tibet, and the Muslim areas? Why did he take the "backward north" as a barrier to the revolution? From the perspective of method, Lenin's attitude toward the national question was not an "answer to be sought in legal definitions deduced from all sorts of 'general concepts' of law" but was rather an answer "to be sought in a historico-economic study of the national movements" (Lenin [1960] 1977 20:395). The economic basis of national movements was that "for the complete victory of commodity production, the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, and there must be politically united territories whose population speak a single language, with all obstacles to the development of that language and to its consolidation in literature eliminated" (396). It therefore follows that "the tendency of every national movement is toward the formation of *national states*, under which these requirements of modern capitalism are best satisfied" (396). Having taken this position, Lenin not only rejected the support of Austrian Social-Democrat Otto Bauer for "national-cultural autonomy" but also critiqued the positions put forward by Luxemburg in her opposition to the slogan of Polish independence. Lenin pointed out that the primary mistake of Luxemburg lay in her

having “lost sight of the most important thing—the difference between countries, where bourgeois-democratic reforms have long been completed, and those where they have not” (405). That is to say, following the European democratic revolutions over the period 1789–1871, Western Europe had already “been transformed into a settled system of bourgeois states, which, as a general rule, were nationally uniform states. Therefore, to seek the right to self-determination in the programmes of West-European socialists at this time of day is to betray one’s ignorance of the ABC of Marxism” (405-406).

Unlike the situation in western Europe, the period of bourgeois democratic revolution in eastern Europe and Asian began with the revolution of 1905. Consequently, the series of incidents indicated by the “awakening of Asia” (revolutions in Russia, Persia, Turkey, and China) as well as the Balkan wars all constituted a “chain of events”; the “Eastern Question” that Lenin reflected upon was derived from this chain. In Lenin’s estimation:

Only a blind man could fail to see in this chain of events the awakening of a *whole series* of bourgeois-democratic national movements which strive to create nationally independent and nationally uniform states. It is precisely and solely because Russia and the neighbouring countries are passing through this period that we must have a clause in our programme on the right of nations to self-determination. (406)

For Lenin, the principle of nation was not absolute. The question of whether to support any given movement for national self-determination would be determined by whether separation and independence would be beneficial to capitalist development in backwards regions. At the same time, it also depended upon a given nation’s political and geographical environment. For example, in Austria there was “a striving on the part of the Hungarians and then of the Czechs, not for separation from Austria, but, on the contrary, for the preservation of Austria’s integrity, precisely in order to preserve national

independence, which might have been completely crushed by more rapacious and powerful neighbours! Owing to this peculiar situation, Austria assumed the form of a dual state, and she is now being transformed into a triple state (Germans, Hungarians, Slavs)” (407). In Russia, on the other hand, the “‘subject peoples’ (which, on the whole, comprise the majority of the entire population—57 per cent) inhabit the border regions; secondly, the oppression of these subject peoples is much stronger here than in the neighbouring states (and not even in the European states alone); thirdly, in a number of cases the oppressed nationalities inhabiting the border regions have compatriots across the border, who enjoy greater national independence (suffice it to mention the Finns, the Swedes, the Poles, the Ukrainians and the Romanians along the western and southern frontiers of the state); fourthly, the development of capitalism and the general level of culture are often higher in the non-Russian border regions than in the centre. Lastly, it is in the neighbouring Asian states that we see the beginning of a phase of bourgeois revolutions and national movements which are spreading to some of the kindred nationalities within the borders of Russia” (408).

From the above analyses, we can deduce Lenin’s fundamental position on the question of China’s border regions. First, similar to the regions inhabited by Hungarian and Czech peoples in the Austro-Hungarian empire, movements for independence in China’s border regions would in all likelihood lead to these regions falling into the hands of “more rapacious and powerful neighbours.” We have clearly seen Russia, Japan, Britain, France, and other powers seeking to divide and control China, whether it be from the first Sino-Japanese War (1895) to the interference of Russia, Germany, and France over the ownership of the Liaodong peninsula, or from the joint repression of the Boxer

Uprising to the Russo-Japanese War. Second, not only was the “level of capitalist development and general cultural level” of China’s “central regions” higher than that of the border regions, but “the bourgeois revolution and nationalist movements had already developed.” Preserving the territorial integrity of China would therefore be of benefit to the development of the revolutionary movement (and consequently also to capitalist development). From this perspective, Lenin described Yuan Shikai and the northern regions he allied with as the “backward north,” anticipating the conquest and resolution of a region that hindered the revolution. He never analyzed in depth why China’s radical revolutionaries compromised their revolutionary principles, which was perhaps related to the aforementioned scope of his political-theoretical horizon. The “backward north” compelled the revolutionary party of the south to make compromises, but this in fact demonstrates that China’s revolutionaries could not seek out capitalist development by means of division. The “problem of the north” was a problem for both the Chinese Revolution and China’s development of capitalism.

The “north” of the problem of the north did not only encompass the northeast, Mongolia, and the areas of Huabei under the control of the Beiyang government. It also included intimately related areas of the northwest as well as southwestern regions of Tibet. In other words, the “north” encompassed the four great non-Han ethnic groups conveyed in the concept of the “Republic of Five Nationalities” as well as their areas of activity. Even following the formation of the People’s Republic of China, the process of land reform was carried out far more gradually in the regions of Mongolia, Tibet, and elsewhere. This demonstrates that the relationship between the “problem of the north” and “compromises” taken in the process of revolution persisted over the long term. On

January 1, 1912, Sun Yat-Sen (1981: 2) in his Declaration of the Temporary President of the Republic of China (and Provisional Constitution of the Republic of China) posed the concept of the “Republic of Five Nationalities”

The foundation of the country lies in its people. To unite the lands of the Han, Manchus, Mongols, Uyghurs and Tibetans into one country is to unite the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Uyghur and Tibetan nations into one subject. This is the meaning of national unification.

Compared to his early perspective on the nation, the concept of Five Nationalities under One Union did not limit the republic to a republic of the Han based on the territory of the Ming dynasty; it took instead the Great Empire of the Qing as the expansive and diverse space “marching toward a republic. (2) From this latter perspective, Sun Yat-sen accepted the understanding of China posed by the advocates of Constitutional Monarchy in the late Qing dynasty, but at the same time he also took the Republic as the political replacement for the dynasty. The shift from a “Constitutional Monarchy of Five Nationalities” to a “Republic of Five Nationalities” established the foundation for a modern politics of equality. It also gave rise to the challenge of how to maintain and balance tensions between conservative, politico-religious traditions (i.e., the politico-economic organization of Tibetan religious society) and intense class politics by means of law, systems, and practices. With its establishment in 1921, the Chinese Communist Party, influenced by the Comintern and Soviet Russia, accepted national self-determination and supported the self-governance of Manchurian, Tibetan, and Hui peoples. It also advocated for the establishment of a federal state on the basic premise that it “overturn the oppression of global imperialism and achieve complete independence for the Chinese nation” (“Resolution” 1991, 8). In July of 1922, the Second National Congress of the Communist Party of China approved a clear formulation of this in its “Resolution on

international imperialism, China, and China's Communist Party." Following the Great Revolution's failure in 1927, the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army established Soviet base areas in Jiangxi. During that time, the Chinese Communist party reaffirmed the right to self-determination as part of its constitutional program, with the right to secession being the core content for its principle of national self-determination.¹⁷ However, over the general course of China's modern revolutionary process, the right to national self-determination has been understood as an anti-imperialist demand for independence. This independence was premised on efforts to establish a state of New Democracy embarking on a transition to socialism. Under Party leadership, the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army took advantage of internal divisions amongst the ruling bloc as well as conflicts between representatives of different imperial powers. By doing so, they were able to forcibly establish their own form of Soviet authority in the border regions. Yet the Party never saw itself as a representative for a specific region or group. According to the party blueprint for political power, it was precisely the opposite: China's revolution was always a people's revolution; concurrently, it was also an organic part of the world revolution. The internationalism of the Chinese Revolution and its later advance of the Third World followed and developed along this line. In the vocabulary of modern Chinese politics, national self-determination was always a view of positive

17 The "Fundamental law (constitutional law) of the Chinese Soviet Republic Outline Draft" and "Chinese Soviet Republic Constitutional Law Outline", passed in 1931, clearly acknowledge each ethnic minority's right to succession. On November 7th, 1931 the Chinese Soviet's first meeting of national representatives approved the fourteenth clause of the "Constitution Outline" declaring: "The Chinese Soviet government recognizes the political autonomy of ethnic minorities within China's borders, including the acknowledgement that each vulnerable ethnic minority has the right to succeed from China and form its own independent nation. All Mongolian, Uyghur, Tibetan, Miao, Li, Chosen etc. people residing within Chinese territory have complete rights to self-determination: to either enter or succeed from the Chinese Soviet Federation, or to found their own autonomous region" ("Selection of legal documents" [1931] 1981: 11).

political value (e.g., national liberation), but China's anti-imperial, anti-colonial revolutionary struggle did not demonstrate the problem of national secession; on the contrary, the revolution emphasized the problem of the unity of the oppressed. Even if there was a period that stressed self-autonomy, the unity of the oppressed remained a more fundamental issue.

In this respect, the practice of the Chinese Revolution that followed the Leninist line was precisely a Luxemburgist line without Luxemburg. Yet, with respect to the political and historical content of the Chinese Revolution, the most appropriate explanation is Lenin's "Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions" delivered at the Second Congress of the Communist International ([1960] 1977: 31). The fundamental content of these theses encompassed the following points: after the First World War and the October Revolution, the national question had become a component of the general problem of the world proletarian revolution, and so it was necessary to forge close links with the socialist revolution that had Soviet Russia as its centre; it was necessary to forge proletarian parties, to unite the broad peasant masses and solve the land question; and it was necessary to form an anti-imperialist revolutionary united front with the national bourgeoisie and the democrats while also maintaining the political and organizational independence of the proletariat. Doing so could carry the struggle for national liberation forth to its conclusion. It was this program that provided political direction to the period of cooperation between the Nationalists and Communists. It also provided direction to the People's Revolution (what Mao would refer to as the "New Democratic Revolution") which devoted its efforts to a transition from the 1911 Republican Revolution towards

socialist transformation. Henceforth, agrarian revolution and national revolution would no longer be limited solely to the category of the bourgeois revolution.¹⁸

The Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

The October Revolution created a worker's state under the leadership of the Bolsheviks. In theoretical terms, this state was envisaged by Marx as a transitional form of government, led by the working class and moving towards a classless society— in other words, a *proletarian dictatorship*. The meaning of the proletarian dictatorship principally consisted of the following: the revolution should not simply be a transfer of state power or a dynastic change, but should encompass changes in economic and social relations. This is to say that it should fundamentally transform the logic of the subordination of labor to capital in the sphere of everyday life. From 1917 onwards, however, circumstances surrounding the mission and character of this new political system and state were such that not only did enemies of the revolution launch military and ideological assaults on Bolshevik-led authority, but even amongst Marxists and socialist-

¹⁸ This transition entailed various ideas and undertakings. Views during this period indicated that the transition's political line and its aims involved a high degree of both policy-making and flexibility. Consequently, it also demanded an extraordinary level of theoretical insight and trial-by-error practice in order to avoid mistakes of either dogmatism or empiricism. Any account of China's subsequent land reform or the implementation of ethnic autonomous regions in the latter half of the twentieth century should be situated within this transformation; only then can we understand its political logic, including its successes and failures, contradictions and crises. Further historical evaluation of these issues, however, lies beyond the scope of this article.

democratic parties criticisms and refutations of the revolution reached an extremely sharp degree of intensity. These divisions and debates were mainly present in the European workers' movement as questions developing with particular reference to the experience and theoretical explanations provided by the Paris Commune:

1. The question of the seizure of power: should the proletarian revolution implement social self-governance via a long period of economic transformation, or should it directly exercise authority to manage the state through a violent seizure of political power?

2. The question of democracy and political system: should the socialist state inherit the fruits of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, such as universal suffrage or a system of legislative assemblies? With respect to political form, should the socialist state make use of a federal system with a division of powers, or should it pursue political centralization?

3. The question of class and party dictatorship: is the proletarian dictatorship a dictatorship of a governing party, or of the proletariat as a class? In contemporary re-evaluations of the Russian and Chinese revolution, one can still distinguish the clear lines of this period's intense debates.

4. The question of the transitional period: while the debates surrounding the above questions had an influence in China, it was not a decisive one. As far as socialists in the "Orient" were concerned, the more pressing question was how to transition from state capitalism to a socialist economy. Eastern societies without exception had not yet undergone a thorough process of industrialization, and so the first step of the "socialist revolution" would be to clear away the old rural relationships and carry out land reform

in order to accumulate resources for industrialization. In the processes of industrialization and agricultural modernization, questions like whether to limit or abolish bourgeois legal right, the function of the law of value in a socialist economy, and other such questions surrounding development not only took a key position in the theoretical discourses of the Chinese Communist Party and intellectuals from the late 1950s onwards, but these questions also emerged in different forms through Chinese economic and social practice. This was the thought, debate and practice surrounding the general line during the period of transition.

Revisiting these nearly forgotten debates is not without benefit for the task of re-defining contemporary social struggles. Let us first analyze these debates, however, beginning with critiques posed by the European socialists. Karl Kautsky's critique of the October Revolution concentrated on two questions that would be of the utmost importance for the Chinese Revolution: namely, the question of state sovereignty and the question of the peasantry. He argued that the Russian Revolution was the product of the war and the failure of the Tsarist military system, believing that Russia not only lacked conditions to undertake a socialist revolution, but also that Russian revolutionaries should not seek to establish a proletarian dictatorship by a seizure of power. The revolution should limit itself strictly to the toppling of the Tsarist autocracy, implementing a phase of liberal alliance with the bourgeoisie. The mature social conditions for a revolution like that which Kautsky spoke of comprised two dimensions: the first was a sort of view tinged by Proudhonism, maintaining that the worker's movement should use "quite peaceful methods were to be employed to free the working classes, namely, builds, banks

of exchange, a mutual system of insurance” ([1920] 1973: 81); the other dimension was that the working class could only take power after having passed through a stage of self-cultivation such as to become spiritually developed. He accepted Engels' praise of the Paris Commune as an example of proletarian dictatorship, but drew on the formulation of Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray to demonstrate that “People have said that the Commune was a Government of the working classes. That is a great mistake. The working classes took part in the struggle, in the administration, and their breath alone made the movement great; but they were very little engaged in actual government.” ([1920] 1973: 84) In Kautsky's view, the victory of the October Revolution and the failure of the Paris Commune were simply because the former gained the support of the peasants, whereas the latter had no way of forming links with the peasantry:

The peasantry, and along with it the armed rising in Russia, all went to the side of the revolutionaries, who were in power in the capital. This gave their regime a force and permanent character, which was denied the Paris regime. On the other hand, it brought about an economic reactionary element from which the Paris Commune was saved. The Paris Dictatorship of the Proletariat was never founded on Peasants' Councils as was the case in Russia. ([1920] 1973: 66)

Unlike Rosa Luxemburg, Kautsky did not focus the brunt of his critique on the question of national self-determination; instead, he took “local self-government” (enjoying the right to independent government, the right to restrictions on national government officials, the formation of a citizen's militia to replace a standing army and so on, within a framework demarcated under a national democratic system) and counter-posed said “local self government” to the fact that “out of the absolute authority of the Workmen's Council there developed the absolute authority of a new class of governors.” He argued that under this new kind of dictatorial power, “The absolutism of the old bureaucracy has

come again to life in a new but, as we have seen, by no means improved form; and also alongside of this absolutism are being formed the seeds of a new capitalism, which is responsible for direct criminal practices, and which in reality stands on a much lower level than the industrial capitalism of former days” ([1920] 1973: 201).

Rosa Luxemburg criticized Kautsky's position, arguing that the Russian Revolution “is a product of international developments plus the land question” ([1961] 1972: 27). She clearly understood that there was a two-sided connection between the Revolution of 1917 and the First World War on the one hand and the 1905 Revolution on the other, the former proving that it was “the very first experiment in proletarian dictatorship in world history (and one taking place at that under the hardest conceivable conditions, in the midst of the world-wide conflagration and chaos of the imperialist mass slaughter, caught in the coils of the most reactionary military power in Europe, and accompanied by the most completest failure on the part of the international working class)” (28), and the latter showing that the main force of the revolution was not only the urban working class, but that “the revolution embraced the mass of the army, which raised the same demand for immediate peace, and the mass of the peasants, who pushed the agrarian question into the foreground, that agrarian question which since 1905 had been the very axis of the revolution” (31-2). Precisely because of this latter point, Luxemburg believed that although “the direct, immediate seizure and distribution of the land by the peasants” was an effective policy for strengthening the socialist government, its negative side lay in the fact that “the direct seizure of the land by the peasants has in general nothing at all in common with socialist economy” (41). The bifurcation of industry and agriculture was a specific feature of capitalism, and the land reform introduced by the Russian Revolution

would ultimately create “a new and powerful layer of popular enemies of socialism on the countryside, enemies whose resistance will be much more dangerous and stubborn than that of the noble large landowners.” (46).

Beyond her critiques of the Bolshevik land policy and policy of national self-determination, Luxemburg shared with other members of social-democratic parties the criticism that the Bolsheviks lacked an understanding of and respect for democracy:

They showed a quite cool contempt for the Constituent Assembly, universal suffrage, freedom of press and assemblage, in short, for the whole apparatus of the basic democratic liberties of the people which, taken all together, constituted the 'right of self-determination' inside Russia,” “the democratic forms of political life in each land, as we shall see, actually involve the most valuable and even indispensable foundations of socialist policy, whereas the famous 'right of self-determination of nations' is nothing but hollow, petty-bourgeois phraseology and humbug” (48-9).

Luxemburg argued that Lenin, Trotsky, and other Bolsheviks committed from the left the same error that Kautsky had committed from the right, namely the separation of democracy and dictatorship: “Lenin says: the bourgeois state is an instrument of oppression of the working class; the socialist state, of the bourgeoisie...This simplified view misses the most essential thing: bourgeois class rule has no need of the political training and education of the entire mass of the people...But for the proletarian dictatorship that is the life element, the very air without which it is not able to exist” (68). The key forms of this training and education were general elections, freedom of press and assembly, and a freedom to exchange views; without these conditions, the Soviets were “a dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the

rule of the Jacobins,” “Yes, we can go even further: such conditions must inevitably cause a brutalization of public life: attempted assassinations, shooting of hostages, etc.” (72). This judgement was thereafter extended to argue that the proletarian dictatorship was no longer the dictatorship of a class, but rather the dictatorship of a governing party or a small minority of leaders over a class.

How one should go about understanding the theories of Marxism concerning proletarian revolution and proletarian dictatorship, as well as the practice of proletarian revolution? Should one proceed from texts or pursue a summation of concrete experience? This is a question of historical perspective as well as methodology. As early as 1956, Mao Zedong and the central leadership pointed out that:

...with the exception of the Paris Commune which lasted only 72 days, Marx and Engels did not live to see for themselves the realization of the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat for which they had striven throughout their lives. In 1917, led by Lenin and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Russian proletariat carried the proletarian revolution to victory and established the dictatorship of the proletariat; it then successfully built up a socialist society. From this time on, scientific socialism was transformed from a theory and ideal into a living reality. And so, the Russian October Revolution of 1917 ushered in a new era, not only in the history of the communist movement but also in the history of mankind. (People’s Daily Editorial Committee 1959: 26)

The core idea of this theory is in fact a demand to proceed from the concrete practice of proletarian dictatorship, to ponder and examine its experience and lessons from within this practice.

From the perspective of the experience of the European workers' movement and the Paris Commune, the proletarian dictatorship was a new system of democracy which should be founded on the basis of active participation by members of each class. This kind of democracy integrates the entirely new relations of production together with some

forms of universal suffrage, and transcends the distinction between the legislative apparatus and the administrative apparatus by means of direct democracy. Marx said that “The direct antithesis to the empire was the Commune. The cry of 'social republic,' with which the February Revolution was ushered in by the Paris proletariat, did but express a vague aspiration after a republic that was not only to supercede the monarchical form of class rule, but class rule itself. The Commune was the positive form of that republic” (Marx [1871] 1977: 69-70). “Do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.” (Engels [1891] 1977: 18). The principles adopted by the Paris Commune simply consisted of a few simple measures: the use of representatives selected by general election to replace the previous bureaucratic officials; paying those representatives according to an average worker’s wage; the possibility of recall at any time; the abolition of the standing army and so on. In Marx's view, these measures signified the fundamental transformation of the state machine. They not only “made that catchword of bourgeois revolutions – cheap government – a reality” but also “supplied the republic with the basis of really democratic institutions” (74). The Paris Commune was, on the one hand “essentially a working class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor” but on the other also went beyond its own historical limits in becoming a political form entirely different from “a state in the proper sense of the word”, a real form of social self-government (74). This is also the basic yardstick which people use to think about the Chinese and Russian Revolutions today.

But when the German Social Democratic Party gained power in the national assembly, Engels abandoned intentions to achieve “the dictatorship of the proletariat”. From that point onwards the struggle of socialist political parties under European social conditions accepted the bourgeois state form and its entire systemic framework, precisely those things that had been firmly rejected by the Commune. In *Evolutionary Socialism*, published in 1899, Bernstein argued that the bourgeois state had undergone a series of changes, including the appearance of the social republic with its class compromises, or the early form of the welfare state. This “revisionist” theory of the state was premised on a change in class relations, wherein capitalists and workers could share in an enterprise’s profits and therefore did not need to pursue an antagonistic class struggle. It was Lenin and his Chinese followers who revived the concept of “proletarian dictatorship”. As early as 1905, in the midst of the “New Iskra” debates, Lenin marked a distinction between the concept of “revolutionary communes” and “the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry,” denouncing the former as “revolutionary phrase-mongering”, while taking the latter, along with the “provisional revolutionary government” as inevitably having “to administer (even if provisionally, ‘partly, episodically’) *all* the affairs of state,” and as such should absolutely not be related to the political form erroneously termed a “commune” (Lenin 1977 [1960]; 9:81). Lenin’s views are thus distinct from those of Marx, who repeatedly emphasized an antithesis between the Commune and “all the affairs of state.” After Russia’s October Revolution, the practice of proletarian dictatorship underwent two major transformations: the first was a transformation from a state permitting multiparty cooperation and implementation of a united executive government to one establishing a different form, in which “the

Communist Party is the sole, legitimate political party”. In other words, it became a politics of single-party dictatorship. Second was a transformation of the worker-peasant alliance from the political structure’s foundation into the party-state’s framework, the power structure by which it would implement all affairs of the state. As such, the proletarian dictatorship changed from a sort of political form entirely distinct from “a state in the proper sense of the word”, from a real form of self-government and participatory mode of democracy, into a state structure with a monopoly on the use of violence and a high concentration of power.

With respect to the Chinese Revolution, the Paris Commune provides a model for reflecting upon political life within a socialist state; and yet, if one proceeds to measure the practice of proletarian dictatorship only by drawing from that brief experience, then it is difficult to develop an understanding of revolution from the internal logic of its concrete, historical conditions. Maurice Meisner has pointed out a fundamental feature of Chinese society, namely the weakness of its social classes: “[there existed in China] a weak bourgeoisie and an even weaker proletariat. But it was not only the modern classes who were puny; the modern Chinese historical situation was marked by the weakness of all social classes. For the emergence of the bourgeoisie and proletariat, both of which remained embryonic, was accompanied by a decline in the power and prestige of the traditional ruling gentry-landlord class. While imperialism undermined the foundations of the imperial bureaucratic state with which the gentry was so closely intertwined, gentry-landlord proprietors found it more profitable to continue to exploit peasants in the tradition parasitic fashion – and the fashion become increasingly parasitic as traditional opportunities for bureaucratically obtained wealth (and traditional bureaucratic and

Confucian moral checks on exploitation) declined along with the disintegration of the old political order” (Meisner [1977] 1999: 6). Along with the specificities of this social structure, there was an increasing trend toward the bifurcation between political and military power on the one hand and economic and social power on the other (7). This was fundamentally different from the protracted process by which new social classes had emerged in Europe.

As a result, the basic route for the Chinese revolution became the use of active methods like high-level organization and politicization in order to transform formerly weak levels of society into radically new subjects, far exceeding their structural weakness. The fundamental conditions for this kind of transformation included the following elements: a political party that had the conquest of power as its ultimate goal, a social movement that produced new kinds of revolutionary classes through the struggle for land revolution, a political-military force that was capable of organizing the key elements of these struggles, and a global perspective that was capable of linking the struggle to destroy feudal social relations inside China together with the global anti-colonial struggle.

When considering the historical experience of proletarian dictatorship in China, it is necessary to think through the following historical characteristics: first of all, the Chinese Revolution took place in a society where there was some level of industry but which was still fundamentally an agrarian society. China's earliest industrial workers were the product of colonial economic invasion following the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing (in 1842). These workers were initially concentrated in ship manufacture and freight, subsequently expanding to other sectors. On the eve of the First Sino-Japanese War, there were approximately 100 foreign enterprises, with a total of around 34,000 workers. In the

period of the Self-Strengthening Movement,¹⁹ there were approximately more than forty enterprises run by the state or co-run between the state and merchants, and their employees totalled around 40,000 workers. Beginning in the 1870s, Chinese domestic capital showed some degree of development, but its scale remained comparatively small, such that, up to 1894, there were altogether approximately just over 100 enterprises, which employed between 27,000 and 30,000 workers. There were altogether around 100,000 workers [across different enterprises] during this period (Sun 1957: 2:1174-1201) (Liu, Tang 2002: 1:1-3, 109). From the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki²⁰ up to the outbreak of the First World War, the scale and speed of the entry of foreign capital into China dramatically increased. The role of foreign capital in railroad infrastructure, monopolization of mining and the establishment of factories continued to expand, such that the distance of railroad directly or indirectly related to foreign investment reached 10944 kilometers, there were 29 new-style mines developed in accordance with European methods and 166 factories. In addition, there were also 14 new freight companies which opened during this period. There was also a relatively large development of national industry, including 549 factories and mines with capital investment exceeding 10,000 yuan, of which textile, foodstuffs and mining were especially prominent. Industries also included machine manufacture, plumbing and electricity, cement, and freight. Up to 1913, there were between 500,000 and 600,000 workers employed across domestic and foreign enterprises (Wang 1957: 2:38-9) (Liu, Tang 2002: 1:4, 109). During the First World War, there was a reduction in the export of commodities and capital from the imperialist countries, and Chinese national industry seized this as an opportunity to develop.

¹⁹ Please see suggested translators' note at end of this document

²⁰ Please see suggested translators' note at end of this document

Whereas there had been a total of 698 factories before the war, with a capitalization of more than 303,000,000 yuan, by 1920 the number of factories had expanded to 1759, with a total capitalization of more than 500,000,000. According to incomplete statistics, by 1919 there were around 2,610,000 workers employed in industrial production, amongst whom there were 165,000 railroad workers, 30,000 telecommunications worker, 150,000 sailors, 30,000 automobile and tram factory workers, 300,000 freight workers, 600,000 factory workers employed in Chinese factories, 235,000 workers employed in factories with foreign investment, 700,000 mine workers, and 400,000 construction workers (Liu, Tang 2002: 1:5, 138-41). A large section of the Chinese working class was comprised of bankrupt peasants and handicraft workers, with the most specialized being the masses of sailors. China's earliest workers' movement began amongst them.

During the First World War, there were waves of strikes and other forms of struggle, swiftly turning the economic struggle into a political one. There were three basic conditions behind this rapid shift: first of all, the birth of European capitalism was a long process of formation, and even whilst formal democracy could not guarantee the political and economic equality of the working class, it did provide the working class with channels by which to pursue their struggle via state and legal frameworks. The Chinese working class, by contrast, faced with the arbitrary repression of the factory bosses and the police, and had almost no political power or legal protection. From the beginning, the struggles of the Chinese working class had the dual character of being both a class struggle and a national struggle. From another perspective, this proves that the struggles of nations oppressed by imperialism have a class character, and it accounts for why the question of political sovereignty would become a core question for the revolution.

Secondly, after the October Revolution, owing to the organization of the Communist Party and the spur given to the workers' and peasants' movement by the First United Front, organized under the influence of the Comintern, the urban working class came to exhibit new political characteristics. This made Trotsky and other Russian revolutionaries who had previously disregarded the potential and possibility of the Chinese Revolution aware of important elements in China that were similar to the Russian Revolution. The similarity of these elements was real, but it was a mistake to place hopes for a Chinese Revolution on these similarities. Although the Chinese Revolution had a close link with the strength of the urban proletariat, it fundamentally had the peasant masses as its base. A key premise for the peasant masses becoming the main military force of the Chinese Revolution was the transformation of the Communist Party from being an organization that took the city as its primary locus to being one that took work in the countryside as its key focus. Thirdly, because of the weakness of social classes in China, the bourgeoisie and the landlord class had no means by which to grasp the economic lifelines in order to lead social changes; quite the contrary, they entered into alliances with the state and the forces of imperialism as well as other military forces in order to seek advantage and project their own interests. As a result, the problem of political sovereignty, or one might say the problem of capturing political power, would necessarily become a key problem for the Chinese Revolution.

In the second place, under conditions of oppression, massacre, and expulsion driven by various forces of counter-revolution, the main pillar of red political power was the military forces of the Soviet Central Base or its localities. Consequently, the struggle that opened up around the seizure of political power in the Chinese Revolution could only

take armed struggle for power as its principal form. The People's Democratic Dictatorship in China was in actual fact born at the time when the organization of the party and the rural movements forged close links with one another; which is to say that it came into being after 1928, during a long period of People's War. There are several facts warranting attention here: *firstly*, the failure of the Great Revolution in 1928 signified the forcible disruption or transformation of the early period of relations between the Chinese Communist Party and the urban working class. From this point onwards, the revolutionary forces gradually transitioned towards rural society (even in 1957, after the formation of the People's Republic in China, the proportion of urban party membership was only at 14%) (Meisner [1977] 1999: 74). As a consequence, the Communist Party had to search for a new formation of revolutionary forces principally constituted by peasant masses. It would have to complete the mission of socialist revolution in conditions where the urban working class was relatively marginalized. This was fundamentally different from the situation of the socialist movement in Europe. *Secondly*, even though the Chinese Communist Party often made use of the concept of class in order to pursue its social analysis, the meaning embodied by this concept was primarily a political one. In 1931, the Chinese Soviet government defined itself in the program of basic law (the constitution) as “a state of the working class and the peasant masses”, and declared that “the Soviet government will fundamentally support the interests of the workers, carry out the land revolution, destroy all feudal remnants, confiscate the land of the landlord class, abolish all feudal-style capitalist levies and taxes, implement the principle of unified and progressive taxation, with taxes completely decided upon by the workers' peasants' soldiers' councils (the Soviets). Only in this way will it be possible for

the peasant masses to gain land under the leadership of the proletariat” (Chinese Communist Party [1931] 1981a: 6). Even with this appeal to “the interests of the workers”, the focal point of this text is how the peasant masses can gain land under “proletarian” (Soviet) leadership. The Chinese Revolution and its pursuit of socialism was initially expressed in the sphere of political structure, political subjects, and political concepts; only later did it express itself in transformations of the economic level and state of production.

Thirdly, without Soviet political power it would have been impossible to describe this revolution, which had few direct links with the working class and took the form of a land revolution, as being a revolution “under proletarian leadership”. The Soviet Republic was formed in November, 1931 in Ruijin, Jiangxi and although it only existed for three years, it succeeded in establishing a functional and effective government and a Red Army of 300,000 soldiers, as well as establishing rule over a population reaching 6,000,000. The first article of the Draft Program of the Basic Law (Constitution) of the Chinese Soviet Republic pointed out that “the aim of our revolutionary war is to topple the rule of the imperialists, the Kuomintang and the militarists, and to establish the political power of the masses of workers and peasants throughout the country” Chinese Communist Party ([1931] 1981a: 2). The Central Soviet of the Jiangxi Soviet District was not only a dress rehearsal for the Yan'an era, but was also preparation for the movement to found the new state in 1949. From these experiences, it initiated a model of coordination between the Chinese communist movement and the movement to found the state. The first article of the Constitutional Program of the Chinese Soviet Republic (passed at the occasion of the first national congress of the Chinese Soviet on the 7th November, 1931) pointed out that

“the task of the basic law (constitution) of the Chinese Soviet Republic is to ensure that the political power of the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants in the Soviet areas obtains victory throughout the whole of China. The aim of this dictatorship is to extinguish all feudal remnants, to chase the forces of the imperialist powers out of China, to unify China, to systemically control the development of capitalism, implement national economic construction, to raise the level of unity and consciousness of the proletariat, and to unify the broad poor peasant masses around the proletariat, in order to transition towards proletarian dictatorship”. The Chinese Revolution thereby became a protracted process of building political power, a process of transition from “the state of democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants” towards a proletarian dictatorship encompassing the whole country (Chinese Communist Party [1931] 1981b: 8).

Fourthly, this process of constructing political power was linked with People's War from beginning to end. People's War is not a purely military concept, but is rather a political category, it is a process of creating new political subjects, and is also a process of creating political structures and forms of self-expression that are adequate to this political subject. If one says that land revolution was the primary content of the Chinese Revolution and a precondition for industrialization, then the completion of this task was made possible by People's War. In fact, before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party and its local organs of political power had already completed land reform in twenty percent of the country. In the three short years after the party gained national political power, the landlord class that embodied a long tradition and had an expansive base of social and political power was thoroughly eliminated. This point is of fundamental importance in understanding the character of the

early Soviet government and its relations with party and class. Over the course of the People's War, experience in the base areas transformed the very character of representation for the modern political party. The birth of the subject of the People, which had the peasantry as its primary content and took the external political form of the worker-peasant alliance, spurred the emergence or transformation of all political forms (including the border region governments, the political party, the peasants' and workers' Soviets and so on). During the course of People's War, the party merged with the army and red political power, it amalgamated with the peasant masses as a result of land reform, and witnessed a transformation of the relationships between the party and other political parties as well as with other social layers and their political representatives. This should all remind us that People's War created a model of political power radically different from previous political parties in history, and it created a class subject that had the peasantry as its primary component and was radically different from all proletariats existing in history.

In the base areas, land reform and armed struggle became the basic methods by which the politics of the political party transformed into mass movements. The central question of the struggle in Jinggangshan and therefore of the Yan'an era became one of land reform and the construction of political power under conditions of revolutionary and national war. The amalgamation of party and military, the merging of the party with the peasant movements and land reform through the military, the management of economic life by the party and the Soviet area governments under its leadership, and the cultural movements that were initiated by the party in its mass work not only transformed the specific content of the revolution and its central task, but also, by means of the multivalent amalgamation of the party, military, political power, and peasant movements,

created a radically new, revolutionary political subject. This was the political foundation of People's War. Mao Zedong said that the popular militia was the basis of victory, and this proposition encompasses the general principles of People's War: firstly, that only by mobilizing and relying on the masses is it possible to carry out the war; secondly, not only should there be a strong, regular military, but there also needs to be armed detachments and a popular militia in the localities; thirdly, the category of the popular militia signified a political process that has close links with military struggle, and which has land reform and the construction of political power as its core. One of the key achievements of the People's War was the formation of an autonomous, red political power. The key political form of red political power was the border government or the border Soviet. The border government was the organizational form of everyday life, and so drew on the historical state experience of China and elsewhere, but this political form was not equivalent to the capitalist state in its general sense, and there is no way to pursue a definition with reference to the model of relations between the state and bourgeois society in Europe. In a context of enduring political and military mobilization, the border government was the political form which secured a conscious class.

Under the conditions of People's War, the Chinese Communist Party and the base area governments did not simply concern themselves with purely military problems, but their concerns also extended to the question of the organization of everyday life. This gave rise to the question of the mass line of the party and the government, the main content of which was as follows: firstly, pursuing the interests of the broad masses should be the point of departure and return for party work. Secondly, the border region government was charged with organizing the life of the masses. It was only by exerting

all efforts in seeking to resolve the problems of the masses, doing the utmost to improve the lives of the masses, and gaining the masses' trust in the border government that it would be possible to mobilize the masses to join the Red Army, to assist the war, and break the Nationalist encirclement. As a result, People's War was not only a method of using military struggle to effectively defeat the enemy, but also required that one deal with all those key problems that constitute the content of the life of the People, such as land, labour, access to basic necessities like firewood, rice, oil and salt, the question of women, schools, farmers' markets and trade, even currency and finance. The transformation and inter-penetration of military affairs and everyday life became the core question of People's War.

The mass line was the fundamental strategy of People's War. The mass line was the party policy as well as a method for the re-construction of the party: in one respect, if there is no organization, then we have no way of knowing where the masses are; in another respect, if one does not fuse together with the masses, and if there is no process of learning from the masses, then the organization will cease to be alive and will become a structure bearing down over the masses. In the expanse of not-yet industrialized villages, the party that had the peasants as its subject secured political expression through movements. It is in this sense that, under the conditions of People's War, the party and its mass line created the self-expression of a class, and in doing so also created a class in the political sense. Compared to political phenomena like the party, the party-state, the Soviet government, etc., which all arose from 19th-century Europe and 20th-century Russia, the People's War was the Chinese Revolution's own, far more original invention..

In this sense, if one does not understand People's War, then one cannot appreciate the unique character of the Chinese Revolution, nor can one understand the fundamental difference between the “construction of the party” in the Chinese Revolution versus previous party-states, and nor can one understand the historical content of the mass line, the United Front, and other unique political concepts that were produced in 20th-century China. If one were to make a comparison between the concrete practice of the People's Democratic Dictatorship under conditions of People's War on the one hand and the Paris Commune and October Revolution on the other, then what might we discover? In the first place, the Paris Commune and the October Revolution took place in the economic and political centres of Russia and France, whereas the practice of People's Democratic Dictatorship under conditions of People's War emerged in remote villages far removed from the centres of power. Kautsky once observed the following:

...the present German Revolution has no centre, whereas the French Revolution was controlled from Paris. That Revolution, as well as the Regiment of Terror that operated within it, are quite incapable of comprehension, without a consideration of the economic and political importance which Paris had acquired for France as a whole. No town in the 18th, or indeed the 19th century has exercised such power as did Paris at that period. This was due to the importance which the royal residence as being the central Government possesses in a modern bureaucratic centralised State, so long as economic decentralisation, which modern industrial capitalism and the development of means of transport bring in its train, has not set in. ([1920] 1973: 3)

The conditions in Russia were also similar. For any successful armed uprising launched in a central location, the key task must be the formation of a revolutionary state authority by relying on the central location of the capital and then ensuring the prolongation of that state authority. In the context of China's People's War, however, owing to the distance from the capital, there did not exist the conditions for the rapid formation of a structure of

national political power. Instead, the Soviet Base areas under red control fought for the protracted and ongoing formation of the revolutionary subject under conditions of protracted struggle.

Moreover, the Paris Commune was constituted exclusively by urban residents – the urban working class, handicraft worker, and the lower levels of the urban populace. Although the October Revolution secured the support of the peasants, in the same way it was also principally composed of the working class and soldiers. The People's War in China, on the other hand, had as its main subjects the peasantry and armed detachments that were primarily formed from the peasantry. The relationship between the Chinese Revolution and the peasantry had already been a site of discussion for an earlier generation of revolutionaries in China, before the October Revolution. For example, in 1908, the Chinese Anarchist Liu Shipei ([1908] 2016: 685) published his text “Anarchist Revolution and Peasant Revolution” in the journal *Hengbao*, in which he pointed out that the majority of capitalists in China were landowners, the vast number of Chinese people were peasants, and the finances of the Chinese government relied upon land rent, such that “if you would carry out anarchist revolution, then this revolution must begin from the peasants. This peasant revolution will struggle against taxation and defy all laws, and so oppose the state and the landlords. If you seek the common ownership of all property, then you must begin from the common ownership of land as the basis, with the land here meaning the fields. Only when the peasantry works the land as their common property, will we be able to take all property as our commonwealth”. Liu Shipei saw amongst the peasants a potential for unity and resistance that was commonly overlooked, especially the possible link between the peasantry and the communist system of common ownership.

In this respect, it cannot be denied that he possessed great foresight. Yet the Chinese Revolution in 1911 did not succeed in grasping this possibility, so it ended in failure.

Were it not for the October Revolution and the experience gained by the Chinese Communist Party while undertaking the workers' and peasants' movements during the Great Revolution, as well as the subsequent experience of entering the villages to pursue guerrilla warfare, then it would have been very difficult for the peasantry to assume the mission of proletarian revolution. Liu Shipei posed his views on peasant revolution from the perspective of economic structure and class relationships, but he actually applied methods of analyzing the class relationships of European industrial society to an agrarian society, analyzing its population, state finances, and rights of property ownership. At the same time as he correctly pointed out the hidden potential for a peasant revolution, he also mistakenly believed that this potential would naturally or spontaneously emerge from the economic structure or class relationships. The Chinese Revolution after 1928 also appropriated European methods of class analysis, but this revolution emphasized the political formation of the peasantry as a revolutionary force. Consequently, the revolutionary party did not take the common ownership of property as its path, but instead raised the slogan of "land to the tiller!" so that the poor peasants might change from being rural proletarians into owners of the land, and it was this process of land redistribution that enabled political mobilization. A broad layer of peasants who had been transformed into petty-bourgeois producers through land reform under conditions of People's War would thereby be impelled to achieve "proletarianization" in the sphere of politics. The tension between the economic position of the peasantry and their revolutionary political consciousness would produce a unique political landscape

constituted by a political proletariat: the land reform that had been so decried by Luxemburg would precisely become the decisive political moment through which the peasants would undergo political mobilization, participate in the construction of Soviet political power, learn self-management and form organizations under the guidance of the party

The capacity of the peasantry to act as a proletariat was not only the consequence of a subjective political course, this proposition in itself was also a product of the international division of labor in the epoch of imperialism. Just as with the proposition that a nation could function as an oppressed class, the peasantry of the Chinese Revolution was a product of the imperialism of the twentieth century and its proxy wars, and not a direct consequence of class struggle in the European context. War is an affair of violence, but People's War was also a practical process of training and educating the people, forging an organic relationship between the people and the party. The literacy movement, production cooperatives, social organization, respect for women, autonomy in marriage, hygienic habits, relations between villages, relations with cadres - all of these quotidian forms of new collective life and values gradually developed during the course of war and land reform, slowly percolating into people's everyday life and political consciousness. The Chinese Revolution had to transform the peasantry into the subject of the revolutionary people, and this historical destiny signifies that the revolution could not naturally and spontaneously develop from the class characteristics and demands of the working class and the peasantry, but had to pass through military struggle, political struggle, the struggle for production, as well as a struggle in life in order to transform the

class characteristics and demands of its participants. This was a historical process involving a high degree of politicization.

This being so, how should we evaluate the “People's Democratic Dictatorship” that was formed through the land revolution in China? Can we replicate Luxemburg's position, and believe that this dictatorship was not a dictatorship exercised by the people or by a class, but was a dictatorship of a party, or even by the leader of a minority party? The path to correctly answering this question must return to the internal logic of the category of People's War in order to understand the transformation of the party and the ongoing, generative process by which the People was emerging into political subjecthood. It is precisely in the mutual interpretation of People's War, land revolution, and the nation-building movement that the party itself transformed from being a political organization of urban elites and the urban working class into a movement that had a high degree of organization. This movement permeated the entirety of the countryside's organic fabric, a fabric possessing an expansive mass base unifying different social layers. I term this party, having been formed through People's War, a “super-party”, possessing key elements superseding the logic of a political party. By these “key elements superseding the logic of a political party”, I mean the mutual amalgamation of the Communist Party and mass movements, the movement to build the country, the military struggle, the struggle for production, and the mass line of “going from the masses to the masses”. It was these elements that made the Chinese Communist Party not simply a vanguard party, but also a mass movement itself. By a “super-party”, I mean that this party was not prepared to share political power with other parties within a constitutional framework, but rather

through its own mass character came to organically constitute its “democratic dictatorship”.

The political concept of the “People” must also be understood by connecting it to the People’s War. Even whilst the Chinese Communist Party habitually uses the Marxist language of class in order to summarize the People or the Chinese People in terms of several basic categories, such as the working class, the peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie, yet what the concept of the “People” indicates in the course of the People’s War is in fact precisely the process of the political formation of the People itself. The members of different social strata have the potential under conditions of People’s War to become a member of the People or allies of the People. For example, in the national war, even the landlord class which served as the target of the land revolution could also become part of the united battle front. One of the origins of this unique and flexible method of class analysis was the analysis posed by the Russian Revolution concerning the epoch of imperialism and its political state of affairs. If the liberation struggles of the oppressed nations can be understood as a form of class struggle in the imperialist epoch, then with the exception of a small minority of rulers, which members of Chinese society would not be eligible for inclusion in the category of the “People”?

Marx himself interpreted proletarian dictatorship as a state of war in the revolutionary struggle between proletarian and bourgeoisie, but he never imagined that this state of war would adopt a form that relied on the countryside to pursue a People’s War. The violent form of military struggle, the uneven ratio of forces between the revolution and its enemies, the sharpening of relations between the interior and exterior (the revolution and its enemies) under conditions of war, meant that this “People’s

Democratic Dictatorship” possessed a broad social base but was also founded on a clear distinction between ourselves and the enemy. Even if boundaries themselves possess the potential for transformation and movement, the oppression exercised towards the enemies of the dictatorship was from beginning to end a fundamental feature of this political form. Mao never shied away from recognizing the dictatorial character of revolutionary politics, nor did he hide the fact that revolution is a violent process; he simply emphasized that revolutionary dictatorship is the political form of People's Democracy. In an atmosphere of struggle between life and death, if one simply denies the violent character of revolution, or if one seeks to negate the whole revolutionary process by refuting revolutionary violence, then there is almost no way to undertake a political analysis of the history of the twentieth century.

It is precisely in this respect that Luxemburg's method of criticism towards the October Revolution has a quality of inspiration, such that when considering the internal contradictions and crises of revolution, one must take the revolution's strategy and tactics into account together with the concrete state of affairs in order to investigate the revolution's mistakes, in lieu of of relying on abstract principles of freedom and human rights to carry out a categorical condemnation of the revolution. Subsequent to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and following the Chinese Communist Party assuming total management of all state affairs, actions to “suppress counter-revolution” were organized and regularized. As far as the total death toll of the land reform and the campaign to suppress counter-revolutionaries in the early years of the People's Republic, even today there are no complete statistics, but we can assume that the scale was very large indeed. The limitation and over-extension of the concept of class, the

level of training and education amongst the soldiers and cadres of the Red Army, a severe lack of effective means of communication and transportation., the militarist style of work and factionalism that grew out of direct amalgamation of intra-party struggle and military power – all of these factors meant that the dictatorial state apparatus constantly directed the brunt of struggle against its own components and members. The policy of purges in the Soviet Union of the 1930s had a direct influence on the Chinese Communist Party; in addition, the party was operating in an environment of arduous struggle, lacking a tradition of law and a strict system of democratic supervision inside the party. These factors resulted in the early Red Army and Communist Party organization committing grave political mistakes, and gave rise to tragedies in which the party killed its own comrades (amongst these varied tragedies, the most famous and terrible was the movement initiated to repress the “anti-Bolshevik Clique” in the Jiangxi Soviet base in 1930-31, the 1931 movement in the Minxi base area to extinguish the “Social Democratic Party”, and the whole purge movement extending up to 1935). In Yan'an the Communist Party made a thorough resolution regarding these experiences, seeking to perfect the system in order to reduce mistaken accusations. But whether in the Yan'an period or following the founding of New China, mistaken accusations continued to multiply as the result of intra-party struggle and conditions that over-extended concepts of class: in the 1950s, the case of the Hu Feng Counter-Revolutionary Clique; the Anti-Party Clique of Gao Gang and Rao Shushi; the expansion of the Anti-Rightist Campaign; the Anti-Party Clique of Peng Dehuai, Huang Kecheng, Zhang Wentian, and Zhou Xiaozhou; and then in the 1960s, the overthrow of Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and Tao Zhu; as well as the mistaken accusations that were committed subsequently at different levels across the

whole country. If one considers similar incidents that happened in different localities, then the cases would be too numerous to mention.

There were serious divergences of political line amidst these intense political movements. There also existed the possibility of using the struggle of ideas, organizational construction, or “cultural revolution” and non-violent revolution to carry out struggle and dialogue. In other words, there was a legitimacy to the struggle of ideas and line struggle. Without understanding these theoretical debates, examinations of practice, and line struggle, it is impossible to understand the numerous historical transformations of the Chinese Communist Party. We therefore cannot interpret the aforementioned tragedies that took place in the course of these theoretical debates and line struggles as a negation of the debates and struggles themselves. From beginning to end, the twentieth century Chinese Revolution revolved around the problem of political power, such that even after the revolution’s success, contradictions and struggles within the socialist system often accompanied the question of seizing power. Determining whether this was a necessity of circumstance or a tactical mistake requires a cautious analysis, but in the key historical junctures described above – namely, the ossification of the concept of class and the Bolshevik tradition which Luxemburg had criticized for its disregard of democratic forms – the possibility of resolving contradictions among the People as a method for also resolving political differences among the party was either partly or totally lost. If one says that, in the context of People's War, the flexible use of the concept of class stimulated political life in the vast countryside and the liberation movement of an oppressed nation, then the subsequent ossification of class distinctions and over-extension of concepts of class during the stage of consolidating political power

made these concepts turn, with the passing of time, towards the active destruction of human beings. The notorious “bloodline theory” of the 1960s was precisely the consequence of de-politicizing class concepts. As a result, we cannot simply negate the concept of class or the political potentiality that it embodied, but must analyze its process of politicization and de-politicization. Only by doing so can we understand the achievements and failures of class politics in this era. All of this depends on theory and practice: an investigation that repeatedly moves between them, maintaining their mutual tension.

The achievements and political inventions of the Chinese Revolution can be called one of the miracles of twentieth century human history, but it is still necessary to carry out a renewed investigation of the theory and practice of People's Democratic Dictatorship and Proletarian Dictatorship. It is already a fashion of our epoch to put revolution on “trial”, so perhaps we would do better to express the judgement in reverse: critically scrutinizing the theory and practice of People's Democratic Dictatorship and Proletarian Dictatorship is necessary, but once again interpreting the achievements of the Chinese Revolution and its political creations is yet more urgent. In actuality, between China and the Soviet Union, debates surrounding how to interpret the historical experience of Proletarian Dictatorship had already begun as early as 1956. In this year, at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev made his famous report entitled 'On The Cult of Personality and its Consequences', which necessitated a response from the Chinese Communist Party and the Communist Parties of other countries. On many occasions Mao chaired discussions on this question in the Politburo, and he published two texts in *People's Daily* which provoked a strong reaction,

'On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat' (5th April, 1956) and 'More on the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat' (29th December, 1956). Mao and other Chinese Communist Party leaders analyzed the expansion of purges under Stalin, his lack of awareness about Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, his neglect of peasants' welfare, and his mistakes in the international Communist movement. They concluded that "on these issues, Stalin fell victim to subjectivism and one-sidedness, and divorced himself from objective reality and from the masses" (People's Daily Editorial Committee 1959: 9) and that he "impaired to a certain extent the principle of democratic centralism both in the life of the Party and in the state system of the Soviet Union, and led to a partial disruption of socialist legality" (33).

We should note that although Mao and his comrades criticized Stalin, at no point did they follow Kautsky and Luxemburg in appealing to elements of formal democracy arising from the experience of European bourgeois revolutions, such as the electoral system or parliamentary democracy. Instead, they returned to the "mass line" that had been posed in the context of the People's War and sought to understand the problem of democracy under the conditions of proletarian dictatorship. In 'On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', the authors described the decision concerning leadership methods taken in June of 1943 by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, arguing that:

In all practical work of our Party, correct leadership can only be developed on the principle of 'from the masses, to the masses.' This means summing up (i.e. co-ordinating and systematizing after careful study) the views of the masses (i.e. views scattered and unsystematic), then taking the resulting ideas back to the masses, explaining and popularizing them until the masses embrace the ideas as their own, stand up for them and translate them into action by way of testing their correctness. Then it is necessary once more to sum up the views of the masses, and

once again take the resulting ideas back to the masses so that the masses give them their whole-hearted support . . . and so on, over and over again, so that each time these ideas emerge with greater correctness and become more vital and meaningful. This is what the Marxist theory of knowledge teaches us. (13)

Departing from the mass line and from actual conditions makes it easy to commit errors of dogmatism, and the enlargement of the purges that happened during the period 1927-1936 in the red base area was exactly the consequence of this type of error.

Apart from damaging the system of democratic centralism and departing from the masses, another of Stalin's errors was to take the "middle forces" as the revolution's primary target of attack. The analysis by Mao Zedong and his comrades in this regard appealed to the process by which the category of the "People" came into political formation over the course of People's War.

In certain circumstances it may be correct to isolate the middle forces, but it is not correct to isolate them under all circumstances. Our experience teaches us that the main blow of the revolution should be directed at the chief enemy to isolate him, while as for the middle forces, a policy of both uniting with them and struggling against them should be adopted, so that they are at least neutralized; and, as circumstances permit, efforts should be made to shift them from their position of neutrality to one of alliance with us, for the purpose of facilitating the development of the revolution. (15)

In the same text, Mao and his comrades argued that:

But there was a time -- the ten years of civil war from 1927 to 1936 -- when some of our comrades crudely applied this formula of Stalin's to China's revolution by turning their main attack on the middle forces, singling them out as the most dangerous enemy; the result was that, instead of isolating the real enemy, we isolated ourselves, and suffered losses to the advantage of the real enemy. In the light of this doctrinaire error, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, during the period of the anti-Japanese war, formulated a policy of "developing the progressive-forces, winning over the middle-of-the-roaders, and isolating the die-hards" for the purpose of defeating the Japanese aggressors. The progressive forces in question consisted of the workers, peasants and revolutionary intellectuals led by, or open to the influence of, the Communist Party. The middle

forces in question consisted of the national bourgeoisie, the democratic parties and groups, and democrats without party affiliation. The die-hards referred to were the comprador-feudal forces headed by Chiang Kai-shek, who were passive in resisting the Japanese and active in fighting the Communists. (16)

The discussion concerning the middle force is related to the problem of the two different kinds of contradiction:

The first type consists of contradictions between our enemy and ourselves (contradictions between the camp of imperialism and that of socialism, contradictions between imperialism and the people and oppressed nations of the whole world, contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the imperialist countries, etc.). This is the fundamental type of contradiction, based on the clash of interests between antagonistic classes. The second type consists of contradictions within the ranks of the people (contradictions between different sections of the people, between comrades within the Communist Party, contradictions between the government and the people in socialist countries, contradictions between socialist countries, contradictions between Communist Parties, etc.). This type of contradiction is not basic; it is not the result of a fundamental clash of interests between classes, but of conflicts between right and wrong opinions or of a partial contradiction of interests. It is a type of contradiction whose solution must, first and foremost, be subordinated to the overall interests of the struggle against the enemy. Contradictions among the people themselves can and ought to be resolved, proceeding from the desire for solidarity, through criticism or struggle, thus achieving a new solidarity under new conditions. Of course, real life is complicated. Sometimes, it is possible that classes whose interests are in fundamental conflict unite to cope with their main common enemy. On the other hand, under specific conditions, a certain contradiction among the people may be gradually transformed into an antagonistic contradiction when one side of it gradually goes over to the enemy. Finally, the nature of such a contradiction may change completely so that it no longer belongs to the category of contradictions among the people themselves but becomes a component part of the contradiction between ourselves and the enemy. Such a phenomenon did come about in the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the Communist Party of China. In a word, anyone who adopts the standpoint of the people should not equate the contradictions among the people with contradictions between the enemy and ourselves, or confuse these two types of contradiction, let alone place the contradictions among the people above the contradictions between the enemy and ourselves. Those who deny the class struggle and do not distinguish between the enemy and ourselves are definitely not Communists or Marxist-Leninists. We think it necessary to settle this question of fundamental standpoint first, before proceeding to the questions to be discussed. Otherwise, we are bound

to lose our bearings, and will be unable to explain correctly international events.
(26)

Even whilst posing this problem in the realm of theory, the Chinese Communist Party still committed errors willy-nilly in distinguishing between the two different kinds of problems. The phenomenon of “expansion” during the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 and during the struggle against “the power-holders taking the capitalist road” over the period of the 1960s and 1970s is a clear example in this regard.

Following the founding of the socialist state, the revolutionary party’s position of authority and monopoly on political power became fundamental political features. From this, there emerged two sets of contradictions, the first being how to manage the relationship between the leading position of the proletarian party on the one hand and the administrative and legislative system of the state on the other. As noted by Weber, in an epoch where the social division of labour has developed to a definite degree, there is no political form that can ultimately escape the constraints of the bureaucratic system. Regardless of whether it be the failure of the Paris Commune, or the solidification of the nineteenth century nation-state system, all of these cases prove that it is difficult to avoid the state as the dominant political form of this entire era. In this respect, simply criticizing the socialist state for maintaining a bureaucratic apparatus or state is lacking in any real, analytical depth. The fundamental problem consists of the following: under conditions in which the state continues to exist and grows ever-stronger, how can a revolutionary party that takes itself as the “guide of the masses” avoid its own bureaucratization, and how does it proceed to turn the state into a political form possessing a tendency towards its own self-negation, which is to say a political form that possesses a lively, participatory democracy. Lenin repeatedly emphasized the importance

of the necessary distinction between the Bolshevik party and the soviets. Mao (1938) also believed that “there is a fundamental distinction between the dictatorship of a class and the dictatorship of a party, the party is simply the organization of the most conscious members of a class, and the party not only should but in fact can only perform a leadership function in a state of proletarian dictatorship, it should not and cannot replace the class in the exercise of dictatorship”. Yet the socialist state ultimately became a unique party-state, where “all key and important guidelines, policies and plans should all be under the unified direction of the party centre” (Mao [1952] 2004).

The statification of the party led in one respect to the concentration of the centralized power in the hands of the party, and in another respect led to an ever-growing bifurcation between the party and the masses. Following the change in the role of the party, the socialist state system became rigid, and the self-negation of the state system that Marx had envisaged almost disappeared. If one were to say that the statification of the party was a product of the gradual dissipation of the tradition of People's War, then one of the methods by which one might seek to overcome this tendency of statification of the party cannot simply be limited to a formalist discussion of a separation between the state and the party, or the organizational construction of the party, but must work through this slowly dissipating tradition in order to seek out a road of participatory or people's democracy. The Great Cultural Revolution was a product of the statification of the party having developed to a definite stage. Under the conditions of this statification of the party, the renewal of social mobilization, which refers to the activation of political fields and political values beyond the limits of the party-state as well as the formation of mass democracy, constituted one of the specific features of the Cultural Revolution in its early

stages. Mao Zedong reaffirmed the political values of the revolutionary party, and sought to use the methods of social movements and political debates in order to break the absolute authority of the party and the state. His goal was the re-constitution of a social system with a tendency towards self-negation, one that was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word, but rather a state and a party moving towards their own negation. One of the directives of the Cultural Revolution was the May Seventh Directive, which linked the Great Cultural Revolution to the flexibility of the social division of labour, seeking to thoroughly root out the model for social division of labour established by the bureaucratic system. The practice of socialism, according to this fundamental directive, consisted in distinguishing the unavoidable division of labour from all previous social models of class society (aristocratic, feudal, and so on) or antagonistic social relationships (class, capitalist, and so on), so that people might become their own masters. In order to reach this goal, it was necessary to fundamentally transform all the cultural conditions, modes of life, and political systems that reproduced class or antagonistic social relations.

During the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, there temporarily appeared in different localities social experiments in self-government in factories, schools, and organizations, which took the Paris Commune as their model (including those later instances of social organization named the “three representative committees,” consisting of worker representative committees, peasant representative committees, and army representative committees). These formations were an experiment in attacking the old state apparatus, a cultural and political practice seeking to supersede the state apparatus. This model of politics beyond the constraints of state and party rapidly decayed, owing to the entanglement of movements, factional struggles, and the party-state system in the

struggle for power. At the end of the 1960s, the Revolutionary Committees, organized around the form of the “three combinations”, were a product of the compromise reached between the mass movements and the bureaucratized state-party system. This political condition contained some seeds of a commune movement, such as the fact that worker, peasant, and soldier representatives entered into the leading organs of the party and the state, or the fact that leaders at different levels of the party and state were required to go as groups down to the factories and villages for set periods in order to engage in social practice, and so on. Even whilst these workers, peasants, students, and soldier representatives were always located at the margins of political power due to their estrangement from the rhythms and procedures of the party-state,¹⁶ this invention can hardly be described as being wholly without significance in the epoch of the state. Many observers believe that it is exactly because of these aforementioned political experiments that, compared to the bureaucratic system controlled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the political system of China’s “post-revolutionary” era has shown such a high degree of flexibility and a capacity to respond to social demands.

The second set of contradictions which the socialist state had to address was the relationship between the governing party, the socialist government, and the economy. The proletarian dictatorship is not simply the transfer of political power from one group of people to another, but is rather a transformation of the totality of social relations. This problem is often simplified as an opposition between planned and market economy, but its nucleus lies in the relationship between the political and the economic, which is to say

1 6 As a backlash against this phenomenon, in the late 1960s in certain locales (for example, Wuhan) there appeared a mass “movement against a return to the old order,” which took the implementation of the “three combinations” as their demand—this “opposition to a return to the old order” meant opposing a return of the revolutionary committees to the party-state bureaucratic system.

that the proletarian dictatorship is not a political form that is divorced from economic relations, but is rather a transitional state that is established on the basis of a deep social revolution. When explaining the phenomenon of a bureaucratic system in a socialist state, many people link the bureaucratization of the state and the party together with problems of economic management. Mao himself criticized the Factory Director System and Taylorism in his *A Critique of Soviet Economics*, and consequently, people posed this kind of question: “Were Stalin's errors owing to the fact that the Soviet socialist economic system and the socialist political system were already out of date, and could no longer meet the demands of Soviet development?” In 'More on the Historical Experience of the Dictatorial of the Proletariat', the Chinese Communist Party answered as follows:

The fact that the Soviet Union has made rapid progress economically proves that its economic system is, in the main, suited to the development of its productive forces; and that its political system is also, in the main, suited to the needs of its economic basis. Stalin's mistakes did not originate in the socialist system; it therefore follows that it is not necessary to "correct" the socialist system in order to correct these mistakes. Unconvincing too are the arguments of others who trace Stalin's mistakes to the administration of economic affairs by the socialist state power, and assert that once the government takes charge of economic affairs it is bound to become a “bureaucratic machine” hindering the development of the socialist forces. No one can deny that the tremendous upsurge of Soviet economy is the result precisely of the planned administration of economic affairs by the state of the working people, while the main mistakes committed by Stalin had very little to do with shortcomings of the state organs administering economic affairs. (35)

Beginning with the 1956 debate concerning Stalin's errors and persisting up to the present, the total condemnation of Soviet practice has gradually gained the ascendancy, which leads us to ask: with respect to the problem of the Soviet economy, was the judgement of Mao Zedong and his comrades correct, or are these negative perspectives correct? All that one needs to do in this case is refer to the following facts: first, compared with other economies of a similar level of development in 1917, the Soviet Union's speed of growth

was vastly superior. Robert C. Allen has used economics, demography, and computational models to recalculate gross national consumption, proving that over 1928-70 the Soviet Union achieved rapid growth under the direction of the Five-Year Plans. The economic backwardness that emerged in the 1970s was due to the arms race and not to the economic model in and of itself (Allen 2003: 4-17). In the second place, Asian national liberation movements and socialist movements under the influence of the October Revolution experienced vigorous development, not only in China but also Vietnam, Laos, and other socialist countries. Economic development of these countries and their increases in the human development index was also rapid, reaching the highest speed in their history. Third, the October Revolution ignited a socialist movement that was global in scope; furthermore, a socialist camp with the Soviet Union at its center emerged following the Second World War. Circumstances of the Cold War sparked competition between the two social systems, which spurred the rapid formation of the welfare system in Europe and America. Before the Second World War, the total expenditure on social insurance in Europe and America amounted on average to less than 1.66% of the GDP, but after the war and having passed through the economic boom of 1947-1973, the expenditure on social welfare in Europe and America greatly increased, owing to the pressure exerted by the socialist economic system. In 1960, this expenditure averaged 10.41% of the GDP, reaching 14.8% by 1980, and rising to 20.09% by 1980. Without the pressure exerted by the socialist countries of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, it would have been difficult for the proportion of spending on welfare in Europe and America to have increased at this speed.

The relationship between the political and the economic in the socialist system continued, however, to witness changes, in addition to the existence of many internal contradictions. Mao used the concept of the “transitional period” to describe the character of Chinese socialism. At the same time, he did not believe in the existence of an everlasting, perfect system. Even under conditions where the system is fundamentally adequate to requirements, he maintained that “there are still certain contradictions between the relations of production and the productive forces, between the superstructure and the economic basis. These contradictions find expression in defects in certain links of the economic and political systems. Though it is not necessary to effect fundamental changes in order to solve these contradictions, readjustments must be made in good time” (People’s Daily Editorial Committee 1959: 35). In 1962, as the Great Debate between the Soviet Union and China was breaking out, Mao ([1962] 1978) reminded the whole party that “in our state, if we do not found a socialist economy, then in what sort of mess would we find ourselves? Well, we would become a revisionist country, actually, we would become a capitalist country, our proletarian dictatorship would turn into a bourgeois dictatorship, yes, it would be a reactionary, fascist dictatorship. This is a question which really requires us to be on guard, so I hope that comrades will give it a good think”. As a result, it is impossible to conceive of a “proletarian dictatorship” or a “socialist state” that is divorced from a socialist economic process.

But what then is a “socialist economy”? Are there socialist states in which a socialist economy is absent? When answering the question of from whence the failure of twentieth-century socialism ultimately arose, the key question is perhaps not a matter of defining a point in time, but rather how to distinguish the gradual bifurcation of the

economic and the political within the socialist state system – at what time, how, by what forms, and why did this bifurcation take place. The essence of this bifurcation was the transformation and arrest of practices which sought unity between laborers and the means of production. This is one angle from which to evaluate the divergent paths and destinies of Chinese socialism and the socialism of the Eastern Bloc. Let us take China's currency, the Renminbi, before the reform period as an example. Because socialist China maintained and continued developing a commodity economy, the Renminbi maintained the character of being a currency. But Chinese socialism sought, in the process of developing an economy based on public ownership, to concurrently develop a commodity economy; furthermore, it also sought to "restrict bourgeois right" while developing this commodity economy. As a result, the Renminbi was not solely an instrument of commodity exchange; relations between people, as well as those between people and objects, were not pure relationships of commodity exchange in the manner that the Renminbi and other coupons represented them. In this sense, the Renminbi was both a currency and not a currency. It symbolized the birth of a new kind of relationship between the social, political, and economic. Owing to this kind of complicated relationship between economic development and the commodity economy, the production process in which laborers participated cannot simply be described as a process of selling labor power; on the contrary, the expenditure of labor by the laborers, apart from being exchanged for the necessities of life (the reproduction of labor power), also possessed the meaning of creating new social relations and relations of production.

Consequently, within the scope of this broader process, economic processes were not divorced from social and political processes. For a long period after the

founding of the People's Republic of China, the levels of industrialization and urbanization were very low and national capital was extremely weak. Under conditions in which technology and capital were in short supply, industrial growth relied largely on mass mobilization and the investment of labor power; the tradition of People's War and the political mobilization of the New China became the primary motive forces of the socialist economy. The Great Cultural Revolution began with rebellion, but it quickly followed the logic of the early stage of People's War by moving in the direction of the seizure and consolidation of power. In the midst of this confused and rapid transition, an exploration of the socialist economy could not become a central question. In the 1970s, reform began from the sphere of economics, signifying that the economic structure had become the "weak link" in the socialist system. With the reform's entrenchment, the economic gradually morphed into a sector independent from the scope of socialist politics, and the position of mastery that laborers had enjoyed in society and politics transformed into a condition of selling labor power as a commodity. Socialist politics were transformed into a discourse of legitimization that was divorced from the practice of everyday life of the laboring people and merely used to consolidate the state-party's power. As a result, the separation of the economic and the political was at the same time the degeneration of politics. If one were to say that the history of the socialist movement was a heroic attempt to overcome the "great transformation" described by Karl Polanyi as the bifurcation of the political and the economic, then the failure of socialism occurred at the moment when the economic once again broke away from political and other social relationships, gaining mastery over their development in the process. In our current moment, where the logic of the economy is riding roughshod over other political and

social sectors, the crisis of socialist politics is unavoidable. Therefore, one method of judging the character of Chinese socialism is to pass through the discursive overlaps of neoclassical economics (the determining function of the market) and Keynesian economics (the function of the government) in order to judge the transformations of Chinese society and the economy, as well as examining the relationships and paths of movement that China's economy and politics take under conditions of globalization.

In the contemporary setting, the discussions of the left and liberals concerning the failure of socialism in the twentieth century are mainly focused around three aspects: the party, the state, and the economy. The party demonstrated its strength in the conquest of power and in the consolidation of political authority, but in the process of founding a transitional state it was often confronted with a crisis of alienation. The socialist state may have had incredible achievements in the sphere of economic development (even if this was not always the case) but with respect to abolishing relations of private ownership, the state constantly made compromises. Following the failure of the planned economy, the market system once again assumed a central position in China, Russia, and other countries, thereby defining the state itself once more as a management apparatus separate from bourgeois society. This situation is fundamentally different from the summary that the Chinese Communist Party undertook of the experience of the October Revolution in the 1950s and the predictions that it made for the period of socialist transition. At that time, the Chinese Communist Party firmly believed that the party, the governing power, the proletarian dictatorship, the nationalization of industry and collectivization of agriculture, the planned development of a socialist economy, and a socialist culture, firm

support for the principles of proletarian internationalism and so on would in fact be the most important achievements of the October road.

The situation of 1956 and that of today cannot be spoken of in the same breath; yet it also cannot be denied that when Mao and his comrades considered the lessons and setbacks of the Soviet Union's socialist practice, they clearly saw the grave mistakes that the party and state had committed over the course of the socialist movement. Unlike the suspicions the Western Left harbored towards the form of the party and state, for Mao and his comrades a party in a People's War and a party that had not gone through a People's War were fundamentally distinct. The problem did not lie in the proletarian party and the socialist state maintaining the forms of the capitalist state and party, but rather lay in whether it was possible to effectively develop a method by which to make those systems successfully function. Mao Zedong said: "Once we have the right system, the main question is whether we can make the right use of it; whether we have the right policies, and right methods and style of work. Without all this, even under a good system it is still possible for people to commit serious mistakes and to use a good state apparatus to do evil things" (People's Daily Editorial Committee 1959: 35). When he set out from the lessons and experience of the Chinese Revolution in order to think about the problems of "proletarian dictatorship" and the "socialist state", Mao concentrated his account on the military strategy of armed struggle, the policy of the mass line, the strategy of the United Front, the path of party building, the dialectical method of distinguishing between contradictions with the enemy and contradictions in the revolutionary camp, and the methods of integrating political, economic, and cultural struggle.

Even in the present, distinguishing these two methods of summarizing experience and lessons is of significance. Communism, apart from being a philosophical hypothesis, also possesses a body of rich experience which maintains the capacity to inspire. The exploration of socialism in the twenty-first century not only should but must pursue a summation of the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, and other people's revolutions of the Third World. It must follow the revolutionaries of that time in not only considering the principles of revolution, but must also pose a synthesis of history and theory according to the concrete circumstances of each country. It must do so not in order to repeat the past, making blind or hollow demands for revolution. To do so would be to take the path criticized by Luxemburg, in which we mistake the “actions they were forced to take” under specific conditions as an advisable model of revolution for the whole socialist project. Instead, we should face contemporary conditions and crises head-on, seeking out a future path— not abstractly, two empty hands groping for a future; not simply or dogmatically, seeking to repeat the slogans of the mass line, People's War and party-building. This kind of arbitrary and unwise method would serve to reify the experience of the Chinese Revolution. This is a moment of continuous crisis, a moment in which the great experiments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have exhausted their potential; but is also a moment pregnant with new transformations in forms of knowledge, economics, culture, and communications. Under these conditions of new knowledge, new social structures, new international relations, and new economic circumstances, re-thinking the experience of the Chinese Revolution and Chinese socialism ultimately serves to fire people's enthusiasm, intelligence, and imaginative capabilities. It is a refusal of the “economic” qua a priori form, constituted such that it

determines and dominates the sphere of everyday life; it is a break with an arrangement in which a small minority of elites divide up the vast majority in order to control them; it is a means of allowing each person to dedicate their entire self to a path of practice full of creation, collectivity, and efforts to produce new systems.

And so, quite apart from being a “hypothesis”, socialism is still a task of practice. But under present conditions, it is only from theory, including a theoretical exploration of socialist practice in the twentieth century, that this task of practice can finally begin.

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http://www.sohu.com/a/150648899_688065

Translators note for "the end of history" (p. 1) [Trans:] Wang Hui refers here to an influential book published by the liberal intellectuals Liu Zehou and Liu Zaifu in the mid 1990s, entitled *Farewell to Revolution (Gaobie Geming)* 1996. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd. in which the authors sought to demarcate the present from the revolutionary legacy.

Translators note for Self-Strengthening Movement (p. 52) – [Trans:] The Self Strengthening Movement refers to a number of initiatives proposed by the Qing government in the second half of the nineteenth century, which aimed to enhance China's technological and military capacities whilst preserving the basis of imperial rule. These initiatives revolved around arsenals that were developed through cooperation between the state, Chinese merchants and foreign capital.

Translators note for Treaty of Shimonoseki (p. 52): [Trans:] The Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed in 1895 between China and Japan, and marked the end to the First Sino-Japanese War. The treaty paved the way for the right of foreign states to construct factories in Chinese port cities, and in doing so initiated an influx of capital.