

MODERNIZATION AND REVOLUTION IN CHINA, 1860-1949*

by P'ENG-YUAN CHANG

I

Modernization and revolution are two themes woven together in the thread that makes up the fabric of modern Chinese history.

How do we define modernization? What about revolution? Scholars have come up with many definitions for these terms. I want to begin this paper by explaining exactly what I mean when I use these two terms to describe modern China. I will start with a discussion of modernization.

Some consider modernization as the use of science and technology to conquer nature so that humans can achieve comfortable living conditions for themselves. Others simply equate industrialization with modernization. To these scholars, the two terms are identical.^① To me, these definitions are a little too rigid. My definition involves two very simple ideals cherished by humans in modern times. The first of these ideals is wealth and strength. In particular, this implies economic growth. The second ideal is freedom and equality, which can be realized under a democratic system. Before continuing with a definition of revolution, I want to explore the process by which these values have come to characterize modernization.

Mankind evolved from nomadic to agrarian society. Although living conditions improved after this transformation, humans had still not escaped the difficulties of living subsistently, which were difficult to bear. In modern times, Western societies have become wealthy through industrialization. Underdeveloped nations have sought to catch up with these industrialized nations. Because of the impact of social Darwinism, competition between societies grows keener and keener. There is no alternative but to

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① C. E. Black has extensively discussed the definition of modernization. See his *The Dynamics of Modernization* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 5-9.

modernize one's own society. When one is rich, then one can attain a comfortable standard of living. When a nation is wealthy, it will have the strength to protect its own people. This is a practical need. No country can neglect modernization as an ultimate goal. Nations naturally want to seek wealth and power in order to obtain material satisfaction for their people and to resist outside aggression.

Freedom and equality are human desires as well. In the competitive world there is a tendency for the strong to oppress the weak. This is true in the case of nations as well as with regard to individuals. If a person is not strong enough, he will be enslaved by others. In premodern times, there were distinctions between nobles and slaves in many societies. The nobles, on the top, standing high, did whatever they wanted to do, taking whatever they desired. The slaves, at the bottom, did only what the nobles permitted them to do. Such societies lacked freedom; certainly their people were not equal to each other. As thinkers began to preach the virtues of freedom and equality, these values became widely cherished. Once awakened, people in the lower levels of society began to dream of obtaining freedom. It is human nature that only those who are free and equal to others feel physically and mentally liberated enough to exercise their thoughts to the fullest potential. These people are able to achieve personal success. Moreover, they can make significant contributions to their nations and the rest of human society. A democratic political system provides people with the freedom and equality that enables them to make such achievements. This is why a democratic political system is one of the two elements in my definition of modernization.

My definition of modernization has, therefore two components: democracy, on the one hand, and wealth and power, on the other. I think this definition is fitting for a discussion of China's situation. Modern China was very weak and poor, oppressed by outside imperialism. Only strength and wealth will enable China to move forward with others, to develop further. China has a 2,000-year history of autocratic monarchy. It is only through the introduction of a modern democratic political system that the Chinese will be able to fully exercise their own intellectual will and bring good fortune to their nation.

The definition of revolution also has many interpretations. Generally

speaking, any action that is opposed to tradition and seeks to bring about drastic change can be considered a revolution. Fairbank, for instance, wrote a general history of modern China titled *The Great Chinese Revolution: 1800 to 1985*.^② He chose to use the term revolution to describe all the changes that have taken place in China over the last two hundred years: political, social, economic and cultural.

Defined in a more restricted sense, revolution denotes changing a political system through radical means that include the use of violence, result in blood-shed, and ultimately shake a society from its very roots. A revolution may or may not have an ideological orientation. Those revolutions with an ideological orientation are usually drastically expressed through action. Revolutionaries do not care how much is sacrificed in the process of meeting their objectives. They won't stop until they reach their goal. Revolutions of this type include the French Revolution of 1789, the Chinese Revolution of 1911 and the Russian Revolution of 1917. Each caused tremendous blood-shed and brought about drastic social changes.^③

In this paper, I will use the term revolution to denote it in a more restricted sense. A revolutionary seeks to solve all problems through drastic change. There is a Chinese proverb: cutting all knots with a single sharp blade. It means that if a broken old house can not be repaired, then it is easier to pull down the whole structure and begin construction of an entirely new house. A society too old to be renovated by the same token, should be completely destroyed, then thoroughly reconstructed.

The question is whether a revolutionary can also be a modernizer. Mao Ze-dong was a great revolutionary, but not necessarily a modernizer. The revolutionary's approach to problem solving is through violent, radical methods rather than the more peaceful processes of negotiation and mitigation. They launch into revolutions over and over again, causing great destruction. As political scientist Samuel Huntington observed, the work of the revolutionary can be accomplished with greater speed and ease than that of the reformer or modernizer. The reformer must work step by step to realize his

② John K. Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution: 1800 to 1985* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).

③ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 3-43.

goals. A revolutionary wants to completely wipe out all traditions that he thinks are corrupted, too old or otherwise unsuitable for the society he envisions. But a reformer seeks to renovate a society gradually, an extremely difficult task. When he launches a piece of reform, he may have some supporters. But he will also face those opposed to his reform plans. Sympathizers, of course, will support him, but opponents will create problems and obstacles. ④

So the revolutionary and the reformer are in at least one sense opposites. One is drastic, the other reserved. Could a society have both modernization and revolution together? To me, modernization is the work of a reformer; revolution is the work for someone who uses drastic actions to wipe out difficulties and opposition. But, sometimes we may need a revolutionary to wipe out difficulties and lay a smooth foundation upon which a reformer can bring about modernization.

If revolution is to be used to prepare for modernization, it is inevitable that some traditions will be wiped out in the process of laying the foundation for reform. For instance, if we want to realize a democratic political system, we cannot avoid first overthrowing a despotic monarchy. The French people wanted to have freedom, equality and fraternity—this was the political goal of their modernization. But they first had to use drastic methods to overthrow the *ancient regime*. If we subscribe to this point of view, then it seems that revolution is a prerequisite for reform. Yet revolution may deprive a society of peace and order, which are also prerequisites for modernization. Once lost, peace and order are difficult to restore.

To illustrate this hypothesis further, let's take economic construction as an example. Economic growth requires a peaceful environment to thrive. If a society is unstable, it is unlikely that it will have a healthy economy. We have observed this it will have a healthy economy. We have observed this phenomenon in the Third World—in the Middle East, South America and South Africa. When people in these nations have launched into civil wars, they claimed to be revolutionaries. Yet they have brought only pain and suffering to their people. Under revolutionary regimes, societies seldom

④ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 344-362.

improve their economic situation. On the other hand, places with more stable governments enjoy economic growth, though it may be slow. Edmund Burke, the conservative critic of the French Revolution, was strongly opposed to revolution because he saw that such movements always bring suffering for the people.^⑤ When we consider the large numbers of people in this world suffering in the midst of civil war and revolution, we cannot but agree with Burke's point of view.

This paper will discuss the movements of revolution and modernization that have manifested themselves in China over the past two hundred years. I hope this discussion will provide some insight into the general nature of such movements. I will begin by discussing the general details of the seven major political movements that occurred in China between 1860 and 1949. Then, we will focus on the elites who led these movements. We will discuss what factors inspired them to promote either revolution or modernization. Next, we will look at how much China changed in response to these movements. Finally, I will suggest why economic growth and democracy were so slow to emerge in China.

II

When examining the growth of non-Western nations, we see a pattern of development that swings between movements of modernization and revolution. The pattern begins with a modernization movement that seeks to develop a nation. Eventually, difficulties are encountered and a group of revolutionaries come to power through the use of force, and bring about radical changes. In the following section, I will show how China's modern history, through 1949, was characterized by a series of modernization and revolution movements closely woven together over the past two hundred years.

We've already considered the main difference between modernization and revolution. We can use our discussion of these two terms to construct a simple litmus test to determine whether a particular movement is essentially a revolution or a modernization. If blood is shed in a movement, we will call it a revolution; if there is no blood-shed, we will call it modernization.

^⑤ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolutions in France* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1955).

Using this criterion to analyze seven major political movements in modern Chinese history, we see that four were modernizations and three were revolutions. Modernization movements include: the Self-Strengthening Movement (1860-1894), the Reform Movement (1894-1898), the Constitutional Movement (1905-1912), the May Fourth/New Cultural Movement (1916-1921). The revolutionary movements were: the 1911 Revolution Movement (1894-1913), the Northern Expedition Unification Movement (1924-1928) and the Communist Revolution (1949). Now I will briefly consider each of these movements as we lay the groundwork for discussing the relationship between revolution and modernization in modern Chinese history.

The Self Strengthening Movement

Following the 1840 defeat in the Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion, the Manchu government became convinced that it needed to launch reforms to prevent further catastrophe. The first of these modernization efforts, known as the Self-Strengthening Movement, focused on improving China's military. This movement was also known as the Foreign Affairs Movement, quite an appropriate title given the fact that the reform focused on obtaining Western military technology (bing-gong-yeu). Bureaucrats like Zeng Guofan and Li Hong-zhang who led this movement argued that China's defeat in the Opium War had been caused by the superiority of Western military technology. China's culture was not inferior to that of the West; it was simply that she lacked the military technology necessary to defend herself from foreign aggression. Therefore, they argued, China only needed to obtain Western military technology; otherwise no other changes need be made in Chinese government, culture or tradition. These reformers called for "zhong-ti xi-yong" or "Chinese as the Essence and Western for the Usage." Under this slogan, China built Western style shipyards and arsenals and began opening of mines and construction of railroads.

While the Self-Strengthening Movement was a step in the direction of industrialization, it was only so to a limited extent. Let us now consider why the reform failed:

First, the ideological basis of the Self-Strengthening Movement was extremely narrow. If a country wants to move towards industrialization, it must begin with the introduction of light industries, such as textiles. Pro-

moting heavy industry without first developing light industry created great obstacles for China's development. Furthermore, the products of these heavy industries did not help the government in strengthening the nation's military: warships they produced were too rough and clumsy to carry their own in battle with Western vessels; guns and cannons they built were of extremely poor quality.

Second, evidence suggests that the capital invested in the Self-Strengthening Movement was insufficient to develop industry. We do not have any documentation that tells us how much was spent on this reform. Yet, given the serious financial problems of the imperial government, it is unlikely that enough money was invested in this movement. The small sum that the Court could afford to spend was just not enough to support the development of industry. Eventually, even this insufficient funding was taken away when the Empress Dowager Ci-xi began construction on her Summer Palace. The removal of the budget was a real blow to the already weak industries.

Third, perhaps most detrimental to the Self-Strengthening Movement is that just as the reforms were moving towards their goal, China was attacked by an unprecedented enemy: the Japanese. Although the Meiji Restoration and the Self-Strengthening Movement began at roughly about the same time, the two movements met opposite results. I am not going to discuss the different interpretations that have been offered to explain what caused Japan's success and China's failure. I just want to point out that the 1894 defeat in the Sino-Japanese War marked the end of the Self-Strengthening Movement. China would face more difficult times.

The Reform Movement

Following the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement, Kang Youwei led a drive for modernization known as the Reform Movement. Kang, who had passed through the British colony of Hong Kong each time he went to participate in the civil examinations in Peking, observed that it was not just sharp weapons, or military superiority, that made Westerners so strong. Having observed the way the British ran Hong Kong's economy, Kang concluded that there was a fundamental difference between China and the West (bi-you sou-ben). That difference was institutionalization. To Kang and his followers, modernization meant institutionalization. They

sought to reform China by building up modern institutions in areas ranging from the military and education to the economy and government administration. After receiving the support of the Kuang-Xü Emperor, Kang initiated the Reform Movement in 1898.

Huntington said institutionalization is the foundation of modernization. In this respect, Kang really touched upon what China needed. Yet, as Huntington also pointed out, it is more difficult to implement reform than it is to bring about revolution. When reformers call for changes that hurt vested interests, they can quickly lose support among the conservatives.^⑥ This is exactly why Kang's reforms failed. By suggesting that all of China be changed overnight, Kang invited many enemies. Only a few student followers remained loyal to him. Defeated by conservatives, Kang was exiled. Altogether his reform lasted only 100 days.

The Constitutional Movement

Although Kang had been defeated, his work served to make it quite clear that China was in desperate need of institutional reform. There was not any doubt that institutional reform was needed, it was just a question of how long it would take to implement it.

Exiled from China, Kang and his disciple Liang Qi-Chao moved to Japan where they discussed China's institutionalization with great fervor. Liang, whose passionate writing style easily moved its readers, wrote a series of articles that created renewed support for reform among the Chinese gentry and intellectuals. Liang sought to use a national constitution as the means for introducing institutionalism to China. A constitution, he argued, would lay the foundation for the construction of other institutions. Around 1905, he launched the Constitutionalist Movement, replacing Kang as China's leading reformer.

Constructing a democratic institution—that is establishing a parliament—was certainly not an easy task. A parliament had to be formed through elections. But conducting elections required a lot of work. First a census needed to be taken to determine who was qualified to vote or to run for public offices. Election regulations demanded that voters be literate, yet

^⑥ Samuel Huntington, *Ibid.*, pp. 1-92.

China had an 80% illiteracy rate.^⑦ If the common people remained uneducated, therefore unable to vote, then democracy would exist in name only. So the government sought to launch a national compulsory primary education system. Of course the Constitutionalists sought other changes. But if we just consider two of their reforms, establishment of a census and a compulsory education system, we see that their program was an unprecedented step toward the modernization of China.

In 1908, the Qing Court began a nine-year program to institute a constitutional monarchy. In the second year of this process, the Manchu government established 22 provincial assemblies and a small national assembly that were intended to give the Chinese people a chance to practice participating in legislative deliberations. The 1,650 members of these bodies were formally elected. The government gave these assemblies only the right to deliberate policies, not to pass laws. Yet, they nevertheless attempted to supervise national and local affairs. To me, the establishment of these assemblies was a tremendous step in China's progress toward modernization. Unfortunately the nine-year constitutional preparation program was not completely carried out. In the fourth year of the reform process, the 1911 Revolution broke out. The dream of a constitutional monarchy could never be realized.

The 1911 Revolution

The revolutionary movement in China started almost at the same time as the constitutional movement. Under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen, a group of radicals organized the first revolutionary organization in 1894. By 1905 their organization, known as the Tong Meng Hui (League of Alliance), had grown tremendously as more and more people became disillusioned by the slow progress of the Qing reform. The Tong Meng Hui sought to overthrow the monarchy and replace it with a republican system. In this respect, we can say that the revolutionaries shared the Constitutionalists goal of institutionalizing China. They agreed that institutionalization and modernization were essentially the same thing.

Sun Yat-sen and his followers launched ten uprisings against the Qing government, the last of which was successful. It was in his tenth attempt

^⑦ Evelyn S. Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), pp. 17-20.

to overthrow the Qing government on October 10, 1911 that Sun finally succeeded in staging a revolution as he gained support from the New Army and some Constitutionals who sympathized with him. It took 120 days to overthrow a 2,000 year-old monarchical system. China became the first Asian nation with a republican system.

The achievement of the 1911 revolution was that it brought about the establishment of a republican system. The revolutionaries and constitutionalist were formally recognized as political parties. Through formal elections, national and provincial assemblies were established. China took a big step towards democratization of its political system.

The May Fourth/New Cultural Movement

It is very hard for us to say that the 1911 revolution was a successful revolution. Not long after the establishment of the republican government, president Yuan Shi-kai dissolved the national assembly with the ambition of inaugurating himself as the emperor. A capable bureaucrat in the late Qing Court who was elected first president of the Republic, Yuan argued that China was not ready to have a republican system and should return to monarchy. However he died soon after declaring himself emperor. The abdicated Qing emperor Pu-yi was restored to the throne by a group of reactionaries. These events demonstrate the kind of instability and chaos that characterized this period and explain why the revolution succeeded in creating a republic in name only.

What is it that caused such chaos to manifest itself? How is it that conservatives were able to restore the monarchy? What was China's real problem? There are no simple answers to any of these questions. But apparently, China was in an epoch of crisis. The return to a monarchical system shows that extremely ambitious people tried to use the emperor as a tool through which they could regain their own personal power. The only way to end such corruption and establish a new society was to wipe out the bad traditions that had a long history in China.

The May Fourth Movement began as a movement against outside imperialism and later turned its attention to China's internal cultural problems. The leaders of the May Fourth Movement believed that if China was to become wealthy and strong like the Western nations, it must first develop a

real democratic political system and acknowledge the importance of scientific technology. They referred to democracy and science as Mr. D and Mr. S. They believed that these two gentlemen could lead China to a bright future, to make the nation strong and wealthy. At the same time, another group of people, influenced by the Russian Revolution, argued that China should use Marxism to modernize. These two groups of people had a great influence on contemporary and future generations of Chinese intellectuals. The Chinese people have come to learn much more about democracy and science. Also, the Communist Party was formally organized in 1921. Eventually, China became a Communist country under the control of Marxists. The leaders of the May Fourth Movement thought that China should have an ideology to guide its construction. This is the essence of the May Fourth movement. This is why we also call it the New Cultural Movement.

If we consider the May Fourth Movement as a new cultural movement from which the Chinese people were liberated from their traditional cultural thought, we might come to ask how and why did the Chinese people come to liberate themselves so quickly. Here we have to make a supplementary explanation about the abolishment of the civil examination system that took place in 1905, which is closely related to the May Fourth/New Culture Movement.

The May Fourth Movement was not an accident. Historically, the Chinese people believed the thought of Confucius as a disciplinary thought of their culture. The long history of the civil examination system served to indoctrinate the Chinese people to follow the thought of Confucius. Established around the early eighth century, the civil examination system was abolished in 1905, after some twelve hundred years. We must recognize this to be among the longest lived and most significant institutions ever established for mankind. Furthermore, it greatly influenced the Chinese people.

During the late Qing period, intellectuals discovered that Confucian thought controlled the Chinese people to an extent that suppressed all free thought. Something had to be done. Reforms were instituted, but eventually the Court came to the conclusion that the examination system must be completely abolished. It was the abolishment of this institution that enabled the Chinese to liberate themselves from the control of Confucian thought. Once the examination system was abolished, China was able to produce

intellectuals like the leaders of the May Fourth movement whose thoughts were free enough to criticize traditional Chinese culture. Furthermore, these leaders sought freedom of expression.

Looking back over the 1200 years of the civil examination system, we can see how that institution served to stifle creative minds. The only way to have a career was to participate in the civil examinations. In order to pass those exams, one had to memorize volumes of Confucian classics, a task that consumed a great deal of one's youth. This left no time for one to have any other kind of thought which might lead to the development of new perspectives, new ways of thinking. Getting a degree from the examination system was the main way—if not the only way—to join the ranks of government bureaucracy. This is how Confucian thought became so deeply rooted in China. It became possible to abolish that kind of system when China came in contact with the West.

Initially, those intellectual leaders who repeatedly criticized Confucian thought and the civil examination system were punished by the authorities. Yet they continued to attack this institution until they succeeded in overthrowing the domination of Confucian thought. The abolishment of the civil examination system was the first step toward liberating the thought of the Chinese people. This made it possible for people to loudly voice their criticisms during the May Fourth Movement. In such an environment, democratic and scientific thought, on the one hand, and Marxism, on the other, could be introduced to China.

After discussing the nature of the May Fourth/New Cultural Movement we can come to grasp the immensity of the political and cultural change that has taken place in China over the last seventy years. It seems clear by now that science and democracy are indeed important components to China's long process of seeking modernization. Whether or not Marxism is fit for the Chinese people is a question that we have to wait to answer.

The North Expedition Unification Movement

Because revolutionary zeal declined after the establishment of the Republic in 1911, the central government fell into the hands of a number of former bureaucrats and warlords. These people excluded the revolutionaries who had overthrown the Qing monarchy from the government, leaving Sun

Yat-sen in great dismay. Accompanied by a number of national assembly members, Sun went to Canton in 1917 to establish a new government. This action caused a split between the north and the south in Chinese politics. Sun's intention was to launch a second revolution and fight his way back to Peking to strengthen the Republican system, but he died in 1925 before realizing this goal. He was succeeded by Chiang Kai-shek who led the North Expedition. By defeating the northern warlords and all the bureaucrats, Chiang succeeded in reshaping the country.

Chiang did not have enough time to wipe out all of the warlords. Instead, he compromised with some of them and incorporated quite a number of old style military warlords in his government after 1927. So the Nanking government was run by a group of officials representing a wide range of different ideologies. Sun Yat-sen's political thought was proclaimed as the ideology of the Nationalist party. The Communists, who had a short period of cooperation with the Nationalists, split off and turned against them. As a result of this turmoil, the government was burdened with serious internal conflict. At the same time, Japan's war against China grew more and more serious. This situation made it impossible for the Republican government to realize a unification of China. So, even though the North Expedition claimed to be a revolution, the Nationalists achieved only partial unification of China. Due to the aggression of the Japanese, they did not make much progress between 1931 and 1945.

Communist Revolution of 1949

Eighty percent of the Chinese population lived in the countryside where there was a very long history of concentration of land ownership. This problem was made more serious in the South where some 5% of the landlords owned between 70% and 80% of the land. Most of the peasants were therefore landless and were quite hostile to their landlords.

According to Sun Yat-sen's principle of "Min-sheng," or "the principle of People's Livelihood," agrarian reform should receive the primary attention of the government. Sun wanted to redistribute the land in rural China so that every tiller could farm his own land. He understood that the situation in the past was serious and wanted to change it. But following his death, Sun's followers did not realize his thought in time, they were too preoccu-

pled with resisting the Japanese aggression and did not have time to pay attention to rural problems.

The Communists used the Nationalists' inability to deal with rural problems to their own advantage. They promised to remedy this situation under the guidelines of Ming-sheng zhu-yi as originally conceived by Sun. The agrarian land problem was the decisive factor that enabled the Communists to come to power in the 1949 revolution.

III

From the above we have briefly discussed the history of modernization and revolution in China. We have seen that each movement of modernization and revolution was greatly different from its predecessors and followers. Moreover, the domestic and international situation as well as the thought of reform leaders changed greatly. C. Black has said that ideological attitudes of the elites determine the orientation of modernization and revolution.^⑧ We have shown that the process of Chinese modernization and revolution was run by elites. Now let us turn to look at the change in the nature of Chinese elites in modern times.

First let us consider the Self-Strengthening Movement again. The movement's ideology was "Chinese Essence and Western Usage," which meant using foreign technology to protect Chinese tradition. In order to understand where this ideology came from, it is necessary to talk about the gentry, the social origins of the intellectuals who led this movement. As mentioned earlier, anyone who wanted to pass through the civil examination system had to study the Confucian classics very carefully. The assumption was that Confucian classics contained the most ideal thoughts for any society. The leaders of the Self-Strengthening Movement concurred with this assumption, but added a corollary: China was lacking one thing that Western society had: guns and warships. If military weapons could be obtained, then China would have everything that a nation could ever desire. It is interesting to consider that reformers like Zeng Guo-fan and Li Hong-zhan who led the Self-Strengthening Movement had all obtained the highest degree (jin-shi) from that system. How is it that they came to know of the

⑧ C. E. Black, *Ibid.*, pp. 62-83, 98-99.

existence of Western weapons that they urged China to obtain? They had been working in the government bureaucracy since the time of the Opium War, so they had watched how Westerners used modern weaponry to defeat them. Furthermore, similar devices were successfully used to prevent the Taiping Rebels from attacking Shanghai's International Settlement. These events characterize the entirety of their knowledge of the West, so it is understandable that their ideology would not extend beyond the development of Western weapons.

By the time of the Reform Movement, China's intellectuals had a broader knowledge of the West. Kang You-wei's impressions of Hong Kong and Shanghai, as well his reading of translated materials, gave him the idea that the wealth and power of Western society was based upon certain fundamental principals. Kang had visited Hong Kong, which had been ceded to the British in 1842. He had seen with his own eyes how after only fifty years under British colonialism the territory had become the Pearl of the Orient, a highly modernized society without rival in East Asia. It was his travels to places like Shanghai and Hong Kong that inspired Kang to urge the Court to replace traditional institutions with Western ones. It is also worth mentioning that a number of Kang's contemporary reformers visited the United States and England. Though they could not speak or read English, what they saw gave them a great impression. According to a Chinese proverb, travelling ten thousand miles in this world is as worthwhile as reading ten thousand volumes of books. So, the reform of 1898 was extremely different from the Self-Strengthening Movement in that it was richer in content and essence.

The Constitutional Movement grasped the essence of political modernization. Kang You-wei emphasized many different spheres of reform: political, military and educational. The Constitutionlists under the leadership of Liang Qi-chao focused on building a constitutional system. Liang pointed out that the Japanese had been able to defeat the Russians in 1904 because they had a constitution while the Russians did not. He emphasized that those countries with constitutions were destined to become strong while those without would remain weak. Common sense confirms that it is relatively easier for a country under a constitutional system to become wealthy and strong. Contrarily, a country with a despotic system will always be

comparatively backward. Most of the citizens in countries with democratic systems are well educated. They have the ability to participate in their own political affairs and can easily reach a common goal to move ahead; their society is more easily modernized.

How could the constitutionalists come to have that kind of knowledge and recognition? I think it is because the structure of the Chinese elites had already changed. With the abolishment of the civil examination system and the establishment of the new Western style education system, the newly raised generation of elites went to new style schools and obtained new knowledge. Even those who belonged to the gentry class turned to re-educate themselves in new schools or went abroad for the purpose of catching up with the new epoch. I have made some rough statistical estimates that confirm these trends:

Ninety percent of the members of the provincial and national assemblies established during the Constitutionalist reform were gentry who had received a traditional Confucian education. After 1905, 30% of these men chose to re-educate themselves at a new style school in China or abroad. After the abolishment of the civil examination system, the tide of change pushed on, from the top down. China was going to have more rapid change. By the time of the 1911 revolution, only 10% of the leaders of the revolution were from the gentry class. The majority were young revolutionaries who had never participated in the traditional civil examination system. Their minds were much less influenced by traditional Confucian thought. When we take the educational background of the revolutionaries and the Constitutionalist into consideration, we see that the gentry pursued moderate changes in society; those without much traditional training sought drastic change. Furthermore, the revolutionaries were younger: averaging between 20 and 25 years old, as opposed to the Constitutionalist who were between 40 and 45.⑨

The leaders of the May Fourth/New Cultural Movement had an even more marked difference from their predecessors: Most were students returning from study in Europe and North America. Tradition saddled them with fewer burdens than it had earlier generations. Mr. Democracy and Mr.

⑨ P'eng-yuan Chang, "Political Participation and Political Elites in Early Republican China: The Parliament of 1913-1914." *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 2 (February 1978), pp. 293-313. (Translated by Andrew J. Nathan).

Science, introduced by them, were completely Western. They shouted "Down with Tradition!" They argued that modernization could only be accomplished through the complete westernization of China. Many of them even embraced ideologies popular in the West such as Marxism, mutual aid, guildism and anarchism. Their craze for Westernization grew stronger day by day, they wanted to import change in the style of the revolutions that had occurred in Western nations like France and Russia. They were sure that China must have a revolution.

The revolution of 1911 overthrew the monarchical system, but failed to solve China's problems. Further revolution was inevitable. The North Expedition developed as a result. Down with the warlords! These movements became stronger and stronger. The Communists absorbed youths into their movement who thought Communism would solve all of China's problems as well as introduce freedom and equality to the country.

These are the different phases of China's modernization. Tradition retreated while Western models were brought in one by one. To what extent should tradition be eliminated? Which Western models should be accepted? The answers to these questions are unclear.

V

Before 1949, China experienced four modernization movements and three big revolutions. We have seen that as tradition gradually withdrew, modernization began to manifest itself. But how much did China really change? In the following section, we will attempt to answer this question by examining the development of economic growth and a democratic system, the two factors that I have chosen to consider when defining modernization. We will begin by discussing economic development.

Economists use Gross National Product (GNP) to measure any nation's economic condition. A high GNP shows impressive development, a low GNP shows underdevelopment. Let's now use GNP as a tool to examine China's economic condition between 1860 and 1949.

GNP reports obviously did not exist until recent decades, and historical economic development data is incomplete. Fortunately scholars have provided us with some well documented estimates that allow us to analyze modern

China's economic growth. In *Income of the Chinese Gentry*, Chung-li Chang estimated that China's personal average GNP in 1880 was only \$9.4 U.S. . At that time, the nation's GNP was composed of 60% agricultural production and 40% non-agricultural production.^⑩ According to Ta-chung Liu, by 1933 personal GNP had risen to \$12^⑪, approximately 30% above the 1880 figure. If we compare the situation in China over this period of time with that in the United States, we see that GNP in America rose more than 250% from \$204 to \$514. This comparison gives us some indication of the low standard of living in China. After the four modernization movements, Chinese peoples' standard of living had not improved substantially. It is interesting to compare these figures with more recent statistics from the Nationalist government in Taiwan. The GNP indicators have risen to \$227 U.S. in 1963, \$2200 in 1980, and \$7,000 today. Early modern China's living standard was extremely low compared with the present situation.

According to a study by Yeh-chien Wang, the coastal area and Yangtze River Valley were more developed than the rest of China.^⑫ Economist Thomas Rawski concurs that the most prosperous area was the delta of the Yangtze River.^⑬ The staff of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica came to similar conclusions in a project that divided China into 17 areas.^⑭ China's interior provinces were waiting for entrepreneurial efforts to explore them to help improve their impoverished living conditions.

Now let us evaluate the development of a democratic system in China. Political scientists Almond and Verba have argued that "if there is a political revolution going on throughout the world, it is what might be called the participation explosion."^⑮ Democratic thought is wide spread. China, like

⑩ Chung-li Chang, *The Income of the Chinese Gentry* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), pp. 291-325.

⑪ T. C. Liu and K. C. Yeh, *The Economy of the Chinese Mainland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). See also K. C. Yeh, "China's National Income, 1931-36," Conference on Modern Chinese Economic History (Taipei, Taiwan, 1977), pp. 125-150.

⑫ Yeh-chien Wang, *Land Taxation in Imperial China: 1750-1911* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 84-109.

⑬ Thomas G. Rawski, "Economic Growth and Integration in Prewar China," Discussion Paper #5 (February 1982). See also his recent book, *Economic Growth in Prewar China*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989).

⑭ P'eng-yuan Chang, "Regional Modernization in China: A Study of Political, Economic and Social Changes-Framework and Discovery," (Manuscript).

⑮ G. A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston: Little Brown, 1963), p. 2.

every other country in the world, is more or less trying to establish a democratic system for itself. I consider the Constitutional Movement to be a movement that sought democracy for China. The assemblies established by the Qing Court to allow the Chinese people to practice legislative deliberations were comprised of elected representatives. As Schumpeter, the well known social scientist, has said, without election there is no democratic system at all.^⑩ According to this model, we can say that the birth of democracy in China occurred in 1909 and 1910 when 1,650 assembly members were elected by the people. As we have mentioned earlier, these assemblies were quite impressive. The bodies were very similar to legislatures in western countries; their deliberations concentrated on political, social and economic issues.

The 1911 revolution overthrew the monarchical system with the establishment of a Republican system and a formal national assembly. During the national assembly elections, we saw that the proportion of citizens participating in casting ballots increased from less than 1% to approximately 10%. Furthermore, a two-party system appeared at the sametime. Unfortunately, amidst the chaos of the early Republican period, military forces repeatedly swung the political situation and disbanded the parliament. Elections were plagued by corruption, the most serious instance of which occurred when the administrative branch of the government attempted to control the elections. Democracy became a name without substance in the Republic. After the success of the North Expedition, the Nationalist Party, following the political thought of Sun Yat-sen, took power as a one-party dictatorship. Because both the national and provincial assemblies had already been disbanded, there was no representative system between 1927 and 1947. In 1947, the Nationalist party returned political rights to the people and the constitutional democracy was revived. But two years later, the Communists took control of the country. Again, democracy fell into a dark age. The only hope we have is today's Taiwan. The people there, however, are not very satisfied with their own democratic system. There are many improvements to be made in the future.

^⑩ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1950), p. 269; Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York, Knopf, 1985) pp. 224-232.

IV

I have just completed a rough outline of the modernization of China from approximately 1860 to 1949. Economically, except for some development along the coast and the Yangtze Delta, we saw little development in the interior areas. Peoples' living standards were extremely low, most Chinese lived in extreme poverty. A democratic system appeared for a very brief period of time. It is hard for us to say that the accomplishment was of any significance. People enjoyed only very limited freedom of speech, correspondence, dwelling, etc. The ideal of equality was not established very well. Why did China's economy and democratic political system develop so slowly? We may suggest the following interpretations:

First, China did not meet the necessary prerequisites for development. Modernization requires peace and order. Stability provides an environment conducive to development. If a society is in chaos, the possibility for economic development will be halted or completely destroyed. Since 1840 China had been involved in repeated wars with foreign powers, conflicts such as the Opium War, the two Sino-Japanese Wars and the Boxer Rebellion. In each of these wars, China was defeated and forced to cede part of its territory and pay high indemnities. The 1895 Shimonosaki Treaty with Japan, for example, required that China pay a 230 million tael indemnity. After the Boxer Rebellion, China paid indemnities totalling some 400 million taels. These were great losses that weakened China's strength. In addition to economic strain, interior political turmoil was serious. Besides the revolutions discussed above, several insurrections broke out, including those of the secret societies, the Taipings and minority and religious groups. This added more chaos to China's situation.

Second, the growth of the population had a negative influence on the nation's economy. China began its rapid population increase in the 17th and 18th centuries and soon reached the limits that the nation's economy could support. Since the Chinese people were already living subsistently, the economy deteriorated even further with demographic growth. A vicious cycle manifested itself. There was little hope, even if China had sought modernization. The Chinese people live in a territory as large as the United States but the natural resources of these two nations are incomparable. The United

States is a country with abundance of resources but its population is only one fourth of China's. In the 18th century China had a population of 500 million. Yet, it is my judgement that the economic infrastructure of China could support a population of no more than 300 million. Because the population could not be controlled, there was no way to avoid wide-spread poverty. Today the population of China has reached some 1.1 billion. There is no hope for the Chinese to catch up with the standard of living enjoyed by citizens of the United States in the near future.

Third is the problem of Chinese Culture and Modernization. In the 1950s and 1960s theorists blamed the Confucian cultural tradition as a hindrance to the modernization of China. But since the 1970s when the "Four Little dragons" appeared in Asia, this interpretation has completely changed. Now it is argued that the Confucian tradition facilitates modernization. It seems to me that there will be an endless dispute over whether the Confucian tradition is helpful or harmful to modernization. Taiwan's economic development could be interpreted as having been helped by Confucian cultural tradition. Yet, we should also point out that the "Four Little dragons" had all been ruled by colonialism during the 19th and 20th centuries. So it is quite a complex issue. We cannot simply come to the conclusion that Taiwan's successful modernization was brought about by any one of these factors.

Some scholars used to argue that the Confucian ideal of "Based upon the People" or popular consent (Min Ben) was consistent with democracy. However, we must acknowledge that Min Ben thought is a political theory that only requires that the ruler be concerned with the real needs of the people. In China there is a proverbial saying: water can float a boat, it can also sink the boat. The Min Ben thought is really just a warning that rulers should not neglect the needs of the subjects; it does not suggest that people may govern themselves. In fact, it seems to me that Min Ben thought is a hindrance to the development of democracy. I believe this is one of the reasons that it took so long for democracy to develop in China.

Fourth is the low educational level of the people. There is an interpretation that a population with a literacy rate of about 20% is a good foundation for the development of modernization. Evelyn Rawski claims that the literacy rate in traditional China reached that target of 20%.^⑩ Then

with such an educational background, why were the Chinese unable to achieve economic development. It seems that we have to put together other factors before reaching an interpretive conclusion.

Apparently, a literacy rate of 20% is not high enough for the development of a democratic system. In early twentieth century China the people were apathetic toward the first democratic reforms instituted by the Constitutionalists. Furthermore, this early experiment in democracy was plagued by corruption. It seems to me that the people's low educational level explains these circumstances. Because their educational level was so low, the people could not ascertain what democracy meant to them. Also, the low level of literacy enabled officials to deceive the people and use their political power corruptly.

From the above factors we see why China's move toward modernization was so slow. In this paper we have discussed the relationship between revolution and modernization. We have seen that revolution sometimes helps smooth over difficulties that may otherwise hinder modernization. Yet we have also seen that revolution creates other kinds of difficulties for modernization. So when revolution and modernization movements came together in the 70 years before 1949, they brought turmoil and chaos, serving to slow China's modernization.

During the past forty years in Taiwan, social conditions have been quite peaceful. Such conditions are a prerequisite for rapid modernization. Yet repeated revolution on Mainland China under the Communist regime has given its 1.1 billion people a very low standard of living. By examining these two cases, we can discern what causes modernization to go forward or lag behind. Sometimes we praise a revolution for wiping out difficulties for modernization; sometimes we blame it for making it more difficult to improve the living conditions of the people.