
A Long-Term Revolution——Exploring Chinese History Between 1850 and 1949¹

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Abstract:

The period between 1839-1949 represents a crucial moment in Chinese history. After centuries of imperial domination over the region, China faced the encounter with the Western modernity, manifesting itself in full extension putting in evidence the backwardness in comparison to the European power. The clash of conceptions was accompanied by a series of defeats against European countries and Japan, the division of China in spheres of influence and the adoption of treaties that forced Chinese opening, giving birth to the widely famous “100 years of national humiliation”, departing from the First Opium Wars and finishing with the victory in the Sino-Japanese War. The collapse of the Chinese worldviews, hence, merged with the witnessing of a failing empire.

In complementation to this official narrative, this paper presents an alternative understanding of this period. Following a close view of the uprisings and revolts between those years what stands clearly is the common understanding of a nation that is at risk of disappearance and needs to be saved. Divergences regarding the causes of the collapse of it provided different solutions that encouraged the revolutions, concluding in the idea of a complete change of system with the victory of the Communist Revolution. Rather than visualising this epoch as “100 years of national humiliation” this article sustains it can be supplemented by considering it as “100 years of national revolution”, providing new insights for the understanding of Chinese history.

Key Words: Chinese Modern History, China's National Humiliation, Chinese Revolution, Chinese Modernity, Chinese Nation

¹ I would like to thank Joseph Esherick and the anonymous reviewers for all the helpful comments.

1. INTRODUCTION

Within a twentieth century full of remarkable international events, the Chinese Revolution has enough force to secure an exceptional place for itself. Sometimes merely regarded, and even with a dismissive tone, as a Communist Revolution, the complexities behind this process are incommensurable. Understanding the revolution as simply Communist tends to hide long-term tensions, reducing the phenomenon to a triumph of one class over another. Notwithstanding this undeniable accomplishment, it is essential to trace back certain dynamics that can shed light on the turbulence witnessed by China since the First Opium War (1839 – 1842). In this regard, how can this period be characterised?

The challenge implied by this question has puzzled historians for decades. Concepts of humiliation, uprisings, national revolution, Communist Revolution and Social Revolution have emerged, fought and argued while looking for a correct characterisation of this period. Definitions have been stated and rejected, only to be stated again. The growing role of China in the international arena has once again boosted the pursuit of an understanding of these hundred years as a turning point in China's modern history. Although disagreements are predominant, an interesting consensus can be found: the challenge of comprehending contemporary China first implies the task of comprehending its origins.

Among the first issues scholars encounter are matters related to the temporal delimitation of the Chinese Revolution. Should we start the journey in 1946 at the end of the Second World War? Is it recommendable to move back towards 1927 when the split between the Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party became evident? Or, is it necessary to begin with the Chinese Revolution of 1925? What about the May 4th Movement? And the Wuchang Uprising of 1911? Even the several denominations of revolutions in this period further complicate the issue of the revolution's starting point. This leads once again to the core of the problem: What do we mean by the Chinese Revolution?

This article understands the Chinese Revolution as a continuous revolution that lasted for a century, starting from the Taiping Uprising in 1850 and ending with the triumph of the Communist forces in 1949. The whole period must be conceived as a long-term national revolution to place China once again as a powerful country in the international system. It is a revolution whose constant manifestation is reflected in its fight against imperialism and its emphasis on saving the Chinese nation. Furthermore, it is a revolution that experienced, showed and evidenced a struggle of ideologies and ideas about how to avoid the disappearance of the nation. Dominant solutions gained momentum, rose and fell, until the last successful solution was achieved with the victory of the Chinese Communist Party.

In order to explore this hypothesis, this paper will be divided into several sections. Firstly, a short argumentation about the concepts of revolution is presented, understanding that to analyse a phenomenon it is first necessary to define it. In the second section, an examination of the

emergence of the notion of nationalism is stated. The third section deals with the implicit consensus found among the intelligentsia and the political elite about the “nation in danger”. In the fourth part, divergences, contradictions, and tensions surrounding the causes and proposed solutions to the Chinese weakness are described. The fifth section explores how these contested ideologies expressed and manifested themselves in diverse uprisings, finishing with the victory of the Communist Revolution. Finally, the major remarks and insights are articulated in a brief conclusion.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of revolution is one of the most contested terms in the academic field. In general used to refer to a wide range of changes, from social to technological, from political to cultural, and from economic to sexual, the concept has lost identity and power of explanation as it is stretched to fit within it many diverse phenomena. However, if everything is a revolution, then nothing is a revolution. Furthermore, Brinton (1965) stresses another aspect that must be considered, proclaiming that the idea of revolution “troubles the semanticist not only because of its wide range in popular usage, but also because it is one of those words charged with emotional content” (Brinton, 1965, p. 4). This section briefly explores different conceptualisations of revolution in order to arrive to a consistent and clear definition that will guide this article.

Chengte (2016) analyses different conceptualisations of revolution by recurring to varied authors, emphasising certain aspects this event should present. The scholar highlights a necessary link between the revolution and the popular will, implying a transformation of all spheres of the State. It is in this transformation, and in the beginning of a new national story that a revolution encounters its meaning. In this sense, revolutions are unique, and there is not a universal formula that can be applied. Since objectives vary as much as national differences vary, in order to produce a comprehensive understanding of a revolution, it is necessary to first provide an overview of its national roots.

An interesting perspective is provided by Bauman (1994) while analysing the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. This author understands revolutions in terms of a continuum. On one end of the spectrum, the author places the purely political revolution, inferring a change in the style of political rule which affects the way the system operates without fundamental challenges to it. On the other, systemic revolutions imply a complete change of the system itself, promoting a new socio-economic distribution/relation and its political correlation. Conscious of the difficulty of determining what constitutes a “pure revolution”, Bauman (1994) sustains that along this continuum any revolution can be placed.

Venter & Bain (2015) start their enquiry dividing the definitions of revolution in three different schools: functionalism, Marxism and psychological school. In the first place, the functionalist view tends to understand a revolution as a rapid and violent change in the values, the institutions and structures of a State. In this regard, a revolution is seen as a possible outcome,

not necessarily positive or desirable. In the second place, Marxist's theories present revolutions as an inevitable phenomena based on the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed, leading to the conformation of a new socio-economic structure. Among these scholars, revolution is not only a general feature of history, is also a positive one. In the third place, the psychological explanations are related to the gap between the reality and the expectations of the population. Revolutions will occur when people consider that there is an unbearable distance between what they are receiving compared to what they think they should have.

After reviewing these definitions, the authors move towards providing their own view. According to Venter & Bain (2015), a revolution must include an alteration of values or myths of a particular system; an alteration of the social structure; a change in the political institutions; a change in what is legal and illegal; an elite alteration; the use of violence; ebbs and flow; a long-term process; a pattern of collective behaviour that needs the support of the masses; intensity; and the acquiring of a moral/religious force that can justify actions (Venter & Bain, 2015, p. 5). Interesting in this definition is the understanding of a revolution as a process, with aspects that should be present, and as a conclusion, paying attention to the final effects of it.

Having reviewed these diverse apprehensions, how then should we define a revolution? Firstly, it is necessary to understand revolutions as a long-term process, with ebbs and flows, and that implies the mobilisation of masses under certain guidance. Secondly, the final achievement of a revolution can be placed in a continuum between political revolutions and systemic revolutions. Finally, it is relevant to comprehend the historical specificity of a revolution, with its national and international causes. Although an extensive description of the whole period is beyond the scope of this article, general features will be presented.

3. THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONALISM

The idea of the nation, already a famous and popular concept between Western countries, appeared late in China, almost as a vintage fashion. A country conceived for millennia as the centre of the world, as a superior civilization emanating and irradiating its cultural authority, found claims of nationhood strange. The violent encounter with the European powers starting with the First Opium War (1839-1942) welcomed China to the new international system. Although this happenstance did not lack violence, the crushing of this system of Chinese core of values and beliefs was arguably more intense. Such a reception was not to come without crisis. This section hence explores the appearance of the concept of nation and its promotion.

Harrison (2001), referencing other authors, sustains that that the perception China had of the world can be described as "culturalist". The Chinese had understood their values and beliefs as universal, not as part of a specific nation. Indeed, "[t]hey saw the values on which it was based as a universal moral code rather than one that was culturally specific" (Harrison, 2001, p. 20). The Confucian practices were not limited to China but rather should be for all mankind, and "thus the state was not merely a civilisation but was civilisation itself and the standard term for what we now refer to as China was quite simply 'all under heaven'" (Harrison, 2001, p. 20).

Harrison (2001) highlights the understanding of Chinese culture as the only civilization, which therefore puts China in a place of superiority among other cultural expressions. Other political units, sooner or later, would embrace this cultural supremacy, hence making unnecessary the idea of thinking in terms of States. The idea of a world divided in nations had no place in the mental scheme that the Chinese people had developed for thousands of years. Not surprisingly, the encounter with the European nations and Japan made the foundations that had sustained the Chinese political legitimisation for ages tremble. A civilisation that was intended to be the only one lost against several different nationalities that were claiming the equality of their cultures.

Imperialism generated an earthquake the empire could not withstand. Quickly, political and intellectual elites started questioning the central values of Chinese culture, intrinsically associated with Confucianism. Facing the crude reality of a world civilisation that was not such, the vacuum required a filling. Explanations for these failures and a new way of understanding the empire and the culture were needed. While a clear superiority of the Western Powers was undeniable, the central theme implied the identification of which dimension was giving the base of that advantage. Among the ideas and values imported from the West, probably the concept of the nation had the longest and deepest impact.

Witnessing the collapse of their worldview, intellectuals hastily realised (and not with the same speed with which they were able to promote their conclusions) that the international system was divided in different political units, each one carrying its own culture. Trusting the superiority of the Chinese civilisation presented difficulties in front of European cannons. Rather than a civilisation, or the civilisation, China needed to be a nation. However, the construction of the nation under the imperialist coercion was more than challenging.

Where to settle the definitions of that nation was especially problematic considering that the Chinese territory involved different ethnicities and cultures. Languages, values and beliefs needed to be included in the Chinese idea of nation while keeping what was considered Chinese. The paradox of entangling a nation and an empire was the main problem that needed to be addressed. The idea of nation had appeared. The construction of the nation was still waiting. In this sense, “from the late nineteenth century we see the development of a new culture closely linked to efforts to build a modern nation state” (Harrison, 2001, p. 3).

In conclusion, the dynamics between empire, imperialism and nation marked China since the Opium Wars. The understanding of China as a superior civilisation, the only one “under heaven”, faced a brutal encounter with the European States bringing their conception of nation. The collapse of the system of beliefs implied a vacuum that was filled with the idea of nationhood and the pursuit of constructing a nation-state.

4. AN ENDANGERED NATION

The adoption and expansion of the concept of nation did come with an aggregate: the risk of its disappearance. If China is not a civilisation but a nation, and this nation is suffering defeat after

defeat against the European countries, then the direct conclusion is that the nation can be subsumed by others. The progressive reasoning from nation to nation-at-risk stands clearly, underlined by the understanding that there was a weakness among the Chinese that needed to be addressed. This section explores the tacit agreement among the socio-political elites and the intelligentsia around the idea of peril of the nation.

Chow points that the "Save the nation" slogan was first used after China's defeat by Japan in 1894 (Chow, 1960, p. 20). The encounter with the European nations and Japan evidenced, explained and demonstrated the poor relative power of China in comparison. Facing this reality and the decay of Chinese classical way of understanding and making sense of the world, claims of risk and necessity of salvation became a common characteristic, a natural feature of the political landscape. Tracing back the development of the idea of nation and the awakening of the population, Fitzgerald states that "These voices mark the boundaries of the greater discursive field in which political theorists and activists formulated their ideas, and in which others made sense of their demands to "wake up" and save China" (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 9). The extension of this belief is striking, the shared deep intersubjective knowledge that the nation is at risk.

In Fitzgerald's all-encompassing study, mentions of this essential duty can be found in a diverse group of activists and politically active persons. In the first place, and besides the incredible complexity of the process which is beyond the scope of this article¹, the May 4th Movement, which erupted after the outcomes of the Treaty of Versailles, "eventually channelled the energies of young cosmopolitans into a movement to save the nation" (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 87). Moreover, their defined objective of saving China was accompanied by a confident acceptance of the necessity of guiding the population towards this purpose as well. In this sense, "Their various contacts with modern Western civilization and increasing alienation from the traditional ideology and ruling class enabled them to lead other restless people in a "save China crusade" (Chow, 1960, p. 9). The whole movement is characterised by this author as a campaign towards the saving of the country, then spinning in different tendencies according to diverse ideologies.

The same concern respectively can be found among the artists, especially the writers. By other means, and in general recurring to stories or metaphors in vernacular language, this mobilized population also attempt to aware a nation that was considered at risk. An interesting example portrayed by Fitzgerald refers to Zeng Pu's *Flower in an Ocean of Sin* and Liu E's *The Travels of Lao Can*. In the former, lotus eaters awake discovering that the island where they live is sinking; in the latter, a hero wakes up to realise that a ship with its passengers and crew are about to sink and something needs to be done to impede this destiny. The moment of awakening, as the moment of encounter of China with the Western world, is directly associated with the danger of destruction of that China (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 61).

¹ An excellent description of this process can be found in Chow, 1960.

In the third place, Communist perspectives addressed as well this problematic. Notwithstanding the acceptance of the state as a mechanism utilised by capitalists that needs to be eliminated, in the 1920s this possibility “certainly involved a grave risk of China losing its territory and its political identity” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 90). Li Dazhao, one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, clearly perceived the peril of the nation. Furthermore, the life of Mao is marked as well by the chase of this saving quest (Schram, 1967).

The Nationalist, in the fourth place, yet again expressed the need of tackling Chinese weaknesses to save the country. In this sense, Fitzgerald articulates that “[s]till, the language of the Nationalist Revolution enabled the revolutionaries to conceive of their purpose, of saving China (*jiuguo*), in ways that were to transform, in radical ways, the nation they set out to save” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 155). The inherent risks of imperialism merged in this perspective with the internal flaws of China, usually associated with warlordism.

In the fifth place, Fitzgerald also traces these conceptions to anarchists, who sustained that the compulsion of liberating woman answered and is justified in terms of saving the nation. It is not in justice nor in an identification of inherent rights that this group assumed the emancipation of these women, but rather in its potential for the strengthening of the nation (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 369).

Finally, further evidence of the extension of the worry to save China can be found in the proliferation of different associations and newspapers, which explicitly linked their name with this purpose. Save China Corps, Save China Fund, National Salvation Fund, Save the Nation Weekly, Save the Nation Daily, Merchants’ Save-China Association, Corps of Chinese Students in Japan for National Salvation and Tientsin Alliance of All Circles for National Salvation, among others, exemplified this reality (Chow, 1960).

To sum up, the collapse of culturalism and the following diffusion of the concept of nation came along with an extended agreement on the fact that this same nation was at risk. While the causes of this peril might diverge, the extended conception of this danger is striking. The May 4th Movement, the artists, the Communists, the Nationalists, the anarchists and the different associations created during the first quarter of the twentieth century illustrate this point. The agreement on the symptoms of the patient is remarkable. However, the disagreement about the diseases was even more prominent.

5. DIFFERENT PLANS ON HOW TO SAVE THE NATION

Understanding that the Chinese nation was at risk by no means implied a shared knowledge about why this was or what were the ways to erase this threat. Different socio-political groups identified different problems and hence different solutions. From the basic shared consensus of peril the political arena became a space of contested ideologies, a universe for power disputes. This section describes how different ideal-types clusters portrayed themselves as knowing the truth, defining the way and providing the life.

Before addressing this topic, it is worth mentioning that the following groups should be considered as ideal-types. Bearing this in mind, it is complex to position actors purely in one of these groups, and in general, aspects of each of them can be found in many political activists. Furthermore, along the tumultuous years between the Taiping Rebellion and the end of the Communist Revolution, the same actors changed their conceptions, adapting and adopting new solutions to the problems they perceived.

The first group can be classified as a cultural one. Especially centred in universities, this cluster tended to find the reasons for the Chinese weakness in its cultural values, namely Confucianism. In this sense, it was “the first time Chinese intellectuals recognized the need for a complete transformation of traditional Chinese civilization” (Chow, 1960, p. 13). This approximation towards the deconstruction of Chinese culture was a necessary step to the welcoming of the two dimensions that constituted the solution: democracy and science. According to this group, the Confucian conceptions of loyalty, rituals, role of woman and ethics oppose directly to the implementations of these two variables that were present in the West.

A second relevant group must be defined as political. The initial core belief of this group gathered around the building of a strong State monopolizing the use of violence and unifying the territory. Visualising the weakness of the Qing Empire, unable to impose its decisions and build up a robust China to face the European imperialist, the main answer from this group was political and implied a change of system. Among these activists, some groups will claim for the necessity of democracy while others will emphasise the relevance of a powerful State or even the disappearance of it. Political activists, as well, could move along different solutions. Interesting is the development of the Nationalist Party, first promoting a democratic revolution but later merging between the party and the state. In other words, “Sun explained that he no longer proposed to “govern” but to “build” the state through the party (*yi dang jian guo*)” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 185).

The third important group found the reasons of the Chinese frailty in the social problems of China. According to this view, the socioeconomic system prevented China from developing a powerful State. In this sense, changing these conditions was essential and the first step towards the construction of the country. The most relevant among these groups was the Communist Party, which had its own perspective about the Chinese difficulty and how to solve it. From an obvious Marxist vision of history, the Chinese Communist Party conceived it as the history of class struggles. Given the harsh conditions and social inequalities in China, the social revolution hence became an inherent part of the salvation of the nation. Without a proper social revolution, based in the peasant force instead of the classic proletarian revolution to modify the distribution of the means of production, the nation was condemned to perish (Schram, 1967).

In conclusion, although a consensus about the risk of the nation can be found among the activists and political theorists, divergences about the causes, and therefore the solutions, arose rapidly. Saving the nation implied defining what was wrong with the nation and how to repair it. Firstly, cultural groups tend to base their argument on traditional Chinese culture, associated

with Confucianism, stating its backwardness and its limitations towards the implementation of a democratic system and new scientific methods. Secondly, the political groups highlighted the inability of the Qing Empire to build up a strong State that could face the European nations and Japan. Departing from these conceptions, different clusters will encourage a democratic state, an authoritarian one or even the disappearance of it. The necessity of territorial consolidation remained strong in all these visions. Finally, the last group tended to find the roots of the problem in social conditions. From this perspective, sustained especially by the Communist Party, a social revolution is required as a pre-condition for the survival of the nation. Unsurprisingly, these contending ideologies will manifest themselves in different political uprisings.

6. A CONTINUOUS REVOLUTION

As aforementioned, the underlining idea of saving the nation found many expressions, each one claiming knowledge about the Chinese problem and the correspondent solution. The ideological contest between different groups translated into diverse uprisings, each pretending to achieve the salvation of the nation. From 1850, after the First Opium War, movements towards this objective continued to arise, finalising with the Communist victory in 1949. A hundred years of long-term national revolution framed under the salvation of China. This section briefly describes the uprisings, rebellions and “revolutions” between 1850 and 1949, understanding that all of them shared this common ideal.

The Taiping Rebellion, “by far the greatest of the rebellions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Harrison, 2001, p. 49) dating from 1850 to 1864, became the first manifestation of the long process of saving China. Religious, political and cultural aspects merged pushing the declaration, by the Society of God Worshippers, of the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace. Moving northeast and encountering some popular support, this movement gained control of Wuchang, Hankou and Nanjing. The idolatry quickly diminished “as their political goals developed [...] begun to identify the Manchu forces as the demons to be opposed and to take up the rhetoric of opposition to the dynasty” (Harrison, 2001, p. 50). This political understanding was also accompanied by a rejection of Confucianism, hence “the Taiping vision of society was opposed not only to the Manchus but also to most of the forms and structures of the Chinese state” (Harrison, 2001, p. 51). Cultural and political conceptions mixed giving birth to this uprising, coloured with “a heightened consciousness of genuine ills, but only a confused notion of how to remedy them” (Bianco, 1971, p. 4).

An attempt to solve the decline of the nation, from a top-down approach, was marked by the Hundred Day’s Reform. Procuring to transform certain aspects of the empire while maintaining it, the short life of this intent ended in a coup that was shortly followed by the famous Boxer Rebellion. Fundamental in this revolt was the anti-imperialist component, boosted by draughts, soon adopted by the imperial authorities (Harrison, 2001). However, no solution for the Chinese nation was proposed, what took place was rather a reaction to a feeling of risk.

The Wuchang Uprising (sometimes referenced as Nationalist Revolution) of 1911 found ground mainly in political reasons. Visualising the weakness of the Qing Empire and its governance flaws, failing both in modernising China and in facing the European imperialism, this movement stood against the empire giving birth to the Republic of China. While Harrison states its complexity evidenced in the fact that “some people thought of themselves as participating in a revolution against the Manchu dynasty, while others saw the events as a revolution against foreign interference and westernising reforms” the political content transcends, as to save the nation political changes were needed. From this triumph, afterwards, a profound transformation of Chinese mentality could be pursued, giving a certain cultural component to this uprising (Fitzgerald, 1996). However, while the political objective of ending the Empire succeeded it “brought no fundamental changes in Chinese society” (Bianco, 1971, p. 18).

The failure of the Republic soon became evident, showing that the problem of saving the nation was still an urgent matter. The May 4th Movement, in its extensive conception, finds its base also in the saving China movement. Students, workers, intellectuals and merchants, among others, mobilised against the Republic. The great complexity and variety of these groups, experiencing and appealing from different perspectives looking for diverse objectives, set up common ground in the fact that something required to be done to avoid the fall of the country. In this sense, it is worth noticing “the development of close relations between the Chinese intellectuals and the public in the save China movement” (Chow, 1960, p. 77). Cultural, political and certain social dimensions combined behind this movement framed by peril and fear.

A fourth expression of these contested ideologies can be found, yet again, in another Nationalist Revolution, which took place between 1925 and 1927. The Nationalist Party and the Communist Party joined forces to overthrow the Republic of China understanding that what was needed was not “just a nationalist political revolution, but a social revolution as well” (Bianco, 1971, p. 23). The Northern Expedition, defeating easily the Republic’s troops, “won *the* victory” (Bianco, 1971, p. 24), establishing the period of Nationalist government after breaking with the Communist Party. Quickly, however, the social motivations led place to the necessity of consolidating the territory and building a functional State, comprehending this was the first step that the nation required (Bianco, 1971). The success (or not) of its mission to save China was soon going to be taken to trial against the Japanese.

The last and final manifestation of the hundred years of revolution was the Communist Revolution. After an interregnum of political cohabitation between the Nationalist and the Communist Party to face the Japanese invasion, the civil war soon exploded with all its force. Both parties, claiming the flag of saving the nation, engaged in a four-year civil war, which ended with a Communist triumph and the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. Two different conceptions about how to build-up a nation that can stand in the international arena clashed with the ultimate victory of the Communist perspective. The closing of the long-

term revolution, the final answer to the nation at risk, materialised: A social revolution was necessary in order to build a strong country.

In conclusion, this section briefly described how the ideological disputes gave birth to different political movements that attempted to save the nation appealing to different solutions. Behind the presented uprisings, namely the Taiping Rebellion, the Wuchang Uprising, the May 4th Movement, the Nationalist and the Communist Revolution, a common shared knowledge of the necessity of saving China can be traced. These events moved throughout the three groups presented in the previous section, giving cultural, political and social solutions. The final response, concluding a period of a revolution of hundred years, came with the Communist victory, generating a complete systemic change in the three dimensions.

7. CONCLUSION

Revolution, uprising, rebellion and revolution again are concepts utilised to describe the convulsed period starting from the Opium Wars until the moment of triumph of the Communist Party. Usually characterised by the political leadership as a “century of humiliation”, this papers sustains that the counter face of this conception implies a “hundred years of revolution”. The Taiping Rebellion in 1850 gave birth to a long-term revolution that ended in 1949 with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. Furthermore, this extended revolution is conceived as national, as the fundamental process behind the different political manifestations is to save the nation. Returning to the starting point, how can the Chinese Revolution be regarded?

As stated in the first section, this paper departs from a specially constructed definition of revolution. Firstly, revolutions are conceived as a long-term process with ebbs and flows, implying at certain point the mobilisation of the masses under a leadership. As explored in the fifth section, the Chinese Revolution can be understood as a revolution of hundred years, showing different uprisings in different moments, with its counter attempts to limit the development of the revolution. In most of these manifestations, as well, the masses of a certain region, or the country itself, were mobilised to achieve political objectives. Leadership is another present variable considering Hong Xiuquan, Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-Shek and Mao Zedong. Along this process, as well, different solutions in terms of cultural, political or social dimensions mix generating new, novel and original answers to the question of “how to save China?”

In the second place, the final stage of the process of revolution can be placed in a continuum between political revolutions, modifying the style of political rule, and systemic revolutions, implying a complete change in the system. The previous section evidences a movement, through the revolution, from a political to a system one. While the first expressions of the Chinese Revolution purposed the end of the imperial rule, replacing it first with a democracy and later with an autocratic government, it finalised with a comprehensive alteration of the

system, transforming every aspect of the Chinese life. With the pass of the years, the Chinese Revolution kept moving towards the systemic extreme of the continuum.

The final aspect that must be considered when analysing a revolution is its particularities and specificities, making each revolution unique. While the core sections of this article intend to provide a general overview of the Chinese conditions, which exceed the scope of this paper, it is relevant to follow the perceptions of the authors of the successful revolution, allowing their entity and analysing how they signify their own acts. Providing voice to the ones who conducted the phenomenon implies moving away from abstract and theoretical conceptions putting the event in the spatial and temporal historicity. Assumed the final triumph of the Communist, which revolution were they intending?

In this regard, famous is Mao's quote about his understanding of a revolution, sustaining that "is an act of violence whereby one class overthrows the authority of another. A rural revolution is one in which the peasantry overthrows the authority of the feudal landlord class" (quotation obtained from Schram, 1967, p. 86). Extremely related to the Marxist school aforementioned, Mao highlights the systemic and violent change related to a revolution.

In spite of this consideration, it is interesting to note a particular change in the current perception of the significance of the Chinese Revolution. Leaving aside the class struggles, Chinese museums present a different understanding of the implications of the Revolution². Words and concepts as "rejuvenation", "development", "prosperity", "peaceful existence" resonate in every conclusion, moving the focus from the class struggle towards the positioning of China in the international system. The narrative is incisive:

The history of the South Bureau of CPC witnessed the victory of the Anti-Japanese National United Front advocated by the CPC, and it was the great historical chapter of the CPC and the Chinese nation striving for the national independence and people liberation in the history of the Chinese Revolution and Chinese Communist Party (Chongqing Honyan Revolution Memorial Hall)

The change in the perception of the revolution among the victorious is thought provoking. From a pure Marxist conceptualisation in terms of class struggle, the current political leadership conceives the revolution as a breaking point in Chinese history, a hinge opening the door to development. Moreover, this development, remarkably, is depicted as more than a mere development. It is the "Chinese dream of rejuvenation", the resetting of an historical position, that brings things "back to normal". This is, then, the story that the revolution gave birth to.

In conclusion, the period dating from 1850 to 1949 can be depicted as a revolution of one hundred years. This long-term process, with movements forward and backwards, has as common ground the "saving of the nation". Different groups will provide different solutions,

² The analysed transcriptions were obtained from museums and memorial sites in the cities of Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai, Chongqing and Chengdu.

transiting from a pure political revolution to a systemic one. The particular conditions of China and the perceptions of the ones who have successfully accomplished the revolution evidenced the conception of a national revolution that intends to save China building a powerful state that can exercise its influence in the international system.

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