

CHINA, GLOBALIZATION, AND DEVELOPMENT

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To understand the importance of the Chinese revolution for its subsequent economic development.
- To understand the importance of the agrarian question in the current and future development of China.
- To consider whether China is following a 'market socialist' or capitalist development trajectory.

INTRODUCTION

According to the dominant discourse of our times, Asia is in the process of overcoming the legacy of underdevelopment. In this view, the region is 'catching up' within the capitalist system rather than breaking away from it. This suggests that capitalism might be shedding its imperialist nature, at least as far as East and South Asia are concerned. Countries such as China and India are seen to be in the process of becoming great powers, including in the nuclear arena.

The eventual result of this process of evolution would be a multi-polar world, organized around at least four poles: the United States, Europe, Japan, and China (and perhaps even six poles, if we include Russia and India). Together, these poles and the countries and regions directly associated with them (Canada and Mexico, eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, and Korea) contain the vast majority of the Earth's population. This multi-polar system would thus be different from the successive versions of imperialism, from multi-polar (up to 1945) to unipolar (with the emergence of the collective imperialism of the **triad** among the United States, the European Union, and Japan), which included only a minority of the world's people.

But the analysis on which this reasoning rests appears shallow to me. First of all, this vision does not take into account the policies that Washington

deploys to undermine the diverse projects that might eventually threaten its hegemony, such as the ambitions of the principal actors concerned, including China. In the meantime, the triad remains dominant. Despite some divergence with Washington, Europe has not yet begun to contemplate the possibility of breaking the Atlantic ties that leave it in the shadow of the United States. For both similar and distinct reasons, Japan remains deferential with regard to its trans-Pacific protector. As a result, the days of the triad's collective imperialism are still far from over.

Second, it is problematic to predict the emergence of new economic powers simply on the basis of economic growth rates. It would present a deceptive picture, and in addition, the validity of such projections beyond a few years into the future is doubtful. In reality, the pursuit of growth in Asia depends on numerous internal and external factors that are articulated in various ways according to, on the one hand, the strategic models of social modernization chosen by the dominant local classes and, on the other hand, reactions from outside (that is, by the imperialist powers who constitute the triad). In addition to its possible consequences for the planet's ecological equilibrium, this pursuit of growth also has the clear potential to trigger conflict with the countries of the triad, who have until now been the exclusive beneficiaries of the world's resources.

CONTRASTING LEGACIES OF THE CHINESE REVOLUTION

The dominant discourse attributes China's post-Maoist success entirely to the virtues of the market and its opening to the outside world. This discourse is an extremely simplistic analysis of the realities of Maoist China, and it also ignores the problems surrounding the capitalist option.

Exceptional trajectory

During the three decades of **Maoism** (1950 to 1980), China registered an exceptional level of growth, double the rate of India's and that of all the other large regions of the Third World. Nonetheless, its performance during the final two decades of the century was even more extraordinary. What has to be remembered, however, is that these unparalleled recent results would not have been possible without the economic, political, and social foundations that were laid during the preceding period—although this should not be taken to imply that there were not also changes. Thus, during the Maoist period, priority was given to laying down a solid basis for the long term. Today, the new economic policy places the emphasis on immediate improvements in consumption, which were made possible by the earlier efforts. It is not absurd to argue that the Maoist decades were characterized by a tendency to favour the building of long-term foundations. But inversely, the emphasis placed on light industry and services from 1980 onward cannot last forever, since China is still in a phase that requires the expansion of its basic industries.

'Workshop of the world' or 'market socialism'

While economic power formerly rested on the monopoly of industrial strength by the world's great powers, today the imperialism of the triad is based on new monopolies, notably the control of technology, the flows of finance, access to the planet's natural resources, information and com-

munication, and weapons of mass destruction (on the five monopolies of new imperialism and the polarization of its construction, see Amin 1997, 3–5). However, these new privileges of the imperialist centres act to deepen global polarization rather than to counteract or attenuate it. In this sense, the term 'emerging country', which appears to suggest that the triad is 'threatened' by countries such as China, India, Brazil, and the others, is deceptive. These are in fact countries that, far from 'catching up', are building tomorrow's **peripheral capitalism**. China is no exception. China is already the workshop of the world, a subcontracting workshop for the benefit of capital and consumers in the countries of the triad. In contrast with this model, the path toward a socialist alternative will be longer and very different from the paths imagined by the Second and Third Socialist International. Following this perspective, **market socialism** could constitute a first phase. But in order for that to happen, several conditions must be met.

China and Russia: Two different itineraries

The Marxism of the socialist movements of the early twentieth century was essentially worker-oriented and Eurocentric. This Marxism shared the dominant ideology's linear vision of history, according to which all societies had to pass first through a phase of capitalist development (for which colonization—in this respect 'historically positive'—laid the ground) before being capable of aspiring to 'socialism'. The idea that the 'development' of some (the dominant centres) and the underdevelopment of others (the dominated peripheries) were indissolubly linked, both imminent products of the global expansion of capitalism, was entirely foreign to this vision.

Initially, some socialists, including Lenin, kept their distance from this dominant theory. Lenin notably led a successful revolution in the 'weak link' country (Russia) but always with the conviction that this would be followed by a wave of socialist revolutions in Europe. As we know, this dream was never fulfilled. Lenin thus pro-

Figure Ep.1 Making Rattan furniture in Haimen, China, 1986



Source: Denis Sing/IDRC Database

pounded a vision that placed more emphasis on the transformation of the eastern rebellions into revolutions. But it was left to the Communist Party of China and to Mao to turn this new vision into concrete reality.

The Russian revolution was led by a party that was deeply rooted within the working class and the radical intelligentsia. Its alliance with the peasantry followed naturally. The resulting radical agrarian reform finally fulfilled the long-standing dream of Russian peasants: to become landowners. But this historical compromise contained the seeds of its own limitations: the 'market' itself inevitably increased economic and social differentiation within the peasantry (the well-known phenomenon of 'kulackization').¹

The Chinese revolution that followed later, however, was rooted in different social bases right

from the start, which guaranteed a strong alliance between the poor and middle peasantry. In addition, the war of resistance against Japanese aggression allowed the formation of a united front led by the communists, recruited largely from the dominant classes who were disappointed by the betrayals of the Kuo Min Tang (KMT).² The Chinese revolution thus produced a novel outcome, different from that of post-revolutionary Russia. A radical peasant revolution rejected the very idea of private property in land and replaced it with the guarantee of equal access to land for all peasants. To the present day, this decisive advantage, which is shared by only one other country (Vietnam), constitutes the major obstacle to a devastating expansion of agrarian capitalism. It should be noted that current debates in China are largely over this question.

The success of Maoism

Moreover, Maoist China achieved these results by avoiding the worst excesses of the Soviet Union. **Collectivization** was not imposed through murderous violence, as occurred under Stalinism. Conflicts within the party did not lead to a reign of terror (Deng Xiaoping was pushed aside but then later returned). The goal of an unprecedented relative equality, in the distribution of incomes between peasants and workers as well as within these classes and between them and the leadership, was pursued—with highs and lows, of course—with tenacity and formalized by strategic development choices contrasting to those taken by the Soviet Union (these options were formulated in China in the ‘10 great reports’ at the beginning of the 1960s). These achievements laid the ground for the subsequent development successes of post-Maoist China from 1980. This explains why post-Maoist China, while inscribing its development within the framework of the new capitalist globalization, did not experience the same destructive shocks that followed the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Mao’s failure

The successes of Maoism nonetheless did not irreversibly resolve the question of the long-term success of socialism. First, the development strategy of the 1950–80 period, based on heavy industry and the construction of a vast infrastructure, exhausted its potential, in part because it came to fruition and in part because it could not maintain growth without expanding the internal market at the same time as opening, even in a limited way, to external markets. It then became clear that some kind of opening (albeit controlled) was necessary. The Chinese Maoist system simultaneously combined the contradictory tendencies of a reinforcement of socialist options and their weakening. Mao, conscious of this contradiction, tried to shift the tide in favour of socialism through a **cultural revolution** (from 1966 to 1974). This was

the reasoning behind his call to set ‘fire to the headquarters’ (the central committee of the Chinese Communist party), which to his eyes was the source of the bourgeois aspirations of the ruling political classes. Mao thought that he could rely on the ‘youth’ to lead this correction in the course of the revolution. The unfolding of events, however, showed that this judgment was mistaken. Once the page was turned on the cultural revolution, supporters of the capitalist route were emboldened to go on the offensive.

What legacy?

Maoism contributed decisively to setting the precise parameters of the pitfalls and challenges posed by the expansion of globalized imperialism/capitalism. Maoism made it possible to put the centre/periphery contrast inherent in the expansion of ‘truly existing’,³ imperialist, and polarizing contemporary capitalism at the centre of its analysis of this challenge and to draw out all of the lessons it offered for the socialist struggle in both the dominant centres and the dominated peripheries. These conclusions were summarized in a tidy formula ‘Chinese style’: ‘States want independence, nations want liberation, people want revolution.’ States (that is, the ruling classes) attempt to increase their room for manoeuvre within the global system and to go beyond the status of ‘passive’ actors (condemned to suffer a unilateral adaptation to the demands of the dominant imperialist power) to become ‘active’ actors (who participate in shaping the global order). Nations (historic blocs of classes) want liberation—that is, ‘development’ and ‘modernization’. People (the dominated and exploited masses) aspire to socialism. The formula allows us to understand the real world in all its complexity and hence to formulate effective strategies. Given this formulation, the transition from capitalism to global socialism will be a very long-term process, and thus we break with the idea of a ‘short transition’ that dominated socialism for most of the twentieth century.

Figure Ep.2 Men and women participating in an exercise drill



Source: IDRC Database

THE CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA

The Chinese ruling class has chosen the capitalist route, if not since the beginning of Deng Xiaoping's rule, then at least after it. But it will not explicitly recognize this fact because its legitimacy rests entirely on the revolution, which it cannot repudiate without committing political suicide. We must nonetheless judge political forces by what they do and not by what they say.

The capitalist project

The true project of the Chinese ruling class is of a capitalist nature, and 'market socialism' is a shortcut that allows them to gradually put in place the fundamental structures and institutions of capitalism, while keeping the frictions and pains of the transition to a minimum. This method is

diametrically opposed to the one that has been adopted by the new ruling class in Russia, who accepted the simultaneous negation of the revolution and the evolution that followed it, which allowed it to reconstruct itself as the new bourgeois class. In contrast, the Chinese ruling class knows that the path it is following leads to capitalism, and it is content with this, even if a fraction (no doubt a minority) remain imprisoned in the rhetoric of 'Chinese socialism'. The ruling class also knows that the people are attached to 'socialist values' (equality above all) and to the real progress associated with these values (the right to equal access to land for all peasants above all). It knows that it must move towards capitalism slowly, with great caution and deliberateness.

The structure of the worldwide capitalist project and the degree of stability it enjoys are the products of 'historical compromises', social alliances defining the hegemonic blocs that succeed each

other during the process of establishing the system. The specificity of each of the different historical paths (the English, the French, the German, the American) defined by these successions has produced, in turn, the specific characteristics of the contemporary form of capitalism in each of these societies. It is because each of these distinct approaches was carried out successfully in the countries at the centre of the world system that capitalism became 'stabilized' (which is not synonymous with 'eternal!').

New alliances

What are the possibilities open to the capitalist option in China today? Alliances are already in place among state powers, the new class of large 'private capitalists', peasants in the areas that have profited from the openings offered by urban markets, and the rapidly expanding middle classes. Nonetheless, this hegemonic bloc excludes the great majority of workers and peasants. Thus, the Chinese structure is not perfectly analogous to the historical alliances built by certain European bourgeoisies with the peasantry (against the working class) and the subsequent social democratic approach, the historic compromise between capital and labour. The model of capitalist development underway in China is based on prioritizing exports to satisfy the growing consumption demands of the middle classes. This is the model that I characterized as being the perfect example of peripheral accumulation. The pursuit of this model implies what we have already seen: a barbaric exploitation of workers that is reminiscent of the nineteenth century (not to mention the associated ecological disaster). In contrast, a more balanced model of development must be based on prioritizing the growth of internal markets to benefit the majority of the population, reinforced by the development of capital goods production. Current political and social conflicts in China, which are taking place within the party as well as between the party and the various lower-class social groups, are in large part a reflection of these two fundamental positions. On one side, the par-

tisans of peripheral capitalism need to exploit the masses as much as possible, because the model of accumulation they propose is outward-oriented. And on the other side, the proponents of the model based on the growth of an internal market have to establish a relationship with the popular classes so that they can gain access to capitalist production, as occurred with the 'great Keynesian compromise' that took place in Western countries from 1945.

This weakness within the hegemonic pro-capitalist bloc in China is the origin of the difficult problem of the political management of the system. I leave the task of arguing that markets equal democracy to the propagandists. Capitalism functions, under certain conditions, in parallel with the political practice of limited democracy in that the former manages to control democratic usage and thus prevent the anti-capitalist 'drift' that authentic democracy inevitably entails. When this is not possible, capitalism simply avoids democracy and does not fare any less well.

The democracy question

The issue of democracy in China is more complex as a result of the legacy of the Third International and its particular beliefs concerning the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. The party line put in place during the Maoist period, breaking with the Soviet tradition, was a genuine step towards participatory democracy, though insufficient. Today, this approach has been abandoned, and it is clear that maintenance of the current political structures is not compatible with the capitalist route that is becoming harder to deny. How will the party-state retain its name (the Communist Party!) and its reference, though purely rhetorical, to Marx and Mao? If they were abandoned in favour of the model of 'Western democracy' (essentially the multi-party electoral system), could that model function within the country's specific circumstances? I doubt it, not for supposedly historical cultural reasons (along the lines that 'democracy is a foreign concept to Chinese culture') but because the social struggles in which

the majority of the lower classes are likely to become engaged would render it impracticable. China has to invent another form of democracy, associated with market socialism, understood as a phase in a long socialist transition. Otherwise, I can only foresee a succession of autocrats lacking legitimacy, with intervals of unstable, ‘superficial democracy’, which is the current fate of the capitalist Third World.

What is socialism?

Socialism is defined as the emancipation of humanity. ‘True’ socialism, if we can speak of any social system in such qualified terms, cannot be described a priori in terms of precise organizational structures or institutions but according to democratic principles that shape the creative imagination and the full exercise of the powers of the people, as yet unrealized. Here, the creative utopia inspired by Marx provides much more substance for reflection than a mediocre, so-called realist sociology. The path towards socialism will be long, much longer than (and taking a different form from) that imagined by earlier movements. And from this perspective, ‘market socialism’ could constitute a first phase. But for this to work, some conditions must be fulfilled, to which I now turn.

Forms of collective property must be created, maintained, and reinforced throughout the process of social advancement. These forms can, and in fact must, be multiple: through the state, regional groups, workers’ and citizens’ collectives. But for them to successfully meet the needs of market exchange, they will have to be designed and understood as authentic forms of ownership (though not private) and not as an expression of ill-defined powers. I do not accept in this regard the fashionable simplification—invented by von Mises and von Hayek—that confuses property with private property. This reductionism/simplification arises from the false elision of Soviet-style centralized planning with socialism. At the same time, the dominance of collective property does not preclude the recognition of a role for private property. I refer not only to local, ‘small’ property

(artisans, small and medium-sized businesses, small trades and services) but even to ‘big business’ or arrangements with transnational capital, as long as the framework within which they are allowed to relocate and shift is clearly defined. Owners’ (state, collective, and private) use of their rights must be regulated. Such regulation will have to balance the tension between the requirements of capitalist accumulation (despite the collective nature of property) and those of the progressive imposition of the values of socialism (equality first, inclusion of all social groups in the process of change, public service in the most noble sense of the term). Democracy is thus not a single formula that is set once and for all and that need only be ‘applied’ but a process that is never complete, leading me to prefer the term ‘democratization’. Democratization must therefore combine, in its increasingly rich and complex formulations, precise ‘procedural’ definitions (the rule of law, in common parlance) as well as ‘substantive’ elements that reinforce the values of socialism within decision-making processes at all levels and in all areas.

The centrality of the agrarian question

Present-day China is already outside of the ‘market socialist’ model proposed in this chapter. The country advanced along a capitalist path when it accepted, effectively, the dominance of a private property system over public and collective ownership. Many critiques of the current system based on solid factual evidence, Chinese in particular, affirm that it is ‘already too late’. This is not exactly my point of view. As long as the principle of equal access to land remains recognized and effectively implemented, I believe it is possible to conclude that it is not yet too late for social action to modify the evolution of the Chinese model.

The population of China grew in the year 2000 to 1.2 billion inhabitants, of which two-thirds live in rural areas (800 million). A simple projection 20 years into the future demonstrates that it would be illusory, if not dangerous, to

believe that urbanization could significantly reduce the number of rural inhabitants, even if the proportion could be reduced. Annual demographic growth of 1.2 per cent would increase the population of China to 1.52 billion by 2020. We can assume that China could achieve an annual growth rate of 5 per cent in industry and modern services located in urban zones. Realizing this growth rate in a context of modernization and competition would require the intensification of accumulation based on an increase in the productivity of labour (of around 2 per cent annually), rather than an expansion of existing industries and services. The growth in urban employment would therefore be in the order of 3 per cent per year, making it possible to absorb a total of 720 million people in urban areas. This figure assumes no change in the number of people who are currently unemployed or working in precarious or informal employment (and this number is not negligible). Nonetheless, the proportion of people in this situation would be significantly reduced (and this would certainly be a good outcome). Basic mathematics reveals that some 800 million Chinese—the same number as today, but reduced from 67 per cent to 53 per cent as a proportion of total population—would have to remain rural. If they were condemned to migrate to the cities because of a lack of access to land, they would swell the marginalized population of urban slums, as has frequently been the case elsewhere in the capitalist Third World. A projection 40 years into the future simply reinforces this conclusion (see, for example, Tiejun 2001, 287–95). This problem is far from being confined to China. It concerns the whole of the Third World—that is, 75 per cent of the world's population.

The argument of those who would defend capitalism is that the agrarian question in Europe was solved by a rural exodus. Why would the countries of the South not reproduce, one or two centuries later, a similar model of transformation? It is easy to forget that the urban industries and services of the nineteenth century required abundant manual labour and that surplus population could emigrate en masse to the Americas. The

contemporary Third World does not have this option, and if it wants to be competitive, as we ordered it to be, it must immediately adopt modern technologies that require little labour. The polarization produced by the global expansion of capital prevents the South from reproducing, in a delayed fashion, the model of the North.

Is peasant agriculture an option?

What is to be done? We must accept the preservation of peasant agriculture for all the foreseeable future of the twenty-first century—not for reasons of romantic nostalgia for the past but simply because the solution to the agrarian problem can only come from going beyond the logic of capitalism and positioning it within the long secular tradition of global socialism. The agrarian question, far from having been solved, is more than ever at the centre of the major challenges of the future to be faced by humanity.

And yet in this area, China has a major asset at its disposal—the legacy of its revolution—which could allow it to construct one of the possible 'models' of what to do. Access to land is, in effect, a fundamental right for half of humanity, the recognition of which is necessary for survival. This right, ignored by capitalism and not even mentioned in the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights, is recognized to this day in China (and in Vietnam). It would be a supreme illusion to think that by renouncing these rights (that is, by giving land the status of a saleable good, as has been suggested by capitalism's apologists in China and elsewhere), it would be possible to 'accelerate modernization'.

The modernization of agriculture was indeed one of the four modernizations decreed by the Communist Party during the turning point of the 1970s. This most definitely does not mean that encouraging the needed growth of agricultural production requires the abandonment of the right to land for all in favour of profit for the few. Taking this path would certainly yield decent growth in production for a few but at the cost of stagnation for many. Growth would likely be meagre over the

Figure Ep.3 Workers collecting rice for transportation;
Source



Denis Sing/IDRC Database

long haul, both for the majority of the peasants remaining on the land and for those who migrated to the urban slums. This reality is of little concern to the unconditional champions of capitalism. The accumulation and enrichment of the few is the only law they know. The exclusion of the 'inefficient', be it billions of human beings, is not their problem.

The history of China over the course of the past half-century has revealed another path that has sought to engage the whole of the peasantry in the process of modernization (respecting the right to land for all) and that has yielded results that compare favourably with the capitalist path to development. The error of both the Soviet and the Chinese 'commune' model (like the central

planning model) was precisely its claim to have established such formulas as definitive solutions. I share the ideas, for example, of numerous peasant organizations in China who promote and support a diverse movement of cooperatives managed by local communities themselves and not controlled from above by the state.

The national question

The national question also plays a central role in debates and political struggles in China between partisans of different political stripes. China was the victim of uninterrupted imperialist aggression by Western powers and Japan between 1840 and 1949. The invaders operated by means of alliances with the dominant and reactionary local classes, often described as 'feudal' or 'compradore' (a term coined by the Chinese communists). Subsequently, a war of national liberation led by the Communist Party restored China's dignity and reconstructed its territorial unity (with the exception of Taiwan, the status of which remains unresolved). All of China is aware of this history. Despite the regionalisms that the size of the country inevitably generates, the Chinese (Han) nation is a reality. Certain elements of the national question are managed in a questionable manner, notably the situations in Tibet and East Turkistan. Multiple conflicts have developed around these situations. Furthermore, the conflicts have been exacerbated by various attempts by the dominant countries to 'pour oil on the fire' in the hope of exploiting these weaknesses of the Chinese regime.

The Chinese are well aware of the place that their nation holds in history. This is why the Chinese intelligentsia has always looked towards those outside 'models' that, in their opinion, showed what had to be done for China to take its place in the modern world. The first models appeared at the time of the great social movements of May 1919, first in Japan (inspiration for the Kuo Min Tang), then in revolutionary Russia (which finally triumphed because it brought together the struggle against imperialism and a revolutionary social transformation that inspired the people).

Today, with Japan in crisis, Russia dissolved, and Europe itself seeking to imitate the United States, China runs the risk of interpreting its quest for modernity and progress as a failure if it does not adopt the ‘American model’—the model of its adversary—just as it had followed the example set by Japan in the past. China, that great nation, always compares itself with the most powerful.

What ‘miracle’?

The legacy of the Chinese revolution is weighty and continues to weigh in the future of China and the world itself. The successes achieved over the past 20 years would not have been possible without the revolution. Only propagandists for American imperialism and their emulators elsewhere in the world, including China, seem not to know this fact.

An oft-repeated saying is that ‘China is a poor country where one sees little poverty.’ China feeds 22 per cent of the world’s population even though it only has 6 per cent of the planet’s arable land. That is the real miracle. It is not correct to suggest that the source of this miracle can be found in the antiquity of Chinese civilization. Although it is true that on the eve of the Industrial Revolution, China was more technologically advanced than all the other large regions of the world, its situation had deteriorated over the preceding century and a half, resulting in large-scale misery comparable to that in countries ravaged by imperialism, such as India. China owes its remarkable turnaround to its revolution. At the other extreme of the range of conditions created by the expansion of global capitalism, I would place Brazil, often described as ‘a rich country where one only sees poverty’.

The China of ‘modernity’

The Chinese revolution brought Chinese society into modernity. Modernity expresses itself in all aspects of the behaviour of its citizens, who consider themselves responsible for their own history. This modernity is an explanation for why China does not exhibit the para-cultural neuroses that

hold sway in other environments, including the Muslim countries, India, and sub-Saharan Africa. China lives its moment in history. It does not feed on the nostalgia for a reconstructed mythological past that seems to define the spirit of our times. China does not have an ‘identity’ problem. If modernity does not produce *ipso facto* democracy, it at least creates the necessary conditions that would otherwise be unthinkable. Relatively few societies in the periphery of the capitalist system have made this jump into modernity (Korea and Taiwan are also exceptions). On the contrary, the current historical moment is, as a whole, characterized by appalling back-pedaling in this regard—another expression of the bankruptcy of capitalism. Indeed, Gramsci wrote, ‘the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears’ (Gramsci 1971, 275–6).

In this respect, the dominant discourse regarding the cultural traits that are supposedly favourable or unfavourable to democracy only feeds the confusion. This discourse attributes an invariable and trans-historical character to those ‘cultures’ and does not recognize that modernity is a rupture with all other pasts. The modernity that has engulfed China is a major advantage for its future development. The revolution and its dive into modernity have transformed the Chinese people more than any other in the contemporary Third World. China’s popular classes are self-confident. They know how to struggle, and they know that doing so pays off. Submissive attitudes have largely been banished, and the idea that citizens have equal rights and are not subject to the arbitrary rule of the dominant is well anchored in society. The people show a remarkable fighting spirit in social struggles, which number in the thousands, occasionally take the form of violence, and do not always end in failure. Those in power know it, sometimes applying repression in order to avoid the crystallization of battlefronts beyond local horizons (by forbidding the independent organization of the popular classes) and further limiting the danger by the art of ‘dialogue’ and manipulation. These struggles

rarely catch the attention of Western defenders of 'human rights'. Democracy in the service of class struggle does not interest them; indeed, many find it worrying. On the contrary, their desire for democracy, systematically defended and harped upon by all, comes from the 'liberals' who once in power will weaken in their defence of the virtues of capitalism!

Shifting futures

The future of China remains unclear (see Amin 1983). The struggle for socialism has not been won. But it has not (yet) been lost either. And in my opinion, it will not be lost until the day when the Chinese system renounces the right to land for all its peasants. Until that point, political and social struggle can change the country's evolution. The leadership class has tried to control these popular struggles by means of its bureaucratic dictatorship. Some fragments of this same class think that the same methods will prevent the emergence of a bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie and the middle classes as a whole have not decided to fight for democracy and have accepted without difficulty the 'Asian style' autocratic model as long as they are able to satisfy their consumer appetites. At the same time, the popular classes struggle to defend their economic and social rights. Will they be able to unify their struggle, invent new forms of organization, formulate an alternative and positive program, and define the content and practices of a democracy that would benefit them?

In this contradictory context, three futures under construction can be envisaged. These three scenarios correspond to:

- the imperialist project of breaking up the country and the compradorization of its coastal regions;
- a 'national' project of capitalist development;
- a national and popular development project that brings together, in a complementary and conflictual way, the logic of market capitalism and the logic of a long-term commitment to socialism.

The option of market deregulation and maximum economic opening is preferred by both Chinese and foreign liberals and plays into the imperialist strategy. Their argument stresses depoliticization and knee-jerk opposition to the popular classes at the same time that it would deepen the external vulnerability of the Chinese nation and state. This is not a path to democracy. Furthermore, this option would not lift China out of its dominated and peripheral status and would leave it subordinated to the logic of the expanding imperialism of the triad (see Amin 1974, 9–26).

The difference between the second and third models is difficult to identify at first glance, but it can be summarized in the fact that the third implies an assertive foreign policy and the maintenance of modes of redistribution that ensure an acceptable level of social and regional solidarity. But in fact, the difference is one of the nature and not the degree of state intervention. The real core of the debate is found here. The progressive (third) option can only be based on prioritizing the expansion of the internal market and on regulating social relations in such a way as to reduce social and regional inequality as much as possible. Consequently, foreign relations must be subordinate to the needs of this driving logic.

This approach can be contrasted with the option that involves ever-deepening insertion into the world capitalist system as the principal motor of economic development. This option is inevitably associated with a worsening of regional and, above all, social inequalities. With that as a necessary outcome, there is limited space to pursue the alternative option of a 'national capitalism' that would allow China to catch up over time with the developed capitalist world and make it a new great power—indeed a superpower that would force the current powers to renounce their hegemony. It is hard to imagine that any political authority could hold this course within the permissible margins or that a strategy inspired by this goal could avoid turning to the right (and ending up subordinated to the imperialist plan) or to the left (and evolving towards the third model) (Chun 2006).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: CHINA IN THE DEBATE ON DEVELOPMENT

The Maoist and post-Maoist periods of the Chinese experiment do not support the dominant discourse of 'development in global capitalism' at all. On the contrary, despite first impressions, they invalidate these claims and support the analysis that I present of the polarization inherent in the global expansion of actually existing capitalism. China is not an emerging superpower, but if the country continues along the path on which it is currently travelling, it will become the model, par excellence, of the periphery of tomorrow.

Another path is possible, initiated by Maoism. That path found the necessary solution to the agrarian problem and in that respect constitutes an important model for the peoples of the periphery (75 per cent of humanity). Maoism initiated the building of 'another world', one that was not 'invented' by the (justifiably) angry young Westerners at Seattle. In other respects, those

Westerners would do well to round out their knowledge of the realities of our world and develop a deeper consciousness of the real challenges confronting humanity. Certainly, Maoism had its limits. In any case, it was not a replica of Sovietism, as some say unreflectively, and it was able to open up new avenues for advancement.

As for the achievements of post-Maoism, they are certainly impressive: 200 million more urban dwellers, better lodged and nourished than anywhere else in the Third World; industry capable of exporting and absorbing technological progress; reduction of pockets of rural poverty. But these achievements remain vulnerable. 40 per cent of China's exports are manufactured by the branch plants of multinationals and their subcontractors (Plantade and Plantade 2006). This is, above all, associated with an increasing inequality in the social and regional distribution of income. But it also gives hope that with a possible shift to the left, China could contribute to the construction of 'another world', a better world.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. From which theoretical viewpoint is this essay written? How do you know?
2. How does this chapter engage the states versus markets debate?
3. Does the 'emergence' of China as a global player represent a challenge to existing theories and practices of development? Discuss with reference to the theories and concepts learned in this course.

FURTHER READING

Amin, Samir. 1997. *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization: The Management of Contemporary Society*. London: Zed Books.

Chun, Lin. 2006. *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

INTERNET RESOURCES

World Social Forum: <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>.

World Forum for Alternatives: <http://www.forumdesalternatives.org/EN/inicio.php>.

Focus on the Global South: <http://www.focusweb.org>.

Asia Monitor Research Center: <http://www.amrc.org.hk>.

Globalization Monitor: <http://www.globalmon.org.hk/en/index.html>.

NOTES

1. From 'kulacks', a new class of rich peasants who took the place of the feudal structures and developed capitalist agriculture. This social group was physically liquidated by Stalin in the 1930s.
2. Nationalist political party created at the beginning of the century by Sun Yatsen. Until 1927, the KMT and the Communist Party were allies. Subsequently, the civil war broke out and ended in 1949 with the victory of the Communists.
3. 'Truly existing' and therefore very different from the idealized vision generally portrayed by those who are in favour of the expansion of capitalism.
4. Although I do not at all share the point of view of those supposed 'defenders of democracy' whose opinions converge with the lamas and mullahs.