

Samir AMIN

THE 1911 REVOLUTION IN WORLD HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE A comparison with the Meiji Restoration and the Revolutions of Mexico, Turkey and Egypt

The Chinese Revolution of 1911 occurred early in this century amid a series of attempts at modernization through capitalist transformation. These attempts took place in the non European world, on the periphery of the capitalist center, after modern imperialism had expanded capitalism and, by 1890, established it on a world scale. The Mexican Revolution broke out in 1910. Shortly after World War I, two other revolutions began, one in Turkey, led by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the other in Egypt, directed by Saad Zaghlul and the Wafd Party.

The immediate forerunner of these revolts was Japan's Meiji Restoration (1867-1868). A Prussian-style reformation, it was carried out by the state in the latter half of the nineteenth century before the world capitalist system had been fully consolidated. Japan made the transition to autonomous capitalism, but at the sacrifice of its national heritage: today, after nearly a century of capitalist modernization, it is in the throes of radical deculturation. The revolutions of Mexico, Turkey, and Egypt also sought to establish independence, self-directed capitalist regimes. Erupting after imperialism had become a dominant world force, however, they failed to liberate or transform their societies. The Chinese revolution of 1911 alone succeeded in setting the stage for a national-democratic revolution (1928-1952) that transformed the country, yet preserved continuity with national history and culture. It did this by severing the links that bound China to the world capitalist system.

This essay attempts to assess the world historical significance of the 1911 Revolution, the first stage in a national-democratic struggle that made modernization possible by liberating China from imperialist control, by comparing it with the Meiji Restoration, which paved the way for state-led modernization that enabled Japan join the imperialist camp. The second part contrasts the Japanese and Chinese experiences of national transformation with three anti imperialist attempts at independent capitalist development in the third world : the revolutions of Mexico, Turkey and Egypt. Although all five movements occupy the same time span, coinciding roughly with the golden age of imperialism (1880-1914), the latter were neither national-democratic in form nor successful in bringing about modernization. In the conclusion, we suggest some reasons why.

Historically, these revolts on the periphery are part of a continuing process of revolutionary upheaval that began in Europe several centuries ago. The transition from feudalism to capitalism in Western Europe is the real starting point of the Meiji Restoration and the early twentieth-century revolutions on the European fringe.

The Transition to Capitalism in Europe (1500-1800).

The transition from feudalism to capitalism in Western Europe is a subject of continuing controversy among historians, and Marxist analysis has yet to reach a definitive, unified view. There is general agreement, however, that two paths to capitalist development were taken. These are exemplified by the British and French models of bourgeois revolution "from below", and the Prussian model of bourgeois reform initiated and carried out "from above"¹.

Before going further, it should be noted that the word “bourgeois revolution” itself is problematical. The terminology of the revolutions that installed capitalism as the dominant mode of production in Europe derives from the ideology of a victorious social class: It reflects the bourgeoisie’s vision of the historical role it played in the transition from feudalism to modern capitalist society. The difficulty becomes apparent if social revolution is defined generally as a qualitative transformation of the existing mode of production, resulting from the class struggle between an exploiting class and an exploited class and implying the political overthrow of the exploiters by the exploited. While both Marxist and bourgeois historians would agree in identifying feudal lords and monarchs as the exploiting class, the latter would reserve the distinction of exploited class for the bourgeoisie. History shows, however, that the peasantry, not the bourgeoisie, was the exploited social group; the class struggle under feudalism pitted serf against lord. In the course of time, this contest weakened and eventually undermined feudal domination, creating conditions that favoured the rise of the bourgeoisie. A new mode of production commanded by this new social class was able to grow out of the interstices of the old order, renting and ultimately destroying it.

At the same time, the class struggle of the peasantry against the landed nobility increasingly freed serfs from feudal bondage; large tracts of feudal property were appropriated and passed into peasant hands. This in turn accelerated social differentiation within the peasantry. As urban centers burgeoned and their bourgeois inhabitants prospered, a sizeable market for agricultural goods was created, calling into existence a new class of wealthy peasants, a kind of agrarian, or kulak, bourgeoisie. The struggle of peasant producers against feudal exploitation, then undercut the class power of the feudalists, allowing a commercial and manufacturing bourgeoisie to grow out of and develop alongside the old mode of production, and creating in the ranks of the peasantry itself a bourgeois like stratum.

The ascendant bourgeoisie was forced, in the course of its own fight against feudal absolutism, to form an alliance with a very broad segment of the peasant masses not yet liberated from feudal exploitation. The “bourgeois” revolution was in reality a peasant revolution guided by an incipient bourgeoisie in need of allies. This was true both of the English revolutions of the seventeenth century, the Puritan revolt of Oliver Cromwell (1642-1649) and the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688, and the French Revolution of 1789. The term bourgeois revolution is therefore inadequate and misleading. It disguises the fact that the French and English revolutions were pre-eminently peasant revolutions in which the bourgeoisie not only usurped revolutionary achievements merely by assuring its cooperation but pre-empted the sharp class struggle of the peasantry by seizing political power.

Ideology, the form of consciousness that arises from the distorted perception of social existence, played an important role in justifying and expanding the class power of European bourgeoisie. In complex precapitalist social formations, transparent class exploitation was disguised by religion, “Christianity, Confucianism, Islam” which justified it as divinely preordained and unalterable. Bourgeois society fused Christianity, the precapitalist ideology of Europe, with a new faith in the laws of supply and demand governed by the exchange value of commodities. Under capitalism, Christianity was replaced by the fetishism of commodities as the dominant ideology and assumed a secondary role². Materialist fetishism rendered capitalist class relations opaque, obscuring the mechanisms of class exploitation: in place of the real social relationships that bound men and women to each other in production, producers and capitalists alike perceived only a relationship between themselves and commodities. The ideology of capitalist exploitation also became the ideology of colonialism, imperialism, and racism³.

The history of Western Europe points to a second way in which capitalism was able to emerge and develop, one that did not require the bourgeoisie to seek alliance with the peasantry. The Prussian road to capitalism saw the bourgeoisie take over the apparatus of the state without recourse to peasant revolution and transform it, at the top, from an instrument of feudal subjugation into one of bourgeois hegemony. This was the path followed by Japan in the late nineteenth century as the process of capitalist transformation in its imperialist phase reached global proportions.

Modernization in the Non Western World: the Meiji Restoration.

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 marks Japan's passage from mercantilist to capitalist society, it is difficult to qualify it as a Western-style bourgeois revolution. The Restoration occurred as the world capitalist order was being consolidated in a society that had nurtured capitalist tendencies under the absolutist bureaucratic rule of the Tokugawa shoguns. Like Western Europe on the eve of modernization late Tokugawa Japan was a transitional social formation already undergoing rapid development toward capitalism. Despite some 3000 peasant revolts during the pre-modern era, the reforms of Meiji did not spring from the type of bourgeois-led peasant revolution that characterized the transition to capitalism in England and France. Politically, this transformation initially took the form of a simple restoration of imperial authority accompanied by the abolition of the shogunate. The dynamism that demolished the old order and created a new political regime came from the lower strata of the former samurai class. These warriors were of rich-peasant stock and in that respect are comparable to the English yeomanry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But the Restoration was not the product of an alliance between an urban and rural bourgeoisie and an exploited peasantry as in Western Europe; structurally, it resembled the Prussian model of state initiated modernization⁴.

The upper strata of warrior society survived the Restoration for the most part by becoming nobles, although some were converted into big capitalists or large landlords. The real locus of power, however, was found among lower-ranking former samurai, large merchant families, and a newly arisen group of enterprising "political-merchants". These forces collaborated closely with the Meiji regime, which began the process of modernization using the power of the state to clear away the debris of the old society and lay the foundations of the new. With the aid and protection of the state, they transformed themselves into a national bourgeoisie, becoming the new ruling class. Thus a bourgeois monarchy took form with the emperor as the head of state.

The modernization of Japan was above all a process of technological borrowing and adaptation directed at mastering as quickly as possible the techniques of production and industrial organization that underlay western economic and, particularly, military might. The creation of a modern army presupposed the thorough-going modernization of the state bureaucracy, transportation and communications networks, and factory production, which the state promoted by establishing nationally financed and managed pilot industries. Imposed from above by a centralized state apparatus, the reforms that accomplished these tasks were also instrumental in consolidating the class power of Japan's fledgling bourgeoisie.

State-led, military-centered development came to depend on an urban industrial and rural landlord bourgeoisie. The articulation between large landed property and urban capital

constituted the mainstay of state power and was a critical factor in Japan's rapid industrialization⁵.

Other features also lent originality to Japanese capitalism. Under the impact of urban capitalist expansion, the rural population grew steadily, even rapidly, a trait shared by countries on the capitalist periphery today. In Japan's case, industrialization was "autocentric", i.e. self-sustaining and expansive, and the surplus population was eventually absorbed. Capitalism in modern underdeveloped nations, however, is "excentric", i.e. dominated by and dependent on the capitalist metropolis. Excess population cannot be employed usefully, reinforcing the trend toward stagnation, unbalanced growth, and dependence⁶.

The weight of the rural population together with the heavy ground rents levied by landlords on tenants and paid in cash served to keep peasant incomes low. Rural revenues remained unchanged up until World War II, dampening the wages of industrial workers, most of whom were recruited from the villages. These factors held the level of Japanese wages below that of European workers throughout the period of pre-World War II industrialization. Low rural and urban incomes restricted the demand for goods and services generally, and the comparative narrowness of the domestic market led Japan to resort to militarist expansion.

As Japan scrambled toward the center of world capitalism in the late nineteenth century, state paternalism came to play an important part in assuring capital a docile labour force. As in Western Europe at the same period, the bourgeoisie formed a class alliance with the working class, coopting it through social democratic policies. This alliance reinforced national solidarity for the defence and development of capitalism and imperialism. The paternalist habits of factory owners and a distinctly Japanese form of technical apprenticeship also played an important role : qualified workers were not trained "horizontally" across industrial sectors as in Europe, where the interchangeability of skills and labour mobility were actively promoted; rather enterprises and workshops using Western technology trained workers in all phases of production for their specific purposes and relied on paternalist practices to limit labour turnover.

The uneasy coexistence between industrial and agrarian-bourgeoisies and other features peculiar to Japanese capitalism provided the economic basis for a age-graded wage hierarchy and enterprise-specific, life long system of employment. (In fact, the village provided the model on which the factory system was based). The absence of a revolutionary peasantry and the landlord-industrialist alliance also explain why the bourgeoisie did not feel constrained to implement land-reform measures until after 1918, the year of nationwide rice riots.

Japanese monopoly capitalism, formed in the 1890s, was beset by rural unrest focused on tenant protest in the 1920s. The bourgeoisie enacted reform laws designed to limit tenancy and strengthen the independent middle peasantry, but to limited effect due to landlord resistance. This legislation restricted landlord prerogatives, an indication that the social and political influence of the large landed bourgeoisie had been eclipsed by its industrial partner, which went on to establish state monopoly capitalism in the 1930s.

The landlord bourgeoisie was not destroyed as a class until the large-scale agrarian reform imposed by the US occupation forces immediately following World War II. The 1947 land reform expanded the strata of independent owner-cultivators and by 1950 had virtually eliminated large landlords from the countryside. At the same time, the reform opened up the

rural areas to the penetration of capital and vastly enlarge the domestic market, providing one of the foundations on which the high-growth economy of the late 1950s and 1960s was built.

Two other advantages proved instrumental in assuring Japan's reemergence as a major industrial power in the post-war period: a relatively low industrial wage scale and Japan's shift from exclusive pre-war colonial rule over countries on the capitalist periphery to neo-colonial domination via trade and investment as Japanese imperialism reasserted itself in the 1960s.

The ideology generated by Japanese capitalism, like the course of Japanese modernization itself, displays a number of original features. The new ruling class and bureaucrats of Meiji inherited and preserved intact the value system and absolutist ideology of Confucianism, which had provided Tokugawa society with a coherent social philosophy and justified the bureaucratic absolutism of the shogunate. Although Confucianism was the dominant ideology of China's tributary mode of production (see below), it was easily transferred to Tokugawa Japan where the ruling class adapted it to that country's absolutist social structure, based like China's tributary system on class exploitation. The fusion of materialist fetishism and precapitalist ideology in the framework of a bourgeois monarchy gave a distinctive cast to the ruling ideology and confirmed the peculiar physiognomy of the Japanese capital-labour relationship (low industrial wages, enterprise paternalism, labour-management solidarity, etc.).

The reforms of Meiji started Japan on the road to capitalist modernization, saved it from colonization by the West, and transformed the country into an imperialist power. Today, Japan has surpassed its Western mentors in several industrial fields. Despite its demonstrated success, however, the Japanese model of capitalist transformation from above has not been emulated elsewhere on the periphery of world capitalism. Japan's close neighbor, China, whose precapitalist ruling class shared many features, including its state ideology, with Tokugawa rulers, chose a very different route to national development.

The 1911 Revolution and its significance

Whereas Japan followed the Prussian, or reformist, model of development, China's road to modernization, like that taken by England and France, was truly revolutionary. As the Meiji reformers before them, Chinese revolutionaries were forced to fight and overcome imperialist intervention. Unlike either Japan or Western Europe, where capitalism emerged out of feudalism, however, China's modern revolution had its roots in a struggle against the tributary mode of production.

The tributary mode of production is characterized by the presence of a centralized state, which extract a tribute, or surplus product, from peasant and other direct producers by extra-economic means of coercion. The forces of production have developed in these social formations to the point where the surplus is large enough to support a large state apparatus, whose role in the organization of production and social life is preponderant. In tributary societies, economic exchanges are based on the use value of goods, that is, their comparative utility, and not on their exchange value (determined by the law of value) as in capitalist social formations⁷. Payment of tribute is assured largely, but not exclusively, by social consensus, which is maintained by the dominant ideology, usually some form of state religion.

In the mid-seventeenth century, imperial China had a population of 150 million. Given the social conditions and technical level of that day, its arable land surface of about 100 million hectares, roughly the amount of land under cultivation today, was adequate to the task of feeding that many people. High population density enabled China to maintain the productivity of agricultural labour at a level relatively elevated for the period, and the system of tributary exactions forced on peasant communities by a strong, centralized state armed with Confucian ideology made China a world power.

Between the middle of the seventeenth and the late nineteenth centuries a period that coincides roughly with Tokugawa rule in Japan, China experienced a profound social and economic crisis. During these 200 years, its population grew rapidly from 150 million to 450 million, but without a substantial increase in land under crops or agricultural productivity. Capitalist tendencies never appeared in China during this period, not even during the prosperous years of the middle seventeenth century. By the mid 1800s, European capitalism, however, was in full expansion and had begun to colonize China, which found itself a weak, peripheral state too crisis ridden to formulate an effective national response in the manner of Japan.

The root of China's troubles lay in the progressive impoverishment of its peasant masses brought about principally by mounting demographic pressures on a limited land base. This meant a dwindling surplus product that could be squeezed out of the peasantry and, subsequently, a dissipation of state influence at the regional and local levels of government. Neither the ruling Qing dynasty nor, after 1911, the national bourgeoisie, which controlled vast areas of China for more than 20 years through the Nationalist Party, or Guomindang, were able to reverse this situation. A solution to the problem of rural poverty and the fragmentation of central authority had to wait the national democratic and socialist phases of the revolution carried out under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party between 1949 and 1980.

The deterioration of political and economic conditions in the early part of the nineteenth century aggravated class antagonisms in China, leading to social strife and peasant up risings that further weakened central power. The Opium Wars (1838-1842 and 1856-1857), which opened Chinese ports to Western goods and signalled the beginning of imperialist encroachments on Chinese sovereignty, also saw China's first anti-imperialist struggles. They were followed, between 1850 and 1865, by a major internal revolt, in fact an attempt at peasant revolution, the Taiping Rebellion. The fifteen year rebellion rent the fabric of precapitalist Chinese society and dealt a telling blow to the Confucian ideology of the ruling class. It is important for its anti-Qing, anti-imperialist character and because it was led by peasants before the world imperialist system had achieved global dominance. With its emphasis on peasant communism and cultural, political, and ideological liberation, the revolt also announced many of the themes later taken up and developed by the Chinese Communist Party.

The Taiping Rebellion was eventually crushed by the military forces of the Qing assisted by British and French troops, but the uprising left a lasting impression on the Chinese masses, and the class struggle in the rural areas continued to intensify. In the early years of the twentieth century, class conflict culminated in the revolutionary movement that overthrew Qing rule in 1911. Headed by Sun Yat-sen, the movement led in early 1912 to the creation of the Chinese Republic and, that same year, to the formation of a nationalist party, precursor to the Guomindang. During this early formative period, the precapitalist tributary state of the

Qing was dismantled and in its place a modern state began to take form under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. Within the movement for national reformation, however, an anti-imperialist liberation struggle was able to develop, and from this embryo a true revolutionary movement emerged. Growing peasant militancy in the countryside created conditions favourable to the formation of the Chinese Communist Party, which was founded at a very early date in 1921. In 1923, two years before the death of Sun Yat-sen, the Guomindang was reorganized along anti-imperialist lines and began to reunite the strife-torn country.

In the late 1920s, Mao Zedong, a communist of peasant origin from Hunan province, demonstrated the revolutionary potential of the Chinese peasantry. Emerging as a party leader, he successfully opposed the bourgeois opportunist line of Chen Duxiu, one of the founders of the Communist Party, and in the 1930s defeated Wang Ming's left-extremist line. While combating erroneous tendencies in the party, Mao set up the red stronghold, a form of revolutionary peasant-worker alliance, in the countryside, developed the concepts of people's war and people's democracy, and opened the way for the transformation of what had begun as peasant insurrection into socialist revolution.

In historical perspective, Sun Yat-sen's 1911 Revolution laid the groundwork for a genuine national-democratic revolution, although the latter would not actually be achieved until after 1949. The Revolution of 1911 not only swept away the remnants of the antiquated tributary state, enabling China subsequently to modernize and liberate itself from foreign domination; the revolutionary process it started eventually transformed social production relations inside the country and revolutionized the relationship between state and peasantry in order to eliminate class exploitation. This explains why revolutionary China borrowed not only scientific technology from the West but revolutionary social science as well⁸.

In Japan, the Meiji government borrowed heavily on Western technology, using the concepts of bourgeois democracy, divested of their anti-feudal content, only as an ideological prop in support of state-led capitalist transformation. China's anti-Qing, anti-imperialist revolution of 1911, however, was the product of a vast social movement whose leaders were aware that China would have to be transformed radically, from the ground up, if it was to modernize. It had deep roots in the masses and left no sector of society untouched. Chinese revolutionaries were not merely concerned with the introduction of Western science and technology; the question was whether to adopt outright, in addition to the capitalist mode of production, Western forms of social organization and thought, particularly bourgeois-democratic ideology, in order to build a new China.

The revolution begun by Sun's movement in 1911 soon lost its momentum, however. The class that should have organized the people's struggle against internal precapitalist class exploitation and external imperialist aggression, the national bourgeoisie, lacked the strength and cohesiveness to give overall direction to the movement, to canalise peasant radicalism toward the goal of national liberation in short, to assume control of the revolution; this task fell to the organized representatives of the working masses, the peasantry and the proletariat. The mantle of revolutionary leadership passed in the 1920s and 1930s from a feeble, divided bourgeoisie to the Chinese Communist Party guided by the revolutionary strategy of Mao Zedong. Mao called for an anti-imperialist people's democratic revolution, under the direction of the Communist Party, based on a revolutionary alliance of peasants and workers in which the peasantry would constitute the principal force. This was to be the condition for transferring leadership of the revolution from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat. The national

democratic phase would lead to socialist transformation via a process of uninterrupted revolution by stages.

Although it announced the start of this revolutionary transition, the 1911 Revolution was not capable of achieving national democracy. This had to await the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and the birth of the People's Republic of China. The national democratic transformation begun in 1911 was consummated between 1949 and 1952 within the framework of a socialist state, and in a form quite different from that envisaged by the Chinese bourgeoisie in 1911. This revolution was carried out in the rural areas through a radical agrarian reform that gave the land to the tillers and did away with exploitive landlord-tenant relations and other forms of class inequity. Under the Guomindang, bourgeois influence had opposed extensive land reform in favour of half measures that actually reinforced the power of the landlord class and kulak peasantry. The restructuring of rural class relations permitted the rapid passage from the people's democratic stage of the revolution to that of so called socialist construction in the mid-1950s. This socialist transformation in the countryside began with the cooperative and higher level collectivisation movements and culminated in the formation of the people's communes, collective units of production designed to abolish previous forms of social exploitation. In the urban centers, state management of industry also shortened the period of national democratic tutelage as the new government quickly but peacefully moved to dissolve capitalist property⁹.

China's modern transformation was more fundamental and far-reaching than the reformation that began Japan's transition to modernity and that has determined its course since 1868. The national democratic phase of the Chinese revolution, in which the peasant worker alliance, not the bourgeoisie, played the principal transformative role, made possible the creation of so called new socialist production relations based on the suppression of class exploitation. This phase pointed the way to the evolution of a new mode of production, one inherently capable of eventually surpassing the level of social and human development attainable under capitalism.

This does not mean that the subsequent stage of China's uninterrupted revolution has been able to resolve all of the problems of the first. After the period of people's democracy, a struggle arose between two strategies of development, one based on the full flowering of production relations aiming at a quick move toward socialism, the other on the reemergence of some capitalist class relationships. This contradiction highlights a problem of socialist transition: statism. Old forms of exploitation will continue to exist and new ones appear under state management of society so long as social productivity is not developed to the point where exploitation becomes impossible¹⁰. Despite these difficulties, in its national dimensions, the Chinese road to modernization holds far more promise for the future than the path taken by Japan.

The Chinese Revolution also affords a sharp contrast with the Meiji Restoration in terms of ideological development. China's worker-peasant alliance not only challenged foreign imperialism and the social, political, and economic foundations of the tributary mode of production; it attacked the ideology of exploitation that emanated from and sustained it: Confucianism. The sharp critique of traditional ideology formulated by Mao Zedong was couched in distinctly Chinese idiom. In this way, the radical ideas of the Chinese peasantry were combined with contemporary Marxism to produce a particularly rich synthesis of revolutionary thought. In this perspective Maoism contains enormous potential for the future material and cultural development of China because it assures continuity with China's history

and cultural traditions. But it does so in the context of a new mode of production dominated by use values and purged of the exploitive social practices of the past. These traditions may find their highest form of development here, serving the needs and expressing the aspirations of the working people, not a small number of class oppressors.

Needless to say, China remains poor and underdeveloped. Industrial development and productivity lag far behind the levels achieved by capitalist Japan. China's relative backwardness will continue for many decades to pose a serious obstacle to the fulfilment of the revolutionary potential of Maoist thought and the eradication of class exploitation. Ultimately, however, the prospects of success are high.

The Japanese model of development, instead of attacking precapitalist ideology, incorporated it selectively into bourgeois thought, conserving traditional values in order to strengthen capitalist production relations and perpetuate class exploitation, albeit in a new form. Precapitalist social values, however, appear now to have lost their usefulness. The sliding wage scale based on senior, lifelong employment, and other traditional labour practices are no longer sufficient to assure Japan a prominent place in the international division of labour, that is, they are no longer a guarantee of international competitiveness. Today, Japanese capital is constrained to seek greater flexibility in the labour market and to adopt forms of capitalist exploitation employed in the industrial West. Precapitalistic labour-management techniques are being rapidly superseded, indeed, are becoming obstacles to further economic development. Increasingly, Japan's value system will lose its national distinctiveness and come to resemble more closely the capitalistic mores of North America and Western Europe. Experiencing a rupture in continuity with its past, Japan stands today on the verge of sweeping deculturation. Those aspects of its cultural heritage still based on use values, i.e. possessing an intrinsic usefulness to society independent of their market value, are being obliterated as the logic of capitalist exchange relations pervades all areas of social and cultural life.

Three Revolutions that failed

China and Japan were not the only countries on the periphery of world capitalism to oppose imperialist penetration in a bid to modernize on their own terms. Mexico, Turkey and Egypt all staged attempts at bourgeois transformation. Arising after imperialism had achieved global hegemony, however, these movements stalled and proved incapable of plotting an independent path of national development.

Mexico

The Mexican Revolution, like the Chinese, began as a peasant revolt. The rebellion that broke out in 1910 involved various social clusters, developed unevenly, and moved in many different directions at once, but the impetus came from an aroused peasant population. The peasant uprisings took aim at the prevalence of large landed property and the precapitalist mode of exploitation that existed as a necessary adjunct to Mexican mercantile capitalism. The system of large estates had been introduced by Spanish colonizers after the conquest of the sixteenth century. Latifundiary proprietors allowed traditional Indian communal society to coexist with the estates and bound servile Indian labour to the land by debt peonage and other feudalistic practices. Despite their feudal features, the great estates produced for the expanding European market. As elsewhere in Latin America, they became a peripheral link in the network of unequal exchanges created by European mercantile capitalism in the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries. Mexican independence, won in 1821, confirmed the social, economic and political ascendancy of the big latifundiary bourgeoisie. By the late 1800s, agrarian capitalism, bolstered by the rapid growth of smaller, private holdings, had been fully integrated into the European capitalist system, its precapitalistic forms of peasant servitude constituting a vital mainstay of the latifundiary economy¹¹.

The Mexican Revolution preserved the character of a peasant rebellion for about a decade. The revolt was led in the south by Emiliano Zapata and in the North by Pancho Villa. Peasant armies, numbering at their height in 1914 and 1915 more than 100.000 men, broke the back of the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz and forced social and political reforms, which were encoded in the constitution of 1917. These included the liquidation of the latifundium, the abolition of peonage, land reform (more token than real), labour legislation, separation of Church and State, secular education, and the establishment of eminent domain over Mexico's national resources. The reforms were implemented slowly over the next 20 years, and land redistribution was not attempted until 1934, when a new wave of peasant unrest brought action. The fruits of Mexico's peasant revolution were reaped not by the peasantry but by the national bourgeoisie, composed of both agrarian and industrial interests backed by its own constitutional army and recognized by the United States, it usurped political power, turning peasant mobilization to reformist rather than revolutionary ends. That power remains essentially unchallenged today.

In that the Mexican Revolution was a peasant rebellion taken over and redirected by the bourgeoisie, it resembles England's revolutions of the XVIIth century and the French Revolution of 1789. It occurred, however, in a social formation that had already been peripheralized and subordinated to the capitalist center and, in that sense, is more easily compared to China's revolution of 1911. The Mexican experience of modernization suggests the fate that might have awaited China had the 1911 Revolution not produced a radical national democratic movement. In the Mexican case, no strong proletarian movement under the leadership of a socialist or communist organization grew up to challenge bourgeois hegemony over the revolution.

After several decades of capitalist development, Mexico is still a subjugated nation tightly bound by the unequal international division of labour. Whereas Japan succeeded in climbing quickly to the heart of the imperialist system, Mexico's national development, taking place at a different period of world history, has remained tied to the strategies of international monopoly capital. The Mexican road to modernization, despite its similarity to the French revolutionary path, has not generated vigorous industrial development, instead, it has left nation underdeveloped and dependent.

Turkey

The Turkish Revolution led by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk after 1919 could have developed into a revolutionary movement of the Anatolian peasantry against a tributary society similar to that of China. In fact, it stopped far short of that. The revolution was directed against imperialist incursions, foreign occupation, and the corrupt and backward military bureaucratic apparatus of a semi-colonized sultanate, but the people had no direct part in it.

By the nineteenth century, the vast empire ruled by the Ottomans for more than 500 years had come under increasing attack from Western imperialism and was faced by the open revolt of subaltern nations from within. Toward the end of the century, European finance capital

penetrated the region rapidly via the empire's foreign debt, which in 1874 absorbed four-fifths of the sultanate's total revenues. Pressing financial needs led the Ottoman Porte to step up the tributary exactions it imposed on its vassal territories, aggravating peasant misery and sharpening internal social antagonisms.

Liberal ideas, reflected in the political constitution of 1876, fell on infertile soil, although the Young Turk revolution of 1908 attempted to implement Western style political reforms. In 1914, the empire allied itself with the central European powers. The war further undermined Ottoman domination, resulting in the dismemberment of large expanses of territory and occasioning new regional revolts against central authority.

As in the case of the Meiji Restoration, the Turkish Revolution began as a revolt inside the ruling class. A progressive faction of this class rose up against and overturned by violence the traditional faction allied with the sultan and subservient to imperialist interests. Ataturk launched his movement for national regeneration in Anatolia with the convocation in 1919 of the Turkish National Congress, which led to the creation of the Nationalist Party. Forming a nationalist army from local militias, Ataturk managed to impose his will, despite the intervention of the Allied forces in favour of the sultan, Resisting Italian, French, and Greek military advances between 1919 and 1923, Kemalist power succeeded in abolishing the sultanate and in 1923 declared a republic with Ataturk at its head. The caliphate, the spiritual leadership of Islam, was dismantled in 1924. That year also saw the promulgation of a new constitution guaranteeing the modernization of the State. Ataturk created a secular modern state, introduced state economic planning and state ownership of major industries, and passed wide-ranging social reforms intended to westernise the country, but he ruled as a virtual dictator.

Despite its commitment to creating an independent modern nation, the Kemalist regime was unable either to initiate a process of thorough social transformation or to extricate Turkey from the imperialist nexus. It is questionable whether the Turkish revolutionary movement merits the name revolutionary. The real battle was fought not between the popular masses and the forces of reaction upholding the old tributary order but between these forces, decadent and subjugated to foreign capital, and the modernizers with their nationalist and anti-imperialist outlook. Moreover, despite secularisation, there was no real attack on the authority of the tributary ideology. Instead of arousing the exploited peasantry of Anatolia for a direct assault on the old mode of production, Ataturk seized power and attempted to uproot the tributary system from above, via state intervention. After a brief interlude, Turkey reverted to its pre-revolutionary status of a dominated peripheral state oriented toward the capitalist metropolis. By the end of World War II, it had become an anti-communist bulwark of the Western alliance and been fully reintegrated, as a dependent, underdeveloped appendage, into the imperialist system. In this sense, the Meiji regime enjoyed the unusual good fortune of capturing the state and beginning their reformation on the eve of world imperialist consolidation. Were it otherwise, Turkey's fate might well have been Japan's.

Egypt

Four historical moments can be identified in Egypt's long march toward modernization¹². The first, Mohammed Ali's effort in the early 1800s to reform the state, constitutes, together with the Meiji Restoration, the only attempt at national transformation on the non European periphery of the nineteenth century. Mohammed Ali's reformation concentrated on modernizing the army in order to repel imperialist advances and liberate the country from

Ottoman rule, in place in Egypt since 1517. As in Japan, the creation of a Western style military force also entailed the introduction of administrative reforms and Western science and technology.

Mohammed Ali's regime nationalized the land, established a monopoly on industry, introduced modern irrigation and cotton cultivation, and implemented educational reforms. But it failed to destroy the tributary mode of production. Egypt, like China had developed a complete system of tributary production, with a state class state centralization of tributary surpluses, and a corresponding form of state ideology, of Islam bread. Instead of attacking this mode of production, Mohammed Ali relied on it to detract surplus out of the villages in order to finance his program of modernization. Imposed from above, the reform was carried out at the expense of the masses, not on their behalf. A second factor dooming the industrial renaissance was the proximity of Europe: in 1840, the European powers intervened on the side of the Ottomans, putting an end to Egypt's first modern reformation.

Between 1848 and 1882, Egypt rejected the path of autonomous development and attempted to modernize with the assistance of European capital, inserting its economy into the world market through cotton production destined largely for England. This second modernization coincided with the consolidation of world capitalism. Under the Khediv Ismail, the ruling class used the state to appropriate land from an increasingly impoverished peasant population and transformed itself into an agrarian bourgeoisie backed by and dependent upon European finance capital. Great latifundary capitalist property came to dominate the nation, but this new bourgeoisie was feeble, timid, and incapable of posing a serious threat to the traditional mode of production. Tributary forms of exploitation remained in place, and in 1880, rural pauperisation fed the anti-foreign revolt of Ahmed Orabi Pasha. The rising was crushed by the British, who seized on the occasion to occupy Egypt in 1882.

Egypt gained formal independence as of 1922 but remained a British client. The third wave of modernization was unleashed during this period by the Wafd Party of Saad Zaghlul. The party fought to secure acceptance for a series of democratic demands and nationalist reforms in a bid to win political power. The Wafd succeeded in opening the way for the rapid development of light industry between 1920 and 1945, but despite its nationalist rhetoric, it never dreamed of breaking free of British patronage. Moreover, in its quest for political power, the party was forced to come to terms with the comprador and latifundary bourgeoisies, now in collusion with the Egyptian monarchy, which ruled the country from the mid 1920s to the early 1950s. This compromise diffused the Wafd's reformist fervour and blunted its critique of traditional class relations. The essential frailty of a newly arisen industrial bourgeoisie indeed, more a petty bourgeoisie was revealed further by Wafd inability to devise a land reform program and join with an exploited and subdued peasantry. Its timidity allowed the agrarian bourgeoisie to capture the Wafd reformation and continue their class domination in collaboration with the king and the British, whose armed forces occupied parts of Egypt throughout the monarchist period.

The emergence of Gamal Abdel Nasser after the military coup d'état of 1952 followed by the proclamation of a republic in 1953 and the withdrawal of British troops in 1954, ushered in the fourth phase of Egyptian development. During this period, which lasted until Nasser's death in 1970, center stage was occupied by a state bourgeoisie operating through a revolutionary council. The new ruling class displaced its comprador and agrarian rivals. It was created, on the one hand, by a series of nationalizations that were carried out from 1957 to

1961 on the other, by the land reform of 1952, which destroyed the political power of latifundary capital and replaced it with a rich peasant bourgeoisie.

For all this, Egypt remains a peripheral, subjugated country. Its state-capitalist regime has never been able to shake itself entirely free of imperialist control, and the state bourgeoisie itself has not been able to avoid compradorization. After 1970, Egypt under Anwar Sadat revert to an open door policy allowing foreign capital direct access to its natural and human resources. Today, it provides a classic example of an underdeveloped, excentric economy facing outward the capitalist center.

The Egyptian path to modernization, like that tried by Mexico and Turkey, did not lead to revolutionary social transformation or to autocratic industrialization. Peasant rebellion had no hand in shaping events, nor did a peasant worker alliance led by a party representing the point of view of the labouring masses and committed to ending class exploitation ever emerge. Separated from the working masses, these movements were incapable of freeing Egypt from the imperialist grip, producing a national democratic revolution, or moving toward socialism.

Conclusion

Before modern times, both Western Europe and Japan were feudal societies existing on the periphery of centralized tributary formations. Christian feudalism rose from the disintegration of the Roman Empire, one of the great imperial tributary constructs, and developed in shadow, Japanese feudalism grew up on the edge of yet another vast tributary empire, China. In its centers the tributary mode of production proved particularly resistant to social transformation from within, whereas peripheral feudal social formations evolved toward mercantile, then industrial, capitalism.

Following a period of revolutionary or reform-initiated transition to capitalism, former peripheral feudal formations achieved autocratic industrial predominance, moving to the center of a new world order. Earlier tributary centers of civilization, unable to organize an effective counterattack against the aggressive expansion of capitalism, found themselves peripheralized, their development stunted and extroverted, i.e. revolving around the needs and designs of a handful of imperialist nations. Capitalist transformation had been accompanied in the center by radical protest against old and new forms of exploitation. As the center of gravity of capitalist exploitation gradually shifted from center to periphery in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the formation of monopoly capital and the world imperialist system, popular revolts followed this swing, moving outward to the periphery.

Of the rebellions that occurred on the capitalist fringe during this period, only the Chinese steered a truly revolutionary course toward social transformation and national liberation. Several factors may be adduced to explain China's success and the failures that ultimately attended Mexican, Turkish and Egyptian attempts at modernization¹³. Of particular importance is the question of the comprador bourgeoisie. Chinese revolutionary analysis, drawing from the situation that dominated in China in the 1930s, distinguished between national (industrial) and comprador (mercantile) bourgeoisies. This distinction holds for colonies and semi colonies in general up until World War II. Imperialist penetration had transformed colonies and semi colonies into non industrialized agrarian economies, each tied to the specific requirements of its industrial metropolis. Imperialist claims discouraged the formation of a national industrial bourgeoisie that might grow up to rival foreign investment.

By contrast, the mercantile bourgeoisie of colonized nations found the going easier. It served as an intermediary link between the latifundiary bourgeoisie and kulak peasant class and the metropolitan industrial with interest in the colonies. This international class alliance, an alliance against peasants, workers and national bourgeois elements persisted until World War II.

The relationship between national and mercantile comprador bourgeoisies should not be regarded statically. After World War II, national liberation movements led by national bourgeoisies overthrew the political power of dependent traditional latifundiary and comprador bourgeoisies. This transformation was accomplished in the absence of a peasant worker alliance. Moreover, victorious national bourgeoisies sought to establish an industrial base without severing their links to the world capitalist system. As a result, the new ruling elites found themselves subjected to the dictates of the international division of labour, in which their assigned roles remained subaltern. All they could do was to set up export industries for the world market and luxury production for the local bourgeoisie.

Since the war, bourgeoisies of the periphery have been able to survive only by inserting themselves into the world capitalist systems and entering into a new international class alliance with metropolitan monopoly capital. This has led them to renounce self-reliant, autonomous national development, a process that may be described as compradorization or transnationalization. The era of neo-colonialism is one of total compradorization.

A peasant worker alliance alone can break this deadlock and open the way for the revolutionary participation of the popular masses in the process of national transformation. There in lies the real hope of the Third World in its strivings to achieve a self determining future in the community of nations.

History does not stop here. Another chapter is about to open. In the People's Republic of China, the crucial question is whether further human and national development will take place in the context of a struggle to revolutionize production relations and eliminate all form of exploitation and if so then in which direction or whether statism associated with capitalism will prevail, generating and maintaining social inequalities. The outcome will doubtless influence other revolutions now in the making. Today, the Third World as a whole is on the eve of a 1911 revolution. The intensification of revolts and continuing social dislocations on capitalism's periphery mean the steady disintegration of imperialist control and the unfolding of new revolutionary perspectives.

¹ See, for example, Samir AMIN, *Class and Nation, Historically and in the current crisis* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1980); Maurice DOBB et al, *The Transition from Feudalism to capitalism* (New York, Schocken, 1978); Albert SOBOUL, *Problèmes paysans de la révolution, 1789-1848*, (Paris, Maspero, 1976).

² In its bourgeois developments, especially Protestantism with its cult of abstract humanity, Christianity neatly mirrored the reification of the commodity as the abstract expression of human labour. See Marx on the fetishism of commodities, Karl MARX, *Capital*, Vol I, (New York, International Publishers, 1974), part I, Chap I, section 4; See Samir AMIN, *L'Eurocentrisme*, Anthropos 1988.

³ See Samir AMIN, *Unequal Development*, (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1976).

⁴ For Japan, see Perry ANDERSON, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, (New York, Schocken, 1978), Maurice DOBB, *Transition*, K. SHIOKAWA, "Les historiens japonais et le mode de production asiatique", *La Pensée*, N° 122, 1965.

⁵ This alliance provided the funds required to finance the Meiji reforms via the land tax of 1873, which destroyed many independent cultivators and was exacted partially from landless tenants by landlords in the form of exorbitant ground rents.

⁶ Samir AMIN, *Unequal Development*, (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1976).

⁷ This means that the product kept by the producer is itself directly a use value meant for consumption, in general, for the producer's own consumption. But the product extracted by the exploiting class is also directly a use value for this class. The essence of this tributary mode of production, then, is a natural economy, without exchange but not without transfers (tribute is one) and redistributions. Samir AMIN, *Class and Nation*. For precapitalist China, see *Marx et la Chine* (Paris, Plon, 1976); Etienne BALACZS, *La bureaucratie céleste*, (Paris, Gallimard, 1969); Jean CHESNEAU, *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China: 1940-1950*, (Stanford University Press, 1972).

⁸ On China's revolutionary transformation, see Charles BETTELHEIM, *Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organization in China* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975); Alain BOUC, *Mao ou la révolution approfondie*, (Paris, Seuil, 1975); E. POULAIN, *Le mode d'industrialisation socialiste en Chine*, (Paris, Maspero, 1977).

⁹ Samir AMIN, *Unequal Development*, (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1976).

¹⁰ See F. H. CARDOSO, *Sociologie du développement en Amérique latine*, (Paris, Anthropos, 1971); Celso FURTADO, *Economic Development of Latin America*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977); Jesus SILVA, *La révolution mexicaine*, (Paris, Maspero, 1968).

¹¹ See ref 10.

¹² For Egypt, see Hassan RIAD, *L'Égypte nassérienne*, (Paris, Minuit, 1964); Mahmoud HUSSEIN, *Class conflict in Egypt: 1945-1970*, (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1974); Samir AMIN, *The arab Nation*, (London, Zed, Press, 1978).

¹³ For instance, ethnic problems in Mexico and the Indian character of the peasant revolt, particularly in the south, created special difficulties for the revolution. In the case of Turkey, the Ottoman Empire's cosmopolitan character and the identification of the Anatolian peasantry with the predominant nationality of the empire limited revolutionary perspectives. (See Samir AMIN, *Presentation*, in Yildis SERTEL, *Nord-Sud, crise et immigration, le cas turc*, Publisud 1987). Egypt too, possessed special national characteristics that led it to attempt modernization at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but the same features may have inhibited social and political transformation. (See Samir AMIN, *L'Eurocentrisme*, op cit; also Samir AMIN, *Contradictions in the Capitalist development of Egypt*, Monthly Review, N° 4, 1984).

This paper was published in China in 1990 in a collective book (in Chinese) on the Revolution of 1911.