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Introduction: Cultural Perspectives

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Introduction: Cultural Perspectives

SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF THE special *Dædalus* issue on “The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today” in the spring of 1991, the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics has disintegrated, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia as unified states have disappeared from the map, and the Cold War has abruptly ended. The socialist camp, it appeared, was about to begin the inevitable transition to democratic polity and market economy, assuring the triumph of modern Western and, by implication, American values. Indeed, the jubilation following the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the unification of Germany, the euphoria after the seemingly easy military solution to the Gulf War in February 1991, not to mention Russia’s nerve-racking August Revolution some months later, evoked hopeful images of an integrated Europe and even sensations of a true age of *Pax Americana*.

Yet, the anticipation of the emergence of a new world order led by the United States and defined in modern Western terms proved unrealistic, if not simpleminded. Instead, the former Soviet states and Moscow’s former satellites struggle, with a profound sense of inadequacy and humiliation, to survive economically and redefine themselves politically; primordial ties, having evoked powerful ethnic, linguistic, religious, and territorial sentiments, unleash dark forces of genocidal conflicts in South Asia, East Africa, and Eastern Europe, and governments in leading democracies (e.g., Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan) suffer from major public distrust.

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Totally unexpected, however, despite Japan's economic recession, is the "Sinic world's"¹ unprecedented dynamism in democratization and marketization. Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan all successfully conducted national elections in 1992, clearly indicating that democracy in Confucian societies is not only possible but also practicable. The most surprising story is perhaps the economic vibrancy of the coastal areas of mainland China. Already the balance of payments in Sino-American trade was more than 18 billion dollars in China's favor in 1992. If we also consider China's trade with the European Economic Community and other Asian markets (including Taiwan), in economic terms, the sleeping giant is wide awake. As the Four Mini-Dragons (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) continue to lead the world in growth and development and prompt the upsurge of economic vitality in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries (notably Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia) and Vietnam, the Asia-Pacific region is challenging the supremacy of North America and Western Europe in global economic strength. Will the People's Republic of China (PRC) emerge as an unabashed mercantilist nation?² Moreover, if the "many Chinas" (an expression none of the political entities in Beijing, Hong Kong, Taipei, or Singapore would embrace) become a new economic superpower, what are the political and cultural implications for the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, for the United States, and for the rest of the world?

The volatile economic situation renders political and cultural perspectives on China shifting and indeterminate. We can no longer assume that agriculture defines the nature of the Chinese economy, that authoritarianism defines the Chinese polity, and that family-centered hierarchy defines Chinese society. The economic dynamism energized by the village, cooperative, and individual enterprises throughout mainland China (which is now estimated to provide roughly 30 percent of the gross domestic product of the entire country)³ compels us to rethink not only the distinction between private and public spheres, which has always been problematical in the Chinese case, but also the interaction between state and society. Similarly, the nature of Chinese politics is so amorphous that the term authoritarianism or "soft" authoritarianism is simply too restrictive to accommodate the full range of its ideological underpinnings and its *modus operandi*. The Chinese state can be totalitarian in exercis-

ing its military control, as in the case of the Tiananmen tragedy; yet, it can also be anarchistic in dealing with local initiatives, fundamentally challenging, in theory and practice, the authority at the center. Indeed, Chinese society may be hierarchically stratified, but it is also enormously fluid, allowing information, ideas, values, and goods to flow incessantly from one stratum to another.

This volume, the result of a joint venture involving a variety of disciplines in Chinese studies—philosophy, history, literature, law, sociology, anthropology, political science, and religion—intends to offer complementary cultural perspectives on China in transformation. The purpose is neither to judge nor to predict, but to *understand*. Our essays, preliminary and tentative but informed by our professional callings, are engaged and often agonized reflections. We try to understand not as detached outside observers but as deeply concerned students of China, wishing to enlarge the discourse through our personal but open-minded approaches. While we do not subscribe to the naïve belief that there are immutable objective truths about China, we cherish the hope that our quest for a better appreciation of the many faces of China will deepen our own cultural sensitivities and bring some understanding to China, not only as an economic presence or a political reality, but also as a cultural universe.

We have chosen, based on our competence and dictated by our limitations, a few salient features of the seemingly restless landscape of the Sinic world. All of them, we believe, have long-term relevance and far-reaching implications for the People's Republic of China as a modernizing state and for the world.

China is at an ideological crossroads, confronting a profound identity crisis which will fundamentally restructure her national character. The meaning of being Chinese is forever changing and China as a civilization-state has been undergoing an unprecedented transmutation in recent decades. The current situation, however, will have a lasting impact far beyond her own borders. Since the Opium War in the mid-nineteenth century and the subsequent political upheavals, economic collapses, social disintegration, and intellectual effervescence in China, every Chinese has been engulfed in an ocean of suffering, but this has had only limited effects on the outside world. To the industrialized societies, China's failure to become an inexhaustible market might have been a disappointment, but, as far as

their forms of life are concerned, China was totally irrelevant, at most a sleeping lion or, to use an indigenous Chinese expression, a “hidden dragon.”

China is now roaring for recognition. Communism, the national glue for more than forty years, is gradually losing its grip. Among dissident intellectuals as well as government officials, the fear of social disintegration, with disastrous consequences for China’s neighbors including Russia, Japan, India, Vietnam, and the Asia-Pacific region, has greatly intensified. The government’s deliberate effort to promote and use patriotism to unify and hold the nation together, often done in bad faith simply to protect the vested interests of the gerontocracy, may not effectively inspire the commitment and sacrifice of the people. On the other hand, an upsurge in Han nationalist sentiments might provoke ethnic conflicts among the minorities. The Chinese state,

stretching from Buddhist Tibet to Korean enclaves in Manchuria, from Muslim Xinjiang near Pakistan to Cantonese-speaking Guangdong next to Hong Kong—is arguably the last great multi-ethnic trans-continental empire left in the world. And while its grasp is enormous, its reach is even greater: Chinese claims stretch across seas to encompass Taiwan and the Spratly islands near the Philippines and Malaysia.⁴

The “socialist market economy,” an apparent oxymoron, implies the awkward combination of economic promise and political despair. There is no easy way out of the dilemma: xenophobic chauvinism or contentious separatism.

The market economy throughout the country, especially in the coastal area from Guangzhou (Canton), via Shanghai, to Dalian, is reminiscent of Hong Kong and Taiwan two decades ago, giving some credibility to the idea of an East Asian economic developmental model.⁵ We should defer technical issues to the economic historian: for instance, is this a new network capitalism modeled after Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons or a variation of Western capitalism?⁶ Yet, our superficial impression warns us against any facile application of familiar analogies. We need to develop a new conceptual framework, significantly different from those readily available in English, to make sense of what we observe. Lest we prematurely celebrate the supremacy of classical liberalism and the universal applicability of Adam Smith’s “invisible hand,” we must note that the

dynamism of the Chinese market economy appears to be predicated on tacit acceptance, if not deliberate promotion, of the state as an engine of development. Surely the leadership in Beijing may be either insensitive or even irrelevant to the economic vibrancy in Zhuhai, Shenzhen, Wenzhou, or Tianjin, but the coastal areas would have difficulty sustaining their unprecedented growth without its implicit approval.

The immediate cause of economic dynamism may be due to individual and collective entrepreneurial initiatives. The peculiar economic strength lies in the intricate relationship between state and economy, involving the continuous negotiation and collusion of central, provincial, and local governments. The interdependence of economy and polity is such that the state plays a vitally important role at all levels in removing “structural impediments” to development and building necessary infrastructures for manufacturing industry, commerce, and trade. The mixed pattern is certainly not a socialist planned economy, nor is it a Western capitalist system. The so-called township village enterprise is a new animal, a species in economic development that has yet to be properly defined.⁷

The rise of regional autonomy, as a result of the development of an integrated economic system in the Guangdong-Hong Kong nexus, presents a major challenge to Beijing’s leadership, the nationally integrated Communist state, and even China’s sovereignty. While we fully recognize regional diversity as a truism in the Chinese polity, we are impressed by the willingness, power, and ingenuity of local leadership, especially in Guangdong province, to assert its independent mindedness. Whether or not the spheres of influence in China have irreversibly shifted from the yellow northwest (central plain) to the blue southeast (coastal areas), the special economic zones along the southern coast have set China’s economic development in motion since 1980. The attempted integration of Hong Kong into China’s economy may lead to the unintended consequence of transforming China’s “one-nation/two-system” into a de facto federation of semi-autonomous economic regions. It is unlikely that Hong Kong will be melted into a monolithic China; on the contrary, in light of the Guangdong-Hong Kong experience, the newly emerging “natural economic territories”—Taiwan/Fujian, Shanghai/Japan, Shandong/South Korea, and, with a stretch of the imagination, Dalian/Vladi-

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vostok—may add vibrant color to the future Chinese economic scene.⁸

For China's polity to become sufficiently decentralized to accommodate the centrifugal forces generated by its powerful regions requires a kind of political wisdom and ideological flexibility that the current regime in Beijing apparently lacks. The regions themselves have clearly benefited from the accommodating policies of the center. They seem to know well how to exploit Beijing's lack of self-confidence and the ambiguity of the central directives, without totally undermining the system and thus risking the danger of anarchism or, perhaps worse, warlordism. The scenario of autonomy without disintegration and unity without dictatorship may only be wishful thinking, but Chinese intellectuals of divergent ideological persuasions have been working together to bring forth a rhetoric of assent, despite fierce argumentation and seemingly irreconcilable conflicts of interpretation of China's state of affairs and her best future course of action.

A dominant theme of this new rhetoric is the rejection of the revolutionary ideology characteristic of much of Chinese political culture for the last century. Instead of revolution, the key term is reform. Deeply rooted in Chinese historical consciousness, reform evokes ideas of pragmatism, realism, and gradualism. Above all, it recognizes the constraint of embedded conditions. The unbridled romantic assertion about the fundamental restructuring of Chinese society through violent continuous class struggle is, even to the leftist Maoists, no more than sound and fury. Mao's parable of the Foolish Old Man, who was determined to move the mountain in front of his house (instead of relocating his house), appears silly in the reformist ethos. The revolutionary spirit, as revealed in self-sacrifice and commitment to the infallibility of the Party, has been rejected as a form of unreflected first loyalty: passionate, naïve, and dangerous. A second loyalty, or a higher loyalty, involving a much more sophisticated view of the public good, is not incompatible with local pride and self-interest.⁹

The consensus that the radicalization of twentieth-century Chinese political culture may have been the single most important factor in destabilizing any reform effort and in marginalizing the Chinese intelligentsia, an unprecedented departure from the Chinese political tradition which, though punctuated by dramatic ruptures, exhibits

remarkable resiliency and continuity. If the radical revolutionary ideology, in the panoramic view of Chinese political history, was an aberration, why did the Chinese intellectuals persist in its creation and implementation with such indefatigable determination for so long? It is beyond dispute that their active participation enabled radicalism as a national ideology to prevail. As Chinese intellectuals, fueled by nationalist sentiments, voluntarily provided the symbolic power to radicalize polity to such an extent that compromise was condemned as a betrayal in bad faith, they fundamentally undermined their own role and function as political critics.

Mao Zedong may have been a beneficiary of this process but his subversive scheme in the narrative reconstruction of reality since the Yan'an period (1936–1947) precipitated the totalistic iconoclasm of this radicalization which eventually also wrecked the basis of his own authority. The “inversionary ideology” that Mao initiated through the creation of a discourse community and the fastidious praxis of “exegetical bonding”—a deliberate effort to create a set of core texts as “dogmas” for the socialist revolution—more than forty years ago remained a recurring theme in the first reform decade (1978–1988). Often as distant echoes but sometimes as volcanic explosions, Mao's revolutionary radicalism occasionally erupted, reducing years of collaborative effort at reform to debris. The Tiananmen tragedy is a constant reminder that although the central state may not possess the infrastructure to interfere with local governance on a regular basis, its capacity as an engine of destruction, armed with military force and symbolic power, must not be underestimated.

The ubiquitous presence of the state, through mechanisms of control such as the “work-unit” system, may give the impression that the authority of Beijing is felt and feared throughout the country. However, we have found that this newest version of “oriental despotism” is more myth than reality. Surely, the intent of the regime, specifically the Party, to be in full control of the behavior, attitudes, and beliefs of the entire populace is clear. Indeed, repeated attempts have been made to insure the Party's authority at every level of governance. If we refer only to the propaganda machine, politics is in command and the will of the Party leadership is enforced everywhere. In practice, however, the overall administrative structure is porous: the room for deviation, manipulation, and deceit is quite spacious. The discretionary rights that local authorities earn or simply presume

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are extensive. The looseness of the vertical network, which is supposed to integrate the entire political system, gives saliency to the old Chinese proverb, "the sky is high and the emperor is distant." Besides, recent sociological surveys in China also indicate that the government's role in the daily lives of ordinary people is not at all prominent.

The implications of this seemingly omnipresent state, which paradoxically does not feature prominently in the social and cultural life of the masses, are profound for China's democratic prospects. As the state's role in the economy diminishes, symbolic resources—a sort of social and cultural capital—are being generated by nongovernmental (but not necessarily private) structures such as clan associations, religious organizations, and secret societies. Even when the Party enjoyed high prestige and the official ideology was unrivaled, traditional patterns of networking based on primordial ties with deep roots in kinship, religion, and history played a significant role in urban as well as rural China. The retreat of the state from active involvement in shaping the economic life of the country, either by strategic withdrawal or by forced retirement, opens up an ever-extending space for "civil society."

Admittedly, the concept of civil society which presupposes not only a substantial middle class but also a full-fledged public sphere directly challenging the authority of the political center is not applicable to the Chinese situation today. Yet, since the emerging economism and regionalism have made pluralism possible, the conditions for different voices and alternative structures of power are already present. We may suggest that, as a result, liberalization (bourgeois or socialist) in speech, publication, religion, assembly, and association is inevitable. The voice of the people, cacophonous but loud, must be heard. The government and intelligentsia are ill-advised not to pay special attention to the demands and aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese population who, primarily farmers rather than peasants, are increasingly vocal in actively defining the Chinese national character.

The heroic deaths of student martyrs in front of the Goddess of Democracy in June 1989, deeply ingrained in our mind's eye, have sparked an enduring hope for China's eventual democratization. Whether or not the Chinese government will fully embrace the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights, it cannot avoid

human rights issues in dealing with both domestic affairs and international politics. The current regime in Beijing may be either woefully insensitive or cynically manipulative in reference to charges of human rights violations, but it can no longer afford (in pure economic terms) to ignore them. The very fact that Beijing is compelled to respond, often awkwardly, to international pressure clearly shows that they have reluctantly acknowledged the rules of the game, even if the intention is simply to criticize them. While the Communist regime in Beijing has vowed never to “redress” the brutally handled Tiananmen case, the calculated policy to tone down the aftermath, far from satisfactory to the participants of the Democracy Movement, has actually embarked on a gradual path of reconciliation. In this light, Deng Xiaoping’s southward journey to drum up support for reform in January of 1992, which was credited by the official press as instrumental in reinvigorating the economy, was no more than an official recognition and endorsement of what had been developing informally for years. There is no reason not to entertain the possibility that China is on her way to democracy, via economism and regionalism.

We may wistfully surmise that since the industrial East Asian states—notably Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore—have all, in principle, accepted the “democratic method” defined in terms of fair and open elections, no intrinsic cultural factors inhibit mainland China, North Korea, or Vietnam from becoming democratic. As Samuel Huntington notes, “Confucian democracy may be a contradiction in terms, but democracy in a Confucian society need not be.”¹⁰ The central question is: What elements in China today are favorable to democracy, and how and under what circumstances can these supersede the undemocratic “habits of the heart” in the cultural tradition?¹¹

Nevertheless, the overall assessment of the well-being of the Chinese people and the prospects for China’s sustained peace and prosperity is not optimistic but extremely cautionary, if not outright pessimistic. Although demographic and environmental issues loom large in our minds as we focus our attention on the negative side of China’s pragmatic strategies for economic growth, we do not undermine China’s ability to benefit from the competitive market so that she can become an economic giant. Nor do we doubt her determination to overcome inhibiting factors in development and even her

ability to blunt the hard edges of authoritarianism so that she may evolve into a democratic country. Nevertheless, one other issue, not strictly in the domain of political economy, may turn out to be equally challenging. The phenomenon, variously characterized by Chinese intellectuals as well as China watchers overseas as the erosion of the moral fabric of society, a loss of faith in the socialist course, flagging conscience, anomie, or meaninglessness, is widely discussed in the mass media. The point in question deeply worries politicians and intellectuals, but for different reasons. To the Beijing regime, it is primarily a matter of law and order, but to intellectuals, especially those in exile, who are overwhelmed by the depth and magnitude of this crisis, it involves the collapse of social solidarity and the absence of a sense of direction.

Certainly it is not new for the Chinese intelligentsia to engage itself in a frantic search for cultural bearings in the turbulent sea of changes in modern times. The intellectual struggle, charged with strong emotions and fortified by a fierce determination to find a way out of China's backwardness, has been going on for more than a century. Since the founding of the People's Republic, however, the coercive ideology—a Sinicized Marxism in the form of "Mao Zedong Thought"—has for forty years provided a path, an orientation. In retrospect, Mao's proposed approach to China's modernization, with an overdose of cultural self-assertiveness, was no more than nativistic revolutionary romanticism. For at least a generation, however, it was embraced by the best minds in the People's Republic of China as the most thoughtful and practicable strategy to destroy the three mountains—imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism—blocking China's way to socialism. The reform, aiming at releasing the economic vitality of both the rural and urban sectors through the mechanism of the market, exposed not only the naïveté of the Maoist economic strategy but also the vulnerability of the political system. The Party, undermined by the Cultural Revolution, reemerged as a wounded beast anxious about its own survival and exclusively concerned with its own self-interest.

This was the context in which the Chinese intelligentsia, alienated from the Party, rediscovered its own soul for the first time since 1949. The painful, and often agonizing, experience of the Chinese intellectuals, old and young, to retrieve the meaning of their existence as reflective minds of the cultural tradition, critical observers of politics,

conscientious voices of the people, and transmitters of social values has been unfolding through the written word as poetry, prose, and essays, in newspapers and journals, and on radio and television. It seems that Chinese intellectuals have already constructed an international forum and some of their works have been acclaimed as the new Chinese conscience by sympathetic critics from North America to Australia.

Prior to the Tiananmen tragedy, the passion of the Chinese intellectuals had been focused on political liberalization. An overwhelming majority of university professors and students as well as educated scholar-officials voluntarily and openly allied themselves with the political leadership committed to reform: Hu Yaobang before January 1987 and Zhao Ziyang afterwards. For two years (1987–1989), the most popular international political figure on Chinese university campuses was Gorbachev. Many college students took Gorbachev's perestroika to be the ideal course of action for the Chinese Communist Party. Nowadays, worries about excessive inflation, rising levels of corruption, and increasing inequality (ironically, similar concerns initially ignited Tiananmen in 1989) seem to outweigh concerns about political lethargy or oppression, let alone demands for liberties and human rights.

The need for political stability, a precondition for steady economic growth, has become an overriding mission of the Beijing leadership. This provides an expedient pretext for the government to relegate political liberalization to the background. Under the banner of patriotism, the Chinese Communist Party is making an all-out effort to rally support for the status quo. The politics of accommodation, with ample precedents in traditional Chinese political culture, has replaced revolutionary mobilization as the *modus operandi* of the government. Paradoxically, the resources of two of the three aforementioned mountains, Confucian feudalism and bourgeois capitalism, are being tapped to prop up flagging socialism. Traditional symbols are widely exploited to inspire nationalist sentiments. Western methods, such as market mechanisms, advertising, international loans, and commercial taxation, are fully employed to stimulate economic activities. While the possibility of a fruitful interaction among Confucian ethics, liberal democratic ideas, and Marxist humanism is there, it is painfully difficult to put it into practice. Rather, the vicious circle caused by nepotistic networking, conspic-

uous consumption, and bureaucratic corruption dominates the social landscape, rendering any serious cultural discussion seemingly vacuous and even irrelevant.

Still, the “intellectual effervescence in China”¹² enables us to probe the interior landscape of the life of the mind in the People’s Republic of China with a kind of lived concreteness and spiritual immediacy unimaginable a decade ago. The willingness of the most articulate and reflective minds in China to express their deep feelings of guilt and grave doubts about China’s future may have been the natural consequence of what Wang Ruoshui identified as “alienation in socialism” in 1980,¹³ but the series of intellectual movements in subsequent years clearly show the independent-mindedness of Chinese scholars, students, journalists, and reform-minded officials. This unfolding of a communal critical self-consciousness of the Chinese intelligentsia may be chronicled in a few significant cultural events: the “wounded literature,” the discussion of the criteria of truth, the humanist discourse, and the debate on tradition and modernity. They symbolize a cultural vitality unparalleled since the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Beijing’s desperate attempts to overcome or to channel the tidal waves of protest against ideological closure were ineffective. The antipsiritual pollution of 1983 and the antibourgeois liberalization campaigns of 1986, launched to preserve some measure of ideological purity, were nipped in the bud for lack of popular support. The authentic Chinese intellectual voices have become audible and can no longer be silenced. Nevertheless, and not without a touch of irony, the anxiety of total ideological confusion and the concern over the paucity of cultural resources rather than the excitement over a profusion of spiritual creativity characterize the intellectual ethos.

The perceived vacuum of thought, suggesting a spiritual crisis as well as an ideological crisis, provides fertile ground for the upsurge of folk religious practices, secret societies (notably the *Yiguandao* or “Way of Basic Unity”), Buddhist monastic life, Daoist alchemy, Christian evangelism, and *qigong* (a generic term for a variety of indigenous psychosomatic exercises intended for enhancing one’s “vital energy”). It also impels sensitive and conscientious intellectuals to redefine themselves as individuals who are participating members of an evolving, and not merely imagined, community. They are no longer the “knowledgeable elements” of a socialist collectivity; nor

can they presume to be the respected scholar-officials of bygone days. They must find their niche in a reconstituted political environment, defining their role and function in reference not only to the workers, farmers, and soldiers but to party functionaries, government officials, entrepreneurs, and merchants. A profound sense of alienation from the political center coupled with a vibrant economy may have empowered some of the intellectuals to search for their own identity independent of wealth and power. A more likely scenario is the commercialization as well as the politicization of the intellectual-scholarly community as a whole.

It is, therefore, most uplifting to witness the emergence of a highly publicized dissenting voice among a small but vocal coterie of intellectuals. Their inner strength, acquired through sacrifice and commitment, exhibits remarkable resiliency. Their reflectiveness, as the result of long and tortuous quests for integrity and authenticity, shows a depth of self-understanding and a sympathetic grasp of the dehumanizing realities around them. They survived the holocaust of the Cultural Revolution with its pain, suffering, and documented cannibalism.¹⁴ Despite innumerable personal hardships and tragedies, their spirit was not broken and their sense of duty not lost. It is awe-inspiring to observe how they managed to use law as a double-edged sword to challenge the legitimacy of the political regime.

On April 25, 1956, during the golden days of the Chinese Communist regime, Mao Zedong summarized the deliberations of the Politburo on the overall situation of the country in terms of "ten great relationships," which specifically meant the major contradictions in Chinese economic and political life:

1. The relationship between industry and agriculture, and between heavy industry and light industry.
2. The relationship between industry in the coastal regions and industry in the interior.
3. The relationship between economic construction and defense construction.
4. The relationship between the state, the units of production, and the individual producers.
5. The relationship between the Center and the regions.

6. The relationship between the Han nationality and the national minorities.
7. The relationship between Party and non-Party.
8. The relationship between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary.
9. The relationship between right and wrong.
10. The relationship between China and other countries.¹⁵

Mao's grandiose design "to mobilize all positive elements and all available forces in order to build socialism more, faster, better and more economically"¹⁶ collapsed with the Great Leap Forward two years later. Mao's ominous note that "The Communist Party was produced by history, and for that reason the day will inevitably come when it will be destroyed"¹⁷ rings singularly true in light of the "breakdown of communist regimes"¹⁸ since 1989.

Thirty-seven years have elapsed. The ten contradictions, which have all become much more intensified, must now be augmented by a host of other equally, if not more, serious threats: an annual population increase of twenty million, depletion of natural resources, environmental deterioration, a massive rural-urban migration (which may reach a staggering three hundred million by the turn of the century), the delegitimation crisis, political disorder, and social chaos. Nevertheless, predictions abound that China will become an economic giant. Dwight Perkins observed in 1986 that "a fundamental change in Chinese society is underway affecting how people live and, of comparable importance, how they think"¹⁹ and that "the momentum toward reform will be difficult to derail." He concluded with a most encouraging note:

If this change does take place, one-quarter of the world's population will have moved in the latter half of the twentieth century from a closed, poor, rural, peasant society to a society where living standards are rising rapidly, where the dominant share of the population is increasingly urban and industrial, and where the nations of the region are fully integrated into the international economic system. Few if any events in the last half of the twentieth century are of comparable significance either to the people of East Asia or to the rest of us.²⁰

Even in the aftermath of 1989, this prophetic statement remains thought-provoking.

Has China embarked on a path of modernization that is uniquely Chinese? Will China definitely help to transform the Asia-Pacific region into the most powerful economic zone in the world, and, as a civilization-state, endure well into the twentieth-first century as the longest continuous unified "Middle Kingdom" in human history? Since "a strong central government in China is a greater evil for the Chinese peoples than a multiplicity of more or less autonomous 'little Chinas,'"²¹ is it not more desirable to see the demise of a monolithic Chinese Communist Party and the disintegration of the central government in Beijing? Indeed, is it not likely that, despite fears attendant on regionalism, the wishful thinking of many Chinas will eventually be realized? On the other hand, since economic growth depends on political stability, will the collapse of the center necessarily bring about disorder and chaos? And, as a result, will a disintegrated China inevitably lead to internecine warfare making a federated Chinese commonwealth totally infeasible? Or, is it conceivable that the weakening of the political center which compels Beijing to exercise her authority with utmost caution will actually enhance the dynamism of economic China and engender more vitality, creativity, and originality in cultural China? These options as well as other alternatives are likely to unfold in the near future. Beyond a doubt, China in transformation is a human drama on the global stage.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹Edwin O. Reischauer, "The Sinic World in Perspective," *Foreign Affairs* 52 (2) (January 1974): 341–48.
- ²A set of statistics, directly resulted from the post-Cultural Revolution reform, is worth mentioning: Real GNP grew at an average annual rate of 10.4 percent from 1980 to 1988 compared with only 6.4 percent during 1965–1980; total GNP grew more than twofold between 1978 and 1988. During 1978–1988, per capita GNP doubled in real terms. See Kang Chen, Gary Jefferson, and Inderzet Singh, "Lessons form China's Economic Reform," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 16 (June 1992): 210–25.
- ³For a general discussion of Chinese industry, see Robert Michael Field, "China's Industrial Performance since 1978," *China Quarterly* 131 (September 1992): 577–609.
- ⁴Nicholas D. Kristof, "China, the Conglomerate, Seeks a New Unifying Principle," *The New York Times*, 21 February 1993.
- ⁵See Peter Berger and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, eds., *In Search of an East Asian Development Model* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1988).
- ⁶Gary G. Hamilton, ed., *Business Networks and Economic Development in East and Southeast Asia* (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1991).
- ⁷Two recent articles are suggestive in conceptualizing the "township village enterprise" as a new economic force in China. See Yia-ling Liu, "Reform from Below: The Private Economy and Local Politics in the Rural Industrialization of Wenzhou," *China Quarterly* 130 (June 1992): 293–316 and Jean C. Oi, "Fiscal Reform and the Economic Foundations of Local-State Corporation in China," *World Politics* 45 (2) (October 1992): 99–126.
- ⁸Robert A. Scalapino, "The U.S. and Asia: Future Prospects," *Foreign Affairs* 70 (5) (Winter 1991–1992): 20–21.
- ⁹Liu Binyan, *A Higher Kind of Loyalty: A Memoir by China's Foremost Journalist*, trans. Zhu Hong (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990).
- ¹⁰Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 310.
- ¹¹*Ibid.*
- ¹²Tu Wei-ming, "Intellectual Effervescence in China," *Dædalus* 121 (2) (Spring 1992): 250–92.
- ¹³Wang Ruoshui, "Tantan yihua wenti" ("Let's Talk about the Problem of Alienation"), *Wei rendaozhuyi bianfu* (*In Defense of Humanism*) (Beijing: Sanlian Publications, 1980), 186–99.
- ¹⁴The horrifying report on politically and ideologically motivated cannibalism in the Guangxi province during the Cultural Revolution by the famous writer and dissident, Cheng Yi, was first published in Chinese-language magazines in June 1992. Since his dramatic escape from the mainland in November 1992, his

findings have been widely circulated through the mass media. See his interview with *Kaifang* (*Open Magazine*) (Hong Kong) 73 (January 1993): 62–68.

¹⁵Stuart Schram, ed., *Chairman Mao Talks to the People: Talks and Letters: 1956–1971* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 61–62.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁸S. N. Eisenstadt, “The Breakdown of Communist Regimes,” *Dædalus* 121 (2) (Spring 1992): 21–41.

¹⁹Dwight H. Perkins, *China: Asia’s Next Economic Giant?* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1986), 83.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 85. For some recent observations on the Chinese economic scene, see Nicholas R. Lardy, “Chinese Foreign Trade,” *China Quarterly* 131 (September 1992): 691–720; and Joseph C. H. Chai, “Consumption and Living Standards in China,” *Ibid.*, 721–49.

²¹Henry Rosemont, Jr., *A China Mirror: Moral Reflections on Political Economy and Society* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1991), 99.



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