

China

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The question that is China, or more precisely, the making of the Chinese Revolution and the impact that that Chinese Revolution has had upon the making of our contemporary world: a question, quite obviously, of overarching and overpowering importance. If we think, for example, of the fact that the consolidation of that Chinese Revolution, or more precisely the victory of the Chinese Communists over the Kuomintang in 1949, really dealt a very lethal blow at the pretensions and the strategy of American policymakers. And more than that, set very sharp limits to the dimensions of that open world empire that the United States was trying to construct after 1945.

A question of overarching importance if you think that the strategy of the Chinese Communist and what they then set down or the perspectives and the goals of their revolution, really, departed very sharply from the conventional Communist wisdom of the Soviet Union. And not only that, finally, departed and criticized that conventional wisdom, and finally, attacked it very bitterly. A question of overarching importance if you think that China not only created a new kind of society in the most populous country of the world, not only rejected the capitalist model of development in the most populous country in the world, but really, then came forth as a Chinese Communist model of development to become a kind of pole of attraction, a very magnetic pole of attraction, for popular movements in that vast zone of the colonized and semi-colonized world.

A question of overarching importance if you think, in the final analysis, that the Chinese Communist regime did much more than overhaul and reconstruct the society and the economy of China. That what it did, by its very example, as what it now does by its very example, is really to cast a very harsh light upon other models of development in the Third World. What it does, after all, is to circumscribe and point out the bankruptcy of propositions like the proposition of growth without revolution, as you have it inscribed in Indian development. Or the bankruptcy, if you please, of a nationalist revolution without a social revolution, as you have it in Algeria. And so, you see, you begin to understand what Jack Belden meant in that book, when he entitled it *China Shakes the World*. You understand, after all, why American policymakers, when that Chinese Revolution finally took its Communist turn, began to turn their attention toward unseating that revolution and have sweat about China almost since then. And you understand why it is that Russian policymakers look fearfully at the victory of communism in China and finally have

come to turn towards setting themselves against it even in a militant and military way. A question of overarching importance. And we want to go to the roots of it.

And when we go to the roots of it, we have to turn back that wheel of history somewhat. And we have to go back at least a hundred and thirty-five years. And we have to go back to that moment around 1840, when a conjunctural crisis really dug very deeply into Chinese history and Chinese society — out of which conjunctural crisis, the wheels of what became revolutionary change would begin to turn.

We are talking about going back to that moment in the history of the last imperial dynasty of China, the Manchu or the Ch'ing Dynasty, at which time the Westerners arrived in force. At which time Western traders and investors and capitalists arrived, buttressed by the armed force of their states, buttressed by the arrogance of their missionaries, arrived and forced the door of China open. And in forcing the door of China open, inserted that society and that culture into the whole circuit of international trade. And in doing that, deepened the crisis and the contradictions interior in Chinese society to that point that they reached, really, the breaking point and the point of revolution. What we are talking about is a conjuncture between an internal Chinese crisis and a foreign imposition which, really, comes to be explosive.

And I want you to try to understand in your imaginings, if you can. I want you to try to get out of any kind of ethnocentric framework that you may have to operate in. To understand what it was when Western tradesmen, and Western investors, and Western missionaries arrived in China around 1840. I want you to realize in your mind that you are not talking about a semi-deserted, desert island. You are not talking about a jungle kingdom. You are not talking about a civilized society which is at the breaking point and really ready for complete degeneration. You are talking, in the first place, about China which is the largest country in the world. In 1840, it was estimated that the population of China was already a staggering 412 million people. Which means, after all, that you are dealing with an immense universe when you are talking about the penetration of China.

But it isn't only the size that is so imposing. What is secondly so important is continuity. That you're dealing with a history which has been continuous and unbroken for almost three thousand years. You're dealing with an imperial state with a social order, with a flourishing culture that had really had that incredible continuity over three millennia. That's what the Westerners found, after all, when they got to China. Now that continuity, after all, think of it in these terms. Think of it that China, after all, was contemporary to those ancient empires. The empire of Egypt of the Pharaohs, the empire of Babylonia which had long since crumbled into dust. And here was that Chinese society, not only continuing, but in the nineteenth century, functioning and growing and, in a sense, adapting to the conditions, after all, that were constantly being imposed upon her.

You're not dealing with a degenerate society, and you're certainly not dealing with one ready for the dustbin of history.

And let me point out a third thing, which strikes me as so absolutely incredible about a Chinese history that has really magnetized me from the time that I first began to read about it or know anything about it. And that is that the central thrust of that Chinese history, what is so imposing about that continuity, is that constant effort toward and that constant veering towards stability. That effort, on the part of the Chinese ruling class, that effort on the part of Chinese ideologues, to create a system which is self-renewing, which can be stable, which can absorb the shocks from the outside and, consequently, really continue.

What I'm talking about is that over those three thousand years, you have elaborated a complex of institutions. You have elaborated a system of values all of which are geared toward the preservation and the buttressing of the imperial state, of a hierarchical social order, and of an agricultural economy. Or to put it in more concrete terms, that what you elaborated over those three millennia was a system of institutions, a way of thinking, a set of attitudes, a kind of set of sentiments which, in their collectivity, we call Confucianism or the Confucianist ideology. And that Confucianism was a functional ideology which aimed, after all, to rationalize the political and the social system of China which was geared, for example, toward reigning in the excess of authority, so that the excesses of the monarchy would not be so great as to destroy the social order. But at the same time, to contain the excesses of subversion, so that the social order, really, was not subverted from within by something that you would recognize as social revolution.

And look into that system momentarily. It is worth it for your own intellectual apparatus. Look into that kind of system and you see several things that, really, are astonishing and that tell you that you were really born in the wrong hemisphere and in the wrong country. And you look into that system and you find, in the first place, that the whole thrust of Chinese thought and philosophy, the whole thrust of what you can call Chinese ideology, is not metaphysical but it is sound and moral. The concern of Confucianism is not, after all, the salvation of an individual soul, or life after death, or that kind of wild goose chase. But the goal, after all, is to adapt the society to nature, to adapt the individual to the group, to adapt the group to the imperial state. It is, after all, a social ideology that you are dealing with.

And so you can begin to understand, in terms of the essential conservative bet or preserving bet of this ideology, why in the Confucian scale virtues, why in the Confucian scale of values, certain kinds of virtues are given very, very great valuation. And so filial piety, for example, given great value as a virtue because that means that the younger generation will absorb the wisdom of antiquity or the wisdom of the older generation, will act upon it and will pass it on. So

you value frugality and you have to value frugality because you are dealing with a poor agricultural system. And the only way that you can keep it intact, the only way that you can keep it from flying apart, is if people are frugal, do not develop great material wants, and consequently, can make do with those limited resources. So you value deference toward superiors, which is the very cement of a hierarchical social order. So you value generosity toward inferiors, which is the only way to prevent interior revolt. And you have then a kind of system of thought elaborated and developed over the centuries, all of which gears toward the maintaining of a cohesion within that particular society. A society that is hierarchical, that must have that cement if it is not to fly apart.

Or consider a second fact. And that is that, within that Confucian system, there is accommodation to change, and that's crucially important. One of the neatest historical tricks of the millennium. Because what you get in that Confucian outlook is the idea that the *t'ien-ming*, the Mandate of Heaven, that authority, that presumably absolute authority that the emperor has, is not irrevocable or is not limitless. And that is terrifically important.

First of all, though the authority is called the *t'ien-ming*, or the Mandate of Heaven, it's not called divine right. There is no God in an anthropomorphic sense. There is no God in a personalized sense. You're talking about *t'ien*: you're talking about heaven, which simply means a kind of universal power for order and stability. And from that universal power, the emperor presumably derives this authority, after all, which is called the Mandate of Heaven. And that means that he is the great mediator, that he mediates between society and nature, that he is the great preserver of the social organism and makes sure that that organism doesn't fly asunder.

All of that true, but the Confucians also talk about *ko-ming* — they talk about the rupture of the mandate. And that is that there are signs of rupture. There are signs that show that the Chinese state is not fulfilling its function, that the Chinese state is falling apart and that there is a rupture of the right of that particular dynasty to continue. And there are signs. Sometimes those signs are natural. They are flood or they are drought. And sometimes they are social or political. They are the corruption of the mandarins, the high bureaucrats of the state. Or they are peasant revolt, or they are extortionate taxation. And when that happens, there is the right of revolt.

But that revolt, the *ko-ming*, is not revolution. And that's what makes this conserving and preserving, and basically, a conservative social order. What you're talking about is the conversion of the leaders of the revolt into the founders of new dynasties. So that the leaders of the revolt, in the 7th century, founded the Tang Dynasty. So that the leaders of the revolt, in the 14th century, founded the Ming Dynasty. What you're saying is that you throw out that kind of political system which no longer can mediate between the classes, no longer can mediate

between society and nature, and you bring in an efficient Mandate. And that accommodates to political and social change and yet preserves the established order.

Or consider a third aspect. Consider what Confucius and the Confucian ideology considers the hierarchy of orders or estates in that social organism, because it is a four-part society of which Confucius spoke. And he talked about the *shih*, the *nung*, the *kung*, and the *shang*. And the *shih*, the highest order, they the lettered intelligentsia. Love it! A society with lettered intelligentsia at the top. And, second came the *nung*, or the peasantry. And, third came the *kung*, or the artisans. And, at the bottom came the merchants [*shang*]. And in that order, or in that hierarchy, there is something fantastically sensible if your goal is to preserve that hierarchical social organism. Because when you talk about the *shih*, or the lettered intelligentsia, what you are talking about is an intellectual elite which absorbs, and manipulates, and conveys, and passes on the wisdom of classical literary Chinese culture. Or, to put it in blunter political terms, which deploys the ideology of the ruling class and deploys it through its bureaucratic or its local functions. Now, that intelligentsia is defined in a very concrete way. It is not hereditary; it is defined as degree holder — in other words, as those who pass through the classical Chinese examination system. That examination system which roots all the way back into the Han Dynasty, which Han Dynasty was founded in 206 BC, lasted to 221 AD. In that Han period, the examination system begins to recruit the personnel, the bureaucratic personnel, for the state. And so, it is that examination system which defines this intelligentsia.

And there are two aspects to that examination system which ought to be noted in passing, to understand something about this system. First of all, that examination system recruiting a bureaucracy, recruiting the mandarins, did not test the candidates in specific expertise, in specific bodies of knowledge. What it did was to test them in the traditional value system, the traditional literary and philosophical culture. The idea was that if you're recruiting personnel for the state, you don't care so much what specific expert information they have. You want to know if they can tell right from wrong, if they know what virtue is within the framework of that society. Now, you know, if we used that standard, we would have no bureaucracy, quite obviously. You ask a bureaucrat the difference between right and wrong, and he'll look at a form to find out. It suffices to say that, fundamentally, that was the idea. To get a personnel that could really serve as the cement in this particular society.

The second aspect to note is that, theoretically at any rate, the examinations were open to everybody. Which meant that even if you were the son of a poor peasant, you could sit for these state examinations. And there are examples enough in Chinese history of the children of poor families who do rise to certain bureaucratic heights. But let us not exaggerate this. Over the centuries, that examination system really becomes the province and the preserve of a kind of

cultivated and monied elite. Because, you see, it takes a hell of a long time to prepare for these examinations. And no poor peasant family can really let his son go for a period of years without using those hands for the economic wellbeing of the family. So that, essentially, those who could set for the examinations really came out of the lettered families themselves, out of the mandarinates, or out of the landholding gentry, or out of the merchant families. And it becomes a kind of self-fulfilling caste, a kind of self-fulfilling entity.

Now, by 1840 — by the time, really, that we're talking about this Western intrusion — there are about a million degree holders at one level or another in Chinese society, and they are divided into two groups. There is a small group, about 1/25th, 40,000, who are the mandarins. And the mandarins are the central state officials. This is the Asiatic mode of production, if you please. This is the Asiatic mode of animating a society. You have a strong bureaucratic state, a state, after all, which fulfills a great number of functions. And so, you have a very strong and large bureaucracy of about 40,000 of these mandarins who are the eyes and ears of the throne, who really fulfil the functions of the central government.

But you have twenty-five times that number, you have the vast majority who are local notables, who aren't in the mandarinates themselves but who live in the local villages with a great amount of prestige because they know how to read and write, because they have a certain affluence, because they are set apart. And they, really, are the local notables who develop a political function that you must underscore because it becomes very important as we move through the stages of this Chinese Revolution. It's these local notables who really fill out or flesh out the administrative structure of the state. A mandarin in a district that has several hundred thousand people couldn't possibly fulfil all of the administrative functions. And so, they call upon this unpaid kind of local notable group, of these degree holders in the local villages who maintain the hospitals, or establish schools, or collect the taxes. And what is terribly important, if they have loyalty to the central government, if they have loyalty to the state, then they raise militias, very frequently, in order to repress social uprising, peasant uprising, as they do in the course of the Taiping Rebellion. When that local gentry, when those local notables really withdraw, in any appreciable measure, their support from the central government then you really do have a very revolutionary situation. But you can see how you have at the very top of this Confucian social order, a group which is responsible for the administration, the political power, essentially the ideological cement of the society.

And it's no great surprise that right under the *shih*, or the lettered intelligentsia, the Confucians placed the peasantry. And that, because of their preference for agriculture. Because agriculture, you see, is much less volatile than market activity. Agriculture means stability. It means that you do not make great differentiations of wealth, that you do not make great differentiations of

material possessions, that you reproduce the society but keep it reasonably stable.

Beneath the peasant you have the artisans. And the artisans are to fulfil the function of providing the wares, the necessary goods of society. And at the bottom, the merchant. Not that the Chinese hated money, not that they hated merchant activity, but that the merchants were the least stable element in the society. It's the same sort of prejudice that Saint Thomas Aquinas had, for example, in the thirteenth century: that if you had to set the just price, or if you had to make proscriptions against usury, it is because you will upset the social order if you permit some people simply to use the criterion of the market in order to define social relationships and, consequently, gain wealth as the expense of the misery and the poverty of others. And that, essentially, was felt to be a very dangerous activity.

Parenthetically, very frequently among those people who profess a preference for the land, it isn't so much a preference for the land as it is a kind of fear of the city. A fear of the mobility that comes about, you see, in market or mercantile societies. There was one time in my life when I was walking down High Street in Columbus, Ohio, and I was looking for causes — it was between causes, as it were — and, consequently, walking down the street. And I saw a little sign and it said, "Friends of the Land." And I thought, Well, I feel friendly. So I went into this society, and it was run by this incredible character called Ollie Fink. And Ollie Fink was the head of Friends of the Land. And they professed to have this great desire to turn people into organic, or to create organic relationship with the land. They took me down to their great model farm south of Mansfield, Ohio, which was run by another incredible character called Cosmas Blubaugh. And I saw this particular farm, and then, after being with them for about two weeks, I discovered that, essentially, they weren't interested in the land, and they weren't friends of the land. It's just that everything in the city was upsetting. Everything in the city seemed to be disrupting and dislodging. And you get that as a real continuum among certain sectors in Western society, but very strongly at the very center of the kind of suspicions that you get built into a Confucian ideology in traditional China. And consequently, you get that kind of social order.

Or take a fourth and final aspect of this particular system of preservation that I find so imposing, so absolutely incredible from the point of view of keeping this sort of preservation intact. And that the very important point of the intervention economically of the state. And here, you see, you get into that whole conceptual historical question of what is called the Asiatic mode of production. And there is a very central interpretation of Chinese history which you find elaborated by Karl Wittfogel in that book *Oriental Despotism*, which you find also in Owen Lattimore's *The Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, which you find in Wolfram Eberhard's *The Social Forces in the Chinese Middle Ages*. They all come out to pretty much the same point. And

it is that the very origin of the Chinese imperial state, the very *raison d'être* for that imperial state was to perform certain kinds of economic functions that could not be performed by any family, or any village, or any individual unit.

What you're talking about is the imperative of controlling of the Chinese rivers, which becomes, really, at the heart of the formation politically of the Chinese Empire. Because you're talking, in terms of the settlement of China, about two great regions: about the region of the north which is watered by the Yellow River, and the region of the center which is watered by the Yangtze River. And in the north, the problem always was the low rainfall cover, the fact that there was little rainfall and it was very sporadic, which meant that you had to take that Yellow River and build canals and irrigate, you see, that territory in order to make it viable for agriculture. In the center part, the problem with the Yangtze was the flood. And consequently, what you had to do was to build the dikes in order to control the flood and to make that area viable for agriculture.

Now, the canals and the dikes, all of this is a collective system that requires a collective political institution, namely the imperial state. And so, the second part of that analysis goes that you move in the so-called Chou period to the Han period, or you move from Chou feudalism to Han bureaucratic feudalism. By which you mean, that when you get to the Han Dynasty, in the third century BC, you have removed all intermediary feudal forces and you have made the state the very center, really, of a bureaucratic feudalism, that everybody owes allegiance to it, that everybody is required by it, and it performs or fulfills those very central economic functions. Now, when you get down to the nineteenth century, you still have this very active, bureaucratic, imperial state interventionists in the economy. It supposed, after all, that that's the very center of the Mandate of Heaven, it's supposed to maintain the dikes and canals. In other words, it's supposed to control those rivers.

In the second place, it maintains what are called emergency storehouses, a terribly important part of the crisis of later nineteenth century Chinese development. These emergency storehouses are state storehouses in which rice and wheat are stored, having been bought by state officials at harvest time, against inflationary prices, at times of shortage, and especially, in order to have a supply in case there really is famine that afflicts the society. So that you have, you see, a very important element of stability in these emergency store houses.

A third, you have a state monopoly over the production and the sale of salt. Now, salt: terribly important not only as a preservative for foods in China, but as a terribly and centrally important condiment in Chinese cuisine. And consequently, the salt, terribly crucial, and so the state took over that function. Now, note it carefully that, though the state had a monopoly over the production and sale of salt, it licensed merchants really to take care of that salt sale. In other

words, there were merchants who made a killing on that. Now, that's very important because in the 1870s and 1880s, when China has to begin to respond to the impact of the West and when it has to begin to think about whether it can develop its own model of economic development, whether it can emerge with some real response, the idea goes back to this notion of control by the mandarins, sale by the merchants, which was built into the whole salt regime. It's a kind of Japanese idea that the state, after all, will really animate the economic development of China, but it will do so in collaboration with the merchant class, it will do so in collaboration with the private sector of the economy, which will be under the control and subsidy of the state, but nonetheless, will be able to reap its private reward for private benefit.

And add to that the final fact which is that the state also had a great number of state factories, and not only in the production of military goods but textiles, in ceramics, in metal works. And you find that the mines, especially, all of the subsoil, are in state hands, often given out to private entrepreneurs but with the eminent right over the iron or over the coal by the state itself. Now all of that, you see, gives you something...

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... society wouldn't look kindly upon any kind of Western intervention. It would think that that Western intervention, really, had no place in this very organic, very highly sophisticated, highly designed kind of society. And it was all the more so in the middle of the nineteenth century for several reasons.

One, because the Chinese had already had a rather bad experience with the Jesuit missionaries. Now, you know, the Chinese were reasonably generous with the Jesuits, more generous than, in fact, than Westerners have often been with the Jesuits. And so, the later Ming emperors and the early Manchu emperors, that would be late seventeenth, early eighteenth century, invited these Jesuits in. Oftentimes they were good scholars, they were astronomers, they were doctors, and they made their way into the Chinese court. But then, little by little, a Jesuit is a Jesuit, and consequently, they began to argue with the Chinese about their vision of the world, about their vision of society, and pretty soon began saying a lot of nonsense. Not only about what the nature of reality was but about what the Chinese thought it was. And so we get, after all, that marvelous dialogue between the Chinese emperor, in the early eighteenth century, and the Jesuit priest who was lecturing to him about the nature of the universe and which is produced, after all, in a fictionalized account to be sure, by Voltaire. And so, I read from Voltaire's little essay on the banishment of the Jesuits from China. And the dialogue went something like this.

You have to understand that these Chinese, no matter if they use a bit of torture or not, are pretty

civilized people while listening to this. And so the Jesuit in Voltaire's account is Frère Rigolet — which is very funny to begin with if one knows what *rigoler* means in French — but at any rate, Frère Rigolet speaks first, and he's talking about the Christian mysteries, and he says:

Rigolet: Oh, between an ox and an ass! His mother was not a woman, she was a girl. It is true that she was married and that she had two other children named James, as the old gospels say, but she was a virgin nonetheless.

The Emperor: What? She was a virgin and she had children?

Rigolet: To be sure. That is the nub of the story: it was God who gave this girl a child.

The Emperor: I don't understand. You have just told me that she was the mother of God. So God slept with his mother in order to be born of her?

Rigolet: You've got it, Your Sacred Majesty. You see, grace was already in operation; you've got it, I say. God changed himself into a pigeon to give a child to a carpenter's wife, and that child was God himself.

The Emperor: But then we have two gods to take into account, a carpenter and a pigeon.

Rigolet: Without doubt, sire. But there is also a third who is the Father of these two and who we always paint with a majestic beard. It was this God who ordered the pigeon to give a child to the carpenter's wife, from whom the God-carpenter was born. But at bottom, you see, these three make only one. The Father had engendered the Son before he was in the world. The Son was then engendered by the pigeon, and the pigeon proceeds from the Father and the Son. Now, you see that the pigeon who precedes the carpenter is born of the pigeon, and the Father who has engendered the Son of the pigeon can only be a single God, and that any man who doesn't believe this story should be burned in this world and then in the next.

The Emperor: And of course, that is as clear as day.

Needless to say, the Chinese got a little bit wary. And, consequently, certainly about missionaries. But it's not only that. They also were extremely wary about the kind of value system that the Westerners bring. And when you get these Westerners in and you get the very worst kind, you get missionaries who are arrogant as hell, and then you get these tradesmen who,

after all, are the most perverse objects of a kind of market society, full of this possessive individualism. And it simply is abrasive against this idea that you preserve a social organism.

But there's something that goes very much to the heart of the matter, and those are two things. First, the Chinese really had the examples already of what had happened in Japan and what had happened in India. They saw how the missionaries had so interfered in the politics of Japan that the Japanese had to ban them, once and for all, at the beginning of the seventeenth century. And then they saw, after all, what happened in Bengal, what the East India Company did in Bengal — how it finally went in there as a trading company and simply lopped off the province and began to build a political empire, and that they wouldn't have.

So all of that gets crystallized in the notion that the West can't possibly have anything that China needs, that China has what, really, suffices for its survival and that anything else would be superfluous. And so, you get this remarkable letter that is sent by Ch'ien-lung to George III in 1793, when the British really want much better trade conditions, want a permanent trade representative. And the Chinese Emperor, in 1793, responds in this way — this is from a marvelous collection of documents that Ssu-yü Teng and John Fairbanks put together called *China's Response to the West*, which you can find in a paperback:

"As to the request made in your memorial, O King, to send one of your nationals to stay in the Celestial Court, to take care of your country's trade with China: this is not in harmony with the state system of our dynasty and will definitely not be permitted.

"Traditionally, people of the European nations who wish to render some service under the Celestial Court have been permitted to come to the capital. But after their arrival, they are obliged to wear Chinese court costumes, are placed in a certain residence, and are never allowed to return to their countries. This is the established rule of the Celestial Dynasty with which you, presumably, O King, are familiar.

"Now you, O King, wish to send one of your nationals to live in the capital, but he — not like the Europeans who come to Peking as Chinese employees — live there and never to return home again, nor can he be allowed to go and come, and maintain any correspondence. This is indeed a useless undertaking. We will not permit it."

Then, at the very end, which really goes to the nub: "As a matter of fact, the virtue and prestige of the Celestial Dynasty, having spread far and wide, the kings of the myriad nations come by land and sea with all sorts of precious things. Consequently, there is nothing we lack, as your principal envoy and others have observed. We have never set much store on strange or ingenuous

objects. Nor do we have any need of any more of your country's silly manufactures." At which point, of course, you are dealing with a hostility that is very, very deeply rooted. And deeply rooted, not only in the Middle Kingdom idea of China, but also in the idea that there's something subversive, you see, something that really begins to un-cement this particular society.

Now, there was a marvelous French traveler, a French priest in the first third of the nineteenth century named Évariste Huc, H-U-C, who wrote a book that I find, really, one of the most attractive from the point of view of what Chinese society was in the beginning of the nineteenth century. It's a book called *L'Empire chinois (The Chinese Empire)*, and Évariste Huc says this: "One excellent reason why China doesn't have much interest in trading with foreigners is that her internal trade is really immense." In other words, she has what she needs. Alright, that's the problem.

Now, it's within that context that the West arrives by 1840. And the working proposition that I want to make, the one that it seems to me really digs down to a certain harsh reality, is that that arrival by the West coincided with a very deep internal crisis in China. That you were arriving at that point in interior Chinese history in which the rupture of the Mandate, in other words, the fall of the Manchu already was being seen in various signs. What I'm saying are two things. First of all, that there are contradictions in Chinese society, of course. Contradictions in this Chinese mode of production, even within this social organism. And that those contradictions were growing deeper under the weight and the pressure of certain forces. And so, we have a two-fold problem. What are the contradictions and why have they really begun to go toward the breaking point?

Well, the contradictions really are twofold in the law. One, the contradiction in the primary facet, or the primary sector of the Chinese mode of production, namely in the village. And what I'm talking about is the differentiation between what you would call large land owners, who are absentee land loaners or who are renters of land, as against a mass of very poor peasants. In other words, you have the land problem of those who own the land and those who work it and are extremely poor. Now, that has to be sophisticated in a very, very concrete way.

What is the Chinese ruling class? What is the Chinese ruling class? Surely, you can't say by this Confucian scale of values, that the Chinese ruling class are these scholar-intellectuals. It's something more than that. Now, generally, social historians of China have used the term gentry. They have talked about the Chinese gentry, or what translated from Shenshi in Chinese, as the term for the Chinese ruling class. Now, the term gentry is a little bit elusive for two reasons. One, because you think immediately of gentry in British terms in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and they're something quite different. When you think of British gentry or gentry in the Western grain, you're thinking of those for whom the initial base of power is their

landholding — in other words, were large landowners and, consequently, on the basis of that have political power. It's a very Marxist theorem that, after all, the gentry by its conglomeration of land, then controls the parliament, then controls the political system. In China, of course, it's quite different and that's why we talk, very frequently, about the curiosity of this particular ruling structure. Because in China, this gentry had political, administrative, and intellectual power before it had economic power. In other words, that it derives from its role as the administrative class, or the bureaucratic class, or the intelligentsia, it derives certain of those economic powers which, really, then buttress it from that very important economic point of view.

A second point of ambiguity is that, essentially, when you talk about large landowners or you talk about, let us say, the village elite, you're sometimes talking about those who are not gentry. In other words, it is possible to be a landowner, a notable in the village, and not be a degree holder. Specifically and concretely, gentry, really, always must refer to somebody who is of this intelligentsia, somebody who is a degree holder. So that Lucien Bianco, who is a very good historian of China, says it's better, instead of using the term gentry, it's really better to use the term notable. Because notable, he says, always describes what is central to the Chinese ruling class, which is that it encapsulates in its hand the three sources of power. And that gives it such terrific clout. It has in its hands the rein of political power, of intellectual power, and of economic power. Now, I think that Bianco's point is well taken, but for practical purposes, gentry really can be almost simultaneous with, coterminous with the bureaucratic class or the degree holder that, really, is also large landowners. Because you see, ultimately the only people that could get the degrees were the rich landowners anyway, and their families. And consequently, the two became, essentially, coterminous. So that you're talking about terrific clout on the part of this Chinese ruling class. You're talking about those perfectly Gramscian, if you please, who have hegemonic power in their hand; land power, of intellectual power, administrative and political power are all wrapped up into one.

Now, there are two qualifications that have to be made, and you have to keep them in mind so that you can really cross over certain cultural barriers. When you talk about a large landowner, when you talk about the gentry in Chinese terms, don't think about a large landowner in Europe in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. You can't think about a large French landowner of the eighteenth century. You can't think about a British squire of the nineteenth century. You can't think about a Russian nobleman of the nineteenth century. It is estimated that when you were a large landowner around 1840, you had in a village about 10 hectare of land and rarely any more than that. In other words, you are dealing with a very poor landed society. A society in which there is such a demographic pressure, so many people on this land, that most holdings are really miniscule. Most holdings are a hectare or less and, consequently, 10 or a few more hectare than that constitute a large landowning.

The second qualification is that you do have a lot of peasant proprietors. It isn't as though you're dealing with, simply, all landed peasants at all. If you look at the data that are produced by R. H. Tawney, by Richard Tawney, in a rather remarkable book that you can find in paperback called *Land and Labor in Classical China*, and what Tawney did was to make an investigation in the early 1930s of the Chinese scene, bringing all of his own investigations into Western agriculture into it, and he comes up with certain data from about the period 1918 or 1920. And those are corroborated by [John] Lossing Buck in a great work, three volumes, called *China's Farm Economy*. Lossing Buck, parenthetically, was the first husband of Pearl Buck and the person who taught her a great deal about China, was an agricultural expert out in the area. And what they conclude with is that by about 1918, about 50% of the Chinese peasantry owned their own land. About 30% were pure tenant; in other words, simply had to rent whatever they worked. And about 20% were part owner and part tenant; in other words, had a tiny little sliver and, consequently, and to rent some more of that land.

So that you're really dealing with a different kind of ruling class structure in which the whole scope of land is very tiny, and in which there is this kind of mass of peasant-proprietors. But that shouldn't delude you. It shouldn't delude you into thinking that this Chinese gentry, then, isn't a powerful ruling class. Because, you see, 10 hectare or more is a powerhouse in a Chinese village. That what this gentry has is what is called the threefold fulcrum of power. It has, after all, rent and rent which is often very extortionate. It has, in the second place, money lending power because they're the only people who can be the usurers in the community. And it has, in the third place, all of that prestige of being the ones that can read and write, a prestige that really serves them in better stead even than birth or blood serves the Western aristocracy. So, you're dealing with that sector of the agricultural or the village society which is the ruling class.

Now, the other part of it are the peasants. And who are the peasants, let us say, in the mid-nineteenth century? Not very different when you came down to the period around the First World War. And, essentially, these are divided, are they not, into three categories? And one talks about rich peasants, about medium peasants, and about poor peasants. And it really is a kind of fastidious differentiation. Because a rich peasant, for example, in a Chinese village, simply is somebody who has a little more than the village average, maybe twice as much if he really is very prosperous, and who can afford at harvest time, perhaps one hired hand. The medium peasant, the one that can go the year without hiring out as labor or without hiring any labor. And the poor peasant, really the largest mass, considered by about the turn of the 20th century to be about 70% of the village population, they live always in that zone of insecurity of which may be the starvation zone. And subject to those three great plights of the village. And that, of course, usury as much as a 100%, rent as much as 50% of the crop, taxes extortionate by all kinds of officialdom. Now, you see the point? There is a contradiction in that mode of production. There

is a contradiction in that village. And it can remain stable only if it is not pushed to the extremity. And that's the point.

And we come to the second contradiction, and here we come to something that I hope you understand because it is a bit intriguing and a little bit complicated. And that is that in macroeconomic terms, there was contradiction growing in Chinese society. That is, you cannot think of Chinese society in the nineteenth century as being composed simply of a mass of inert peasants and a state that involves itself in whatever industry there is. There is also a dynamic artisan and manufacturing sector in Chinese society, and that is terribly important if you are to understand this economy.

What you are dealing with are these absolutely fantastic Chinese artisan crafts. You're dealing with all that stuff that supplied the Chinese population that got, really, destroyed when the West came in. You're thinking about the silks, and the cottons, and the bamboos, and the leather goods, and the metal goods. You're thinking about the products out of the mines. But two things have to be noted. First of all, that you begin to get what is called a proto-industrial structure in China. In other words, you begin to get the geographic differentiation, in nineteenth century China, of certain industrial zones. Zones, really, that are very heavily industrial. They would be, for example, like the province of Hunan in the south, which becomes so very important not only in salt mining but in copper, in tin, in silver, and in all the smithing that goes with that. You get, for example, Anhui which becomes a center of ink and paper. You get certain centers of tea production and so forth. In other words, you get a structure in which there already are industrial zones.

Now, the mode of production, for the most part, is artisan. It's traditional artisan. In the cities, the artisans inscribed in guilds or, certainly working in the countryside in specialized villages. But what the Chinese Communist historians, what the historians of popular China have really debating for about a ten-year period, and it's a fascinating debate, is how much a proto-capitalist structure really had developed in China even before the West go there. And they have documented a tremendous number of centers of what you would call capitalist industry. In other words, mining or textile in which you are employing literally hundreds, even thousands of workers. In other words, there is the shadowy outline of utilizing the resources of China to move to another level of production, a capitalist level of production.

Now, the contradiction is that that proto-capitalism is inscribed in a traditional society whose boundaries it cannot pierce or penetrate. What we're talking about is the fact that the state is very unsympathetic. It taxes very heavily over this industry. It makes all kinds of minute regulations. And then you see the whole value system, the whole ideology, is hostile to this kind of market

activity. So that those industrialists, those merchants who are in the private sector prefer to have their sons go into the bureaucracy, go into the mandarinat in order to buttress their family fortunes, in order to buttress their family fate. And consequently, there is a kind of tension between something that is embryonic in the society and always the question of whether it can explode and whether it can grow.

Now all of that, you see, before the West gets into China. Now, this is terribly important because there is the possibility of a certain unique and original Chinese mode of capitalist production. There is the possibility that if you make the *ko-ming*, if you rupture the Mandate and get another kind of dynasty other than this Ch'ing or Manchu Dynasty, that it may look sympathetically upon the animation of another form of economy. One that will suffice for this booming and burgeoning population, and consequently, begin to make a kind of Saint-Simonian state capitalism animated under this Asiatic mode of production by the state. All of that was the problematic of China, you see, by the time you get the West arriving.

Now, the point is that these contradictions deepen. And they deepen by the middle of the nineteenth century under certain pressures. One pressure, quite obviously, that the Chinese didn't like the dynasty. Well, it is the Manchu Dynasty. It is a foreign dynasty, let's face it. When the Manchus established themselves by overthrowing the Ming Dynasty in 1644, it is a foreign dynasty. They came from Manchuria. They're Manchu people, they are not Chinese. And from the very beginning, there's a certain hostility to them. And hostility in China, politically, is manifest traditionally through secret societies. Now, I tell you parenthetically, don't say anything outside, but you can learn a lot from these Chinese secret societies, and they do some very fantastic things. And you study the records of the White Lotus Society or the Triad Society and you — well, maybe you don't, but I get lots of good ideas.

At any rate, the White Lotus Society, for example, was always very anti-foreigner. It dates all the way back to the twelfth century and was fighting the Mongol Dynasty in order to bring in the Ming, which was an indigenous dynasty. Once the Manchus established themselves, the White Lotus secret society constantly kept up this barrage of hostility. The same was true of the Triad Society, probably the most famous of the secret societies, which develop that notion "*Fan Ch'ing fu Ming*," which was, "Throw out the Ch'ing and bring back the Ming Dynasty," and consequently get some kind of indigenous Chinese dynasty. In part, you see, is that the Manchus, even though they didn't disrupt the whole political system of China, did put in the court all of their own notables. They did monopolize the high state offices. And certainly, they garrison their Manchu army all over China, where they have, let us say, free food, where they had to be taken care of by the local population. No, no. The Manchus weren't popular. And then, you see, the dynasty declined. The dynasty declined.

You have two long, very prosperous, very good dynasties of the Manchus, or reigns, in the period of the eighteenth century. Then, from 1796 down to 1851, came two long reigns that are what are considered to be the degenerate reigns within the Manchu Dynasty, when you get all the characteristic signs of this rupture of the Mandate: when the dikes and the canals aren't taken care of; when the mandarins become very extortionate in taxation; when the emergency storehouses begin to deteriorate and there isn't enough grainstuff, let us say, in those storehouses; when the peasants begin so to be pressed that you get peasant uprisings — the great peasant uprising of 1832, which spread over four provinces of the south of China and which took finally a year and a half to suppress — all of that was a sign that the dynasty was in very, very deep trouble.

And all of this comes to be exaggerated by the natural force, the Malthusian force, which is the demography. The demography is crucial because, you see, one of the great phenomena is the Chinese population. It's one of the great phenomena under any circumstance, in any conversation about any subject. It's a phenomenon: 150 million Chinese around 1650, 420 million Chinese in 1850. How are they doing it? And the demographers, after all, have a field day with that Chinese explosion. And they tell us, in part, it is due to that eighteenth century reign of peace by those two long reigns of the Manchu dynasties. That there were no interior wars, that the population could exist in peace. Also commensurate with that, a period of what we call Malthusian adjustment. In other words, adjustment of the food supply to a growing population by that eighteenth century movement of moving out into land that hadn't been put under cultivation, of developing new crops like the sweet potatoes or maize which could be grown in the hill areas or mountain areas, and consequently, bring new land into cultivation.

But, as the demographers tell us, around 1780 or '90 there is a change in that conjuncture. What had been a balance in the eighteenth century then became an imbalance. There simply is not enough food to go along with that kind of burgeoning population. And it's most fascinating that in the 1780s and '90s, years before Malthus wrote, in 1798, his famous tract on population, there was a whole school of what you would call Chinese Malthusians writing about the fact that this imbalance was a classic and a catastrophic imbalance on the Chinese land. So that everything, you see, that was wrong in Chinese society, the breakdown of the state, the breakdown of authority, the hostility, the peasant revolt; all of this becomes, after all, part and parcel of a terrific natural crisis that has to be resolved by some new dynasty, by some correction of the agricultural system, by some breakthrough of the industrial system. And it's at that point that the West arrives.

And you see what I mean by this conjuncture of crisis? Oh, yes, the West had their crisis, an exterior one. Well, they had been there in Canton. They had been restricted to the city of Canton,

that was the only place the West could trade. And so, it was in Canton that they had bad conditions because they had to trade with what was called the *Cohong*. And the *Cohong* was a guild of merchants who had a monopoly of trade with the West. And they set the amounts, and they set the price. Furthermore, they were restricted to certain specific quarters in the city of Canton. Furthermore, they were restricted to Chinese law which they didn't understand. Very bad circumstances. Note that by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Western merchant, especially the British, Benton Company, Jardine & Matheson, the great trading houses in China were British. They begin to engage in contraband trade. In other words, they begin to go beyond Canton, they won't be restricted. They began to get a network of Chinese clients to carry their goods into the interior. All of that begins to develop at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

And then, you see, from about 1820 to '30 comes a critical turning point. You know why? The Napoleonic wars are over in Europe. That means, after all, that there is an over-building of the industrial plant in Great Britain. They are looking for markets. There really is social crisis inside that society. Secondly, 1834 comes the end of the monopoly of the East India Company over trade in China, which means that any merchant can get into this trade if there is some kind of viability, some kind of market for it. And then the third and crucial factor, yes, the third and crucial factor. You see, you had given away silver to trade in China to get all of those marvelous goods. To get those textiles, to get that tea, to get all of those Chinese crafts, you had given away good silver. No, no. To get those Chinese riches and give away nothing? How? Find opium.

And that is grown in Bengal under servants of the British East India Company. And so opium, which is contraband in China to be used only for medicinal purposes, and opium begins to come in. Between 1820 and '25, the average annual contraband, about 9,000 cases a year. By 1830 to '35, in that average period 36,000 cases a year. The contraband quadruples. And that opium, not good for the Chinese. Not good morally, not good from the point of view of health. High mandarins, high army officials say...

[audio cuts out]

... wiped out on opium. And we think in terms, for example, of the economic drain. 1835, 100 million Chinese tael (which was the Chinese coin) spent on opium, and the annual intake for taxes only 40 million. Consider, if you please, the political subversion that that means. The Chinese said, "No, you cannot do it." And the British and the Americans, the Americans getting theirs from Turkey, pushing that opium into China.

And finally the Chinese had to respond. And they responded in two ways. There was a cleavage in the court. The Manchus didn't want to fight. They didn't want to fight the British, certainly not.

Any fight, after all, might dislodge that dynasty and consequently, there were conciliators, and there were conciliators around them. But then there were these old Confucian moralists, the ones that say that the entire fabric of loyalty is at stake. The entire social order is at stake. We cannot permit this. They are the intransigents.

The one who goes down as the commissioner of trade, as the Extraordinary Commissioner, Commissioner Lin, he goes down and he wins his point. In 1839, the Chinese state passes a 39-article law to suppress the opium trade. And in that 39-article law, what they do is to proclaim the death penalty for anyone who is pushing opium in China. And Commissioner Lin goes down in the spring of 1839, and he's a decent guy. Lin Tse-hsü is a decent guy. He's a Confucian. He's no reactionary, he's interested in Western science and technology; he just doesn't think that it's a useful progressive, civilized thing for the British and the Americans to be pushing opium in China. Bizarre.

So he did what only a certain kind of Chinese naivete and moral sense would dictate. He wrote a letter to Queen Victoria, and he said to Queen Victoria: "I appeal to your moral sense." Well, that means the form is curt. And he writes:

"We find that your country is sixty or seventy thousand leagues from China. Yet there are barbarian ships that strive to come here for trade and for the purpose of making a great profit. Now, the wealth of China is used to profit the barbarians. That is to say, the great profit made by barbarians is all taken from the rightful share of China. By what right do they then, in turn, use the poisonous drug to injure the Chinese people? Even though the barbarians may not necessarily intend to do us harm, yet in coveting profit in the extreme they have no regard for injuring others."

And then this pathetic next sentence:

"Let us ask, where is your conscience? I have heard that the smoking of opium is very strictly forbidden in your country. That is because the harm caused by opium is clearly understood. Since it is not permitted to do harm to your own country, then even less should you let it be passed on to the harm of other countries. How much less to China? Of all that China exports to foreign countries, there is not a single thing which is not beneficial to people. They are a benefit when eaten, or a benefit when used, or a benefit when resold. All are beneficial. Is there a single article from China which has done any harm to your country or any country? Take tea and rhubarb, for example, the foreign countries cannot get along for a day without them."

Well, that didn't hit the mark. And so Commissioner Lin did what he had to do. In June of 1839, he collected 20,000 cases of opium from the storehouses in Canton, had a public burning, and scattered the ashes in the sea. And that is the beginning of the Opium War. Because when he did that, all that wealth, and he did that, and when that went up in smoke, and then said that the part of Canton was closed. The British, of course, sent their gunboats, and for two years, between 1840 and '42, not only bombarded the ports of China, but finally leveled the resistance. Commissioner Lin was forced to resign in disgrace at the end of 1840. And it's most interesting that the state was conciliatory, and made the Treaty of Nanking (of which we'll talk later) in 1842, which opens the whole treaty system.

But the Chinese gentry, those who saw that there was something that really was the beginning of a process that would never end until everything was broken in China and had to be remade, they roused, as much as they could, the peasantry against the foreign barbarian. And so we have this marvelous document of 1841, which professes to be written by peasants in south China against the penetration and the war that the British are carrying on. Obviously written by gentry trying to rouse these peasant militia against the British. But it expresses a point of view that you will hear again on the Taiping Rebellion and that is really in the whole fact of what is in the Chinese Revolution: "The thoroughly loyal and patriotic people of the whole province of Kwangchow instruct the rebellious barbarian dogs and sheep for their information. We note that you English barbarians have formed the habits and developed the nature of wolves. Plundering and seizing things by force." You see, they didn't understand what possessive individualism means. They didn't understand, really, that there's a natural harmony in the universe that works out as Adam Smith told us:

"In trade relations, you come to our country merely to covet profit. What knowledge do you have? Your seeking profit resembles the animal's greed for food. You are ignorant of our laws and institutions, ignorant of right principles. You have no gratitude for the great favor of our Celestial Court. On the contrary, you treat us like enemies and do us harm. You use opium to injure our common people, cheating us of our silver and cash. Although you have penetrated our inland rivers and enticed fellows who renounce their fathers and their ruler to become Chinese traitors" — Note that well, the comprador, those who work for the West — "though you have penetrated our inland rivers and enticed fellows who renounce their fathers and their ruler to become Chinese traitors and stir up trouble among us. You are only using money to buy up their services. And what good points have you? Except for your ships being solid, your gunfire fierce, and your rockets powerful — what other abilities do you have?

"We patriots have received the favor of the Celestial Dynasty in nourishing us for two

centuries. Today, if we do not exterminate you English barbarians, we will not be human beings. You have killed and injured our common people in many villages and seriously hurt the universal harmony of our society. You also destroyed the coffins in several places. This is properly a time when heaven is angered, and mankind is resentful. Even the ghosts and the spirits, if such there be, will not tolerate you beasts. Our hatred is already at white heat. If we do not exterminate you pigs, we will not be manly Chinese. Once we have said this, we will never go back on it even if frustrated ten thousand times. We are definitely going to kill you and to burn you to death. Even though you ask people to admonish us, we will not obey. We must rip off your skin and even eat your flesh, if necessary, to let you know that we mean what we say. We want really to use much more refined expressions, but since you do not understand written characters, therefore we use these rough, vulgar words to instruct you in simple terms."

And they lost that war, but there would be others to come. And it's the beginning of a process that would begin. [*applause*]