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Part I

INTRODUCTION

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Understanding the State and Party in China

THE collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union highlights the issue of state-building in today's world politics. As one quickly discovers, building the state institutions after Communism is anything but easy. Newly elected leaders in the former Communist countries have faced formidable challenges, as they realized how much still needed to be done in this "third wave of state formation."[1] Decades of Communist rule seem to have contributed little, if anything, to institutional development. Everything has to start from scratch: negotiating the rules of the game, establishing political authorities, defining power relationships, learning how to convene parliaments as well as how to behave like a parliamentarian. Meanwhile, from the pointless bombardment of the parliament in Russia to the senseless ethnic war in former Yugoslavia, and from escalating lawlessness in the center to rising outcry for breakup in the periphery, we have witnessed in recent years the devastating consequences of state institutional breakdown.

Against this background, China seems to be doing very well: At an average of 9 percent per year over the past sixteen years, the Chinese economy was the fastest growing in the world; market reform had been deepening, despite or perhaps because of the tragedy in Tiananmen Square in 1989; foreign investments poured in and Chinese products rushed out. Much of the booming economy, of course, hinges upon the Communist Party's grip on power in China. What will happen if or when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) also collapses? Will China face similar dangers of breakup as we have seen in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia? Can the Chinese state institutions survive the end of the Communist Party's rule? Will China remain a unified country after Communism? These are fundamental, yet difficult, questions about the future of China.

[1] This is a rephrasing of Daniel S. Papp's term of "Third Proliferation of States." Daniel S. Papp, *Contemporary International Relations: Frameworks for Understanding*, 4th edition (New York: Macmillan College Publishing Company, 1994), pp. 41–3.

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Looking beyond the booming economy, we may find that not all is comforting in China. Indeed, China today is facing a deep institutional crisis. This is so not just because the old guard of the revolution is going to "see Marx," nor just because official corruption is rampant or the official ideology is rapidly losing its currency or relevance. First, the death of a paramount leader undoubtedly has a great impact on the Chinese polity. It jolts the political system and pushes all the elements of the existing power structure into disequilibrium. However, China has had this kind of shakeup before. In imperial China, emperors came and went but the dynastic rule continued. In post-1949 China, the regime has also endured the death of its founding fathers, such as Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. Second, today's rampant corruption suggests that something is seriously wrong with the system and may even signal the approaching end of the regime.[2] Yet, runaway corruption is only the symptom of a much deeper crisis. Corruption happens all the time and in all political systems. It is what has led to uncontrollable and widespread official corruption in China that warrants our attention. Third, because China lacks a broadly held religious belief and a civic culture has yet to develop, the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought functioned as an important integrating instrument for keeping the Party together. The erosion of the ruling ideology, therefore, is bound to weaken the regime's ability to govern. Nonetheless, we have to note that the official ideology began to lose its appeal in the later years of the Mao Zedong era, long before the current crisis loomed large. An eroding ideology exacerbates the crisis, but is not the crisis itself.

China is in crisis because the Party organization that has controlled the country since 1949 is now in disarray, and the Chinese state institutions have yet to prove their ability to organize 1.2 billion people. Due to the devastating attack on Party officials during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s and because of the profound impact of "loosening up" and "getting rich first" on the morale of Party members during the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, the discipline and cohesion of the Communist Party organization has irremediably declined. As the Party becomes weak, the lack of capacity of Chinese state institutions becomes increasingly noticeable.[3] After more than four decades of existence, the state of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has yet to develop

[2] For a comparative study of the role of corruption in effecting the collapse of Communist systems, see Leslie Holmes, *The End of Communist Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[3] "Beijing Losing Control: China in Transition: No Law, No Order," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (June 9, 1994), pp. 22–30.

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the necessary and adequate abilities to handle major political, social, and economic problems. In many ways, the Chinese state institutions can hardly function independently of the Party organization. China – a country that invented the civil service system many centuries ago – still lags behind many others in establishing a government civil service in modern times. In a dramatic way, the forty-nine-day standoff between the demonstrating students and the government in Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1989 and the loss of control by the government in the escalating tensions, seemed to prove the inability of the state to act even in a crisis. The dispatch of field armies to the capital to suppress the defenseless students and civilians further bore testimony to the inability of the legal and police apparatus to maintain law and order.[4]

Sixteen years of economic reform in China have unleashed both constructive and destructive forces, and set free both angels and devils. Amidst stock market speculation and business activities, organized crime and violence is on the rise, tax evasion or tax resistance is widespread, and smuggling has become epidemic, often ignored, if not aided, by local officials.[5] The official corruption has become so pervasive that Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin warned that the corruption will bury the Party, the regime, and the modernization program if it is unchecked.[6] There is nothing surprising here compared with what we have seen in Russia and other former Communist countries. What is revealing, however, is that all this is happening in China where the world's largest Communist Party is still in power!

Both the Chinese rulers and their critics have recognized the dangers of an institutional breakdown in China. As early as in 1981, Deng Xiaoping warned: "Without Party leadership there definitely will be nationwide disorder and China would fall apart."[7] After the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident, the Party leaders have recycled Deng's argument many times in an attempt to deter Chinese and Westerners alike from trying to weaken the Party's rule. Mean-

[4] Bringing the military forces to the capital was the last thing the imperial Chinese rulers wanted in peacetime. This, however, has happened at least twice in the history of the People's Republic of China. What Deng Xiaoping did in May–June 1989 resembled what Mao Zedong did in July–August 1968 when he ordered the People's Liberation Army to terminate the Red Guard movement.

[5] Chinese Vice Premier Li Lanqing warned, "The PRC might become the kingdom of smugglers." The *People's Daily,* August 4, 1993.

[6] Jiang made this comment at the Second Plenum of the CCP Central Disciplinary Committee in August 1993. *Zhongguo jingji tizhi gaige* (Reform of the Chinese Economic System) (September 1993), p. 21.

[7] Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping 1975–1982* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), p. 369.

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while, the aging "Long March" veterans, who are literally racing against the clock, have tried everything they can to make sure that the Party will survive after they leave the political scene. Yet, in a dramatically changed world, neither the dying veteran revolutionaries nor the new Party leaders are likely to find a magic formula for revitalizing the Communist Party. On the other hand, opponents to the Communist rule in China are faced with the challenge of providing an alternative to the CCP if the fundamental changes they advocate are to come. Despite their strenuous efforts to search for an alternative discourse, there is little indication that an organizational alternative to the CCP will soon materialize. Thus, approaching the end of the twentieth century, China is again facing a crisis of institutional disintegration, much like the one she faced at the century's onset. China's crisis today is less about leadership, discipline, ethics, or ideology than it is about institutions. Chinese institutional breakdown or rebuilding has again become an urgent issue that deserves our attention.

This is a study of the issue of state-building in post-1949 China. By comparing the Mao Zedong era (1949–76) and the Deng Xiaoping era (1978–95), I want to find out what has happened after a strong revolutionary party won the civil war and established a new state. What did a revolutionary party mean to the process of state-building? What are the problems, difficulties or dilemmas that a revolutionary party has in its relations with the state? By exploring these issues of state-building, we may better understand the institutional challenge China faces today and the direction in which China might be heading in the future.

THE QUESTION OF STATE-BUILDING

Organizing China has never been easy because of the sheer size of its land and population. The problem of governance became all the more acute after the imperial institutions that had ruled China for thousands of years collapsed at the beginning of this century. That is why one of the most important issues in the twentieth century has been how to reorganize China. Contemporary Chinese history is full of struggles over establishment, abolition, reestablishment, restoration, or reform of political institutions.[8] It is no coincidence that Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong, two key figures in contemporary Chinese poli-

[8] The Chinese efforts at creating political institutions in the first half of the twentieth century are detailed in William L. Tung, *The Political Institutions of Modern China* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968).

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tics, recognized this problem early on in their revolutionary careers. Sun complained that China had become like a "sheet of loose sand."[9] Mao urged his countrymen to "get organized!"[10]

The pre-1949 Chinese struggles to reorganize China have captured much attention from historians and comparative theorists in the West. Studies of the successes or failures of the pre-1949 Chinese state-building are abundant.[11] State-building in post-1949 China, however, has not been a major concern until recently.[12] It seemed as if the century-long problem of state-building in China had been solved in no time after the Communists had taken over the mainland. Studies of Chinese political history usually stopped short of looking further at how the new state evolved after the revolution, whereas research on post-1949 Chinese politics often began with the assumption that the state was already an established institution and a given condition.[13]

Neglect in China studies of the post-1949 state-building problem is attributable to several factors. First, there is a long-held assumption that China has a strong "statist" tradition. Whereas studies of American political development have pointed to the weakness or absence of the state as "the great hallmark of American political culture,"[14] the state is often taken for granted in studies of Chinese political development. After all, some scholars would argue, how could China not have a strong state? The Chinese empire had existed for thousands of years. The imperial bureaucracy was perhaps the oldest and most

[9] Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the 1911 Chinese Republic, made this complaint in 1924. Sun Yat-sen, *San Min Chu I* (The Three Principles of the People), translated by Frank W. Price (Shanghai: China Committee of the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1927), p. 5.

[10] Mao made this call in November 1943. Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung,* vol. 3 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), p. 153.

[11] The most influential books are: Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); John King Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution, 1800–1985* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987); and Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990).

[12] Recent scholarship on the post-1949 state-building problems in China includes: Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China* (London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1987); Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988); and Gordon White, *The Chinese State in the Era of Economic Reform: The Road to Crisis* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1991).

[13] This is what Joseph W. Esherick calls "the 1949 barrier." Joseph W. Esherick, "Ten Theses on the Chinese Revolution," *Modern China* 21, no. 1 (January 1995), p. 48.

[14] Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities 1877–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 3.

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sophisticated in world history. The official ideology dominated Chinese culture and philosophy. If one finds the American political tradition "stateless,"[15] the Chinese political tradition must look very "statist" by comparison. The long existence in China of a strong state, therefore, must be the rule, whereas the institutional disorder between the last imperial dynasty and the first people's republic is the exception.

Second, the issue of Chinese state-building is overshadowed by the course of revolution. In the literature on modern Chinese history, the dominant theme can be briefly summarized as follows: In the last one hundred years or so, China underwent a great social revolution that ultimately buried the long-existing imperial dynasty. The revolution started with the collapse of the old state and ended with the founding of a new state.[16] The process of revolution in China is thus simultaneously a process of state-rebuilding. Even though the revolutionaries were determined to smash the old state structure, the revolution resulted in "a much larger, more powerful and more bureaucratic new political regime."[17] Under the shadow of the revolution, the formation of a modern Chinese state is seen as a natural result of the revolutionary process.

Third, the key role played by the revolutionary parties further obscured the issue of state-building. Ever since the Alliance Society toppled the last imperial dynasty in 1911 and founded the Republic of China, the revolutionary parties occupied a central role in social and political changes. If the Chinese revolution is a continuous process consisting of successive phases,[18] then the revolutionary parties were seen as the major protagonists, and the state played only a minor role. Thanks to the "revolution" paradigm that once dominated China studies, the dynamics and causes of revolutions were given much more attention than their consequences.[19] The impact of the revolutionary parties on state-building was seldom qualified to be a legitimate topic.[20] This, coupled

[15] J. P. Nettl, "The State as a Conceptual Variable," *World Politics* 4 (July 1968), p. 569.

[16] This theme is most explicitly developed in Skocpol, pp. 236–81.

[17] Ibid., p. 263.

[18] Fairbank divides this process into the Republican Revolution of 1911–12, the Nationalist Revolution of 1925–28, and the Communist Revolution of 1945–49. Fairbank, 1987, pp. 37–45.

[19] For a discussion of the "revolution" paradigm, see Thomas A. Metzger and Ramon H. Myers, "Sinological Shadows: The State of Modern China Studies in the US," in Amy Auerbacher Wilson, Sidney Leonard Greenblatt, and Richard W. Wilson, eds. *Methodological Issues in China Studies* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983), pp. 14–50.

[20] Some exceptions are A. Doak Barnett, *Cadres, Bureaucracy, and Political Power in Communist China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967); Harry Harding, *Organizing China: The Problem of Bureaucracy, 1949–1976* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981); and

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with the ideological preference for a limited state in liberal democracies, had often led us to think more of problems caused by the state than of problems caused to the state.

Conceptually, there has long been a tendency to equate the Chinese Communist Party with the post-1949 Chinese state. Prevailing in China studies is the view that it is of no analytical significance to distinguish the Party from the state, because the Party organization has deeply penetrated the state apparatus and the Party leadership has tightly controlled the state bureaucracy.[21] This is best exemplified by the conception of a "party-state" that denotes a type of state in which the Communist Party organization, as the core of the state, monopolizes state power over the direction and control of society. Although not everyone is comfortable with the conceptual marriage of the state and the Party, the party-state image is so prevalent as to make analytical distinctions between the Party organization and the state institutions theoretically appealing to only a few researchers. Studies of post-1949 Chinese politics, though varying in their focuses, share much in accepting the party-state argument. Convinced of the strong statist tradition in China and trapped by the revolution paradigm, we have often taken the party-state concept for granted too easily.

The party-state conception was undoubtedly influenced by the "totalitarian" model.[22] Once popular in comparative studies of Communism, the totalitarian model emphasizes, among other things, the central role of the Communist Party in the state of the Communist countries.[23] To be sure, an over-simplistic

Tang Tsou, *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms: A Historical Perspective* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 259–334.

[21] This view is summarized in Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 4–6.

[22] Theories of political order also seem to have supported the "party-state" concept. According to Samuel Huntington, in many developing countries, "[w]eak political institutions, particularly the lack of a strong political party, contributed to military coups and political instability." Thus a strong party organization like the CCP could be the most important provider of political stability. "The party is not just a supplementary organization; it is instead the source of legitimacy and authority." Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 5, 91.

[23] Some of the major books on "totalitarianism" include Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956); Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); Raymond Aron, *Democracy and Totalitarianism: A Theory of Political Systems* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1965); Sigmund Neumann, *Permanent Revolution: Totalitarianism in the Age of International Civil War,* 2nd edition (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1965); and Leonard Schapiro, *Totalitarianism* (New York: Praeger

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Orwellian depiction of an omnipotent totalitarian Communist state fits the Chinese case poorly because of the backward communication facilities in a vast peasant society. Nonetheless, attempts at modifying the totalitarian model to make it applicable to the Chinese case are not rare.[24]

The totalitarian perception of a party-state in China was greatly shaken by the events of the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, when the Chinese officials at all levels were attacked by the young Red Guards and rebel workers. In the early 1970s, a shift away from the totalitarian image of the Chinese state was already discernible.[25] By the late 1970s, observation of the chaos in the 1960s began to bear certain theoretical fruit, and new perspectives on the Chinese state mushroomed.[26] Taking the initial shot at the totalitarian model, revisionist scholars discovered the weakness of the Chinese state. They argued that the state in China might not be as strong and monolithic as was previously thought, largely because of the practical difficulty the Communist Party organization had in maintaining an effective command of the state machine.[27] Meanwhile, studies of the Chinese revolution began to offer some new thoughts. Rather than praising the achievements of the revolutionaries, many have chosen to examine the long-term consequences of the revolution.[28] As one reviewer points out: "In sum, recent scholarship has begun to consider the numerous specific uncertainties, difficulties, and ambiguities involved in the revolution's course, rather than simply continuing to debate the overall causes of its ultimate success."[29]

Publishers, 1972).

[24] Tang Tsou's analysis of the revolutionary "feudal" totalitarian trend in China is perhaps the best of such attempts. See "Back from the Brink of Revolutionary-'Feudal' Totalitarianism," in Tsou, pp. 144–88.

[25] Two examples are Chalmers Johnson, ed., *Change in Communist Systems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970), and Lucian W. Pye, *China: An Introduction* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972).

[26] A good source of these new perspectives on the Chinese state is Victor Nee and David Mozingo, eds., *State and Society in Contemporary China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

[27] Ibid., pp. 17–24.

[28] For examples, see Chen Yung-fa, *Making Revolution: The Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), and Steven I. Levine, *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945–1948* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). See also the symposium on "Rethinking the Chinese Revolution," organized by Philip C. C. Huang, *Modern China* 21, no. 1 (January 1995), pp. 3–143.

[29] Stephen C. Averill, "The Chinese Revolution Reevaluated," *Problems of Communism* (January–February 1989), p. 83.

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These two developments have led to the replacement of a totalitarian or monolithic image of party-state with a limited or fragmented image of party-state.[30] For instance, after examining the relations between the state center and the peasant periphery, Vivienne Shue argues that the reach of the state in the Mao Zedong era was limited because of the existence of "*the honeycomb pattern of the polity* – a highly localized, highly segmented, cell-like pattern" – that characterizes the way social and economic life came to be organized in the Chinese countryside in the 1950s and 1960s.[31]

The party-state concept, however, has survived all the revisions. Recent scholarship on the Chinese state has begun to challenge the revolution paradigm, but remained enslaved by the party-state conception. Even the revisionist scholars are not yet ready to reject the party-state concept. Instead, they tend to rest content with showing how a party-state may become weak, in contrast to the earlier literature that emphasized the strength of a party-state. Many studies of Chinese politics still depend on the basic assumption, as a point of departure, that the Communist Party constitutes the core of a modern Chinese state.

The party-state concept is persistent because it is difficult to change. To distinguish the Party from the Chinese state is no easy job. That the Party organization has penetrated the state institutions so deeply can easily discourage the effort. It also incites questions of whether the exercise has any value. The party-state concept is prevalent because it is easy to use. It seems to describe the Chinese state without a need for further explanation. We tend to believe that by putting the Party organization and the state institutions together, we can largely control the variable of the state in our analysis, which in turn enables us to focus on social and economic factors. An insistence on an analytical distinction between the Party organization and state institutions will perhaps make our job more difficult or even weaken some of the basic assumptions with which we have already become so comfortable.

However, the compound noun *party-state* usually brings us more confusion than convenience. As an analytical tool, the party-state concept is inherently a problematic one, because it often blurs rather than reveals the structural conflicts that beset the Party organization and the state institutions. By accepting

[30] The view of a "fragmented" authoritarian state in China is presented by Kenneth Lieberthal and David M. Lampton in *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 1–12.

[31] Shue, pp. 130–37.

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