Political Subjects, Activism and Social Subjectivation in Contemporary China: a Tentative Historical Sketch

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Is the issue of subjects worth considering in a Chinese context? In China and abroad, for scholars and public opinion alike, cultural a priori and generalizations seem to make it meaningless. Even more so the question of the political subject, in spite of the past hundred years of revolutions and democratic movements. The century of modern Chinese politics hinges on undemocratic pivots, foremost among which are the national and revolutionary dictatorships enforced from the late 1920s to the late 1970s by the Guomindang (GMD) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). From then on, Taiwan's democratic establishment has been the sole exception, while in the People's Republic of China (PRC) the proclaimed end of revolution (in the 1990s) following the dismantling of Maoism (in the 1980s) has left the CCP in solitary power with no revolutionary justification, in an alliance of authority and tradition recalling authoritarian democracies – with no democracy. On the opposite side we are faced with the cliché that China has embarked on a democratic transition. As ready-made paradigms taking for granted the absence or the presence of subjects, "tradition" and "transition" are unhelpful. Yet it is worth revisiting the past hundred years of Chinese political history with subjects in mind, if only because the vast majority of political actors had most of the time to make do without proactive institutions and operated as activists. I shall therefore examine the production of subjects in the successive contexts defining the construction of the political over the century rather than using a substantive definition and asking what the subject is (or is not). In other words, I shall move from subjects to subjectivation. Michel Foucault's theory of the subject as a dynamic construct[1] produced by a double process of subjectivation (one, the effect of a dominant power structure focusing on the subjects, the other one the individuals' own reflection of the shift in the making of their subjectivity as a proactive or resistive reaction) is apposite – with the caveat that the processes I consider are those producing the political.

While the difference (clarified below) has important effects on what the political amounts to, I keep from Foucault's theory the opposite pronouncements that make it so remarkable: in recognizing that the subjective side (or subjective scale) is all-important, even determining, albeit the subject is a construct; and that studying political subjectivation is not the same thing as studying subjects. Studying political subjectivation amounts to examining the conditions in the political (related to conditions in society) under which subjects emerge as political subjects. I shall argue that rather than being a complementary modality in the major productive modes of modern politics in China (institutionalizing, revolutionary, totalitarian, authoritarian), subjectivation has a history of its own and offers an index of the political transformation during the past century. Citizenship, democracy, dissent, contest, protest, but also proactive action within the successive régimes, can be reinterpreted in the light of subjectivation, all the way to the Mao-made mass heroes who are resurrected today, and to the most violent Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution. Rather than pondering the share of illusion, subjugation, alienation and domination v. emancipation inherent in subjectivation, I take it as a subject-processing process.

It thus may be characterized by its effects, as the self-appropriation of politics (indeed, of the world at large, of history, religion, life, etc.) by a person who becomes a *self*-recognized autonomous subject

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[1]   Foucault, 1994.

through a process enabling him or her to reshape his or her consciousness of self (subjectivity) in relation to the overall social and political environment. The politically subjected personality matches the two, by withdrawing into a private sphere (whatever the state of the world at large), or by taking arms, as Hamlet declares, "against a sea of troubles / And by opposing end them" in a dynamic interaction between the transformation of the self and the urge to change the world. This urge, and the resulting agenda of proactive action (not opposition) on the local scene, have been termed, for late imperial times, "activism". From then on, we see various processes of subjectivation playing hand in hand with various forms of social and political activism in changing contexts. The historicization of the political subjects shows that the process of subjectivation was the way whereby the modern political produced subjects in China without developing the individualistic and institutionalized patterns that were instrumental in the political making of the modern West. My contention (in part I) is that the activist framework fostered at the level of local and provincial elites in the cradle of late imperial times was the main launching pad for modern politics at the start of the twentieth century, when the trend was to institutionalize the power relations and the political practices that emerged in the new sphere of national politics (1895-1915). I shall then argue that in the durable context of de-institutionalization that ensued, the activist mode of subjectivation was given full momentum during the May Fourth era (around 1919) before taking a violent totalitarian turn under Maoism (part II), while the present period would be characterized by a social reframing of subjectivations without the long-standing support of political activism (part III).

Foucault's approach of the subject is not pragmatic, but hermeneutic. [2] However, historicizing political subjects as *political* agents – not as puppets – appears as self-explanatory and even circular if the whole range of questions pertaining to the relation of subjects to collective historical forces, and, finally, to the political, is not addressed – as (in my view) it is not in the pragmatic vision (of actors' agency). In one reading of Foucault' work, the subjectivation paradigm appears as yet another theory delineating a reverse (anti-humanist) side (of domination/alienation) to the celebrated obverse side of (Western) modern individualism. But there is more to it. In fact, Foucault shows quite the reverse: that the overarching factors determining the subjects as subjects (and alienating them in the process) depend on and foster subjects' agency. While under certain historical conditions the subjective scale is underplayed, other conditions (such as the ones in contemporary democratic societies and, as we shall see, in post-revolutionary China) inflate it so much that the predominant patterns are determined by the subjects. But under all circumstances, far from failing to separate (in analysis) the emic and the etic dimensions, the subjectivation paradigm builds the former into the latter without precluding the necessary distance. According to me, *this* Foucault goes back to the first modern theory of subjective agency and historical alienation, namely to Hegel's own historical theory of subjectivation with the axial tenet (in *Phenomenology of Geist*) that the objective scale (of societies, civilizations, religions, history) exists and operates only through the subjective scale, and is objective only because the subjective is alienated – by itself or, more precisely, in the social intercourse of the subjects. The objectivity of (modern) science is a further delusion if it is expected to deliver keys to society, history religion, morality, politics, etc. – because (even when a Kantian kind of criticism limits the transcendent pretense of reason and does away with metaphysics) the universality that it posits versus the particular instances (historical, ethnographical) misses the real articulation of the singular and the collective/objective. The singular-subjective scale is thus found to be the locus solus of history, at once the melting pot of subjects' personal histories, ideas, feelings, identifications, memories, and the cesspool of supra-subjective determinations; the elevated siege of lofty ideals (in Hegel's reading, the intellectual achievement of the Enlightenment) and the pit of brutal violence and fanaticism (in his reading, the French Terror of 1792-93). This fundamental insight

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[2]   The following discussion comments Foucault's supposed « turn » or « return » to individualism and humanism (through the « rediscovery » of ancient wisdom) in his lectures at Collège de France in 1981-82: see Foucault (2001). In my view, the stress on the subjective elaborates on his previous insight on what subjectivation means for and against subjects.

was still at work in Marx's early thought. Equivalents can be found in rarely visited recesses of Weber's or Durkheim's personal sociology, some echoes radiate in the "negative dialectics" of the Frankfurt School (of Marxian anti-totalitarian sociology and political analysis), but it was more or less lost, even in the reflection on politics for which it would seem especially welcome.

Among the rare exceptions (like Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique*), an outstanding and illuminating one is the contemporary Chinese philosopher Li Zehou (born in 1930), who has been living in the United States since the early 1990s after breaking with the CCP. Li was influential in China during the "Enlightenment" of the post-Mao period (the 1980s, before the Tiananmen onslaught) for presenting a theory of subjectivity for which he coined a neologism translated as "subjectality" paralleling Foucault's insight by stressing the dual determination weighing on human subjects: the techno-social one (in the original Marxian sense) and the individual's free agency (in light of Kant's concept of the Enlightenment founded on the subject made autonomous by the knowledge and consciousness of encompassing determinations).[3] Woven together, the two strands produced a philosophy of agency and freedom that Li opposed to the inertia of the masses under Mao's sway and, earlier in China's contemporary history, to the submission of the individuals' free intelligence to national and revolutionary concerns that absorbed the country's creativity by stifling a first Enlightenment (born at the end of the Qing period).[4] It is understandable that an opponent would criticize Mao's subjects as passive and conflate them with the "masses" – while, as we shall see, they were neither inert nor massified. Foucault's theory of subjectivation is perhaps a surer guide in this matter as it helps focusing on the making of subjects through subjectivation patterns explaining how autonomy can be a subjective conquest of self and history by resistance and identification under conditions not conducive to autonomy. Rather than comparing two philosophies, l therefore regard Li's as a marker (perhaps, with Liang Qichao's earlier theory of activism, the most significant one) in the history of subjectivation that I sketch here.

In regarding subjects as social actors endowed with agency, today's social sciences aim at bridging the gap between the objective and the subjective scales, but, as I remarked, these approaches miss the historical and political contexts because they focus on subjects rather than on the patterns producing subjects. The comparative advantage of the subjectivation paradigm is that in holding together both ends (subjects as social constructs and social atoms constructing societies) it gives full weight to the reflexive dimension (and the affective aspect) of action that weights so much on the political while not neglecting to inscribe the subjective consciousness and its endeavor in supra-subjective historical worlds of action and reflection. In Foucault's work, the subjectivation paradigm is derived from examples of structural changes in practices of government focusing on subjects' biological and mental lives, while the politics that are associated to it appear as individual and collective forms of resistance vindicating Foucault's definition of politics as action upon action. Rather than deriving the political from subjectivation, I propose to look for subjectivation patterns in the political along the different modes I have mentioned. As a result, relating political action to subjectivation does not restrict the scope of the political to activism. While in the Chinese context the linkage is obvious and especially enlightening in explaining the pervasive activist dimension of the twentieth century, we should refrain from taking Foucault's perspective on politics as the one and only yardstick. Activism should also be viewed in relation to the rise and fall of institutionalized politics and institutionalized democracy. Political subjects did emerge in a context of political institution between 1895 and 1915. I therefore suggest that two subjectivation trends were at work at the start of the twentieth century, with the not inconsiderable outcome that Mao's brand of total power stemmed from the one that originated in the failure of the modern institution of the political.

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[3]   Li, 1986 and 1987b.

[4]   Li, 1987a.

Another not inconsequential effect which readers should be made aware of is the enhanced subjective side of Mao's totalitarian régime that it reveals. State-organized terror, blinding political massification and mindless bureaucratic criminality were at work, but Arendt's famous trilogy is not a sufficient approach. Characterizing Mao's activist practice of power v. Stalin's bureaucratic terror requires our descending on the subjective ladder into the hellish pits where conscious, proactive individuals thought they were liberating themselves and emancipating humankind by committing themselves to fanaticism and personally exerting violence. When it comes to the subjective side, total political commitment is not unlike the total religious one we see erupting anew. The coincidence of total submission, total alienation and total subjective liberation seems the incarnation of sheer madness, yet the subjectivation paradigm helps *not* regarding the individual terrorist as a (convenient) psychopath. One sure guide in this rim-investigation of total politics from the angle of subjects is Dostoyevsky's *Demons*. Behind the surface argument (the diffusion of anti-traditional ideas and politics among Russia's intelligentsia during the 1860s), Dostoyevsky's novel on nihilism is built around this most vexing question: the individual's subjective-rational-moral-progressist involvement in what reason, morality, civilization, would prefer to regard as the blind working of crushing "historical" forces. In case one would object this is yet another Western encroachment, suffice is to recall that Chinese scholars have for long discussed the objective/subjective alternative, with Wang Fuzhi's famous emphasis on supra-subjective historical forces having determined the fall of the Ming in 1644 holding the line against the subjective turn of Ming neo-Confucian thought. On the threshold of the political twentieth century, Tan Sitong's *Renxue* (A study of the sense of human relations) called for personal action in expounding the individual's moral-political responsibility for redressing history's course,[5] in direct opposition to Kang Youwei's vision of evolution blindly moving the wheels of history. Tan's theory of action went as far as self-martyrdom (in 1898). Conjugated with the arrival of Russian nihilism (via Japanese channels), it exerted a decisive influence on the first generation of Chinese activists and their terror-prone mode of action. As we shall see now, it was a prime source of political radicalization in revolutionary circles at the start of the twentieth century, yet the source was derived (and politicized) from a non-radical, non-political form of social activism that marked the rise of the local elites in late imperial times.

From Citizenship to Failed Political Institution: The Rise of the Political Subject

Late Imperial Subjects: the Activist Framework

Rather than pointing to the cliché-ed Daoist-Chan Solitary, or, in intellectual history, to a "liberal tradition"[6] punctured by "mad" sur-individuals, some of whom certainly qualify as self-subjected subjects[7] and followed by "alienated" modern intellectuals, a glance at late imperial local society shows the well-known picture of various social activities managed by community leaders in domains ranging from education and charities to public works and religion. Not a few of these actions were conducted in cooperation with the state authorities, but for the most part they were self-organized enterprises involving various intersecting communal institutions that structured local power relations and communication channels at (local) elite and popular levels. A lot of ink has been poured on the delicate issues raised by the growth of these institutions. Were they supporting a public sphere in formation? Were they China's incipient civil society? From the now forgotten controversies that unfolded during the 1990s, two points emerged: one pertains to the – local – scale of the phenomena under discussion; the other one to their communal texture, making them so many segmented building blocks inserted into the interstices of the imperial state, and not the heralds of a new era of social autonomy and individual freedom. The late imperial rise of community affairs, impressive as it was, belonged to the older trend of imperial

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[5]   Qiu, 1979.

[6]   de Bary, 1983.

[7]   Billeter, 1979.

state-building that had been for centuries bureaucratically centralized and locally underbuilt and decentralized. Before social affairs came to the fore, the local knot had been religion and rituals, namely the local institutionalization of the so-called "popular" (that is, territorial) religions. Historians have shown how the local performances of state rituals effectively decentralized the religious empire, while the local officials' participation to, and/or recognition of local cults, metaphorically centralized the local universes of religion. In the same way the local communal space built around lineage and religious structures was endowed with a high level of legitimacy from the two sides – local and imperial. In many cases the presence among the local grandees of degree-holders not holding office strengthened the double articulation of both gentry (as a social and state order) and empire (as being centrally and locally founded) while providing a normative continuum and a cultural bridge between the "high tradition" which the scholars reproduced and the communities' local identities. In this light, late imperial elite activism connected all-important features. The subjectivation process (on which more below) may take place (or lead to) taking action without the official channels, by supplementing them or bypassing them. In so doing, it carries an in-built load of implicit criticism and disapproval, but does not necessarily single out the institutions and the instituted authority as enemies, not even as targets of action. Local elite members did not take to the fields or to the streets to lead angry mobs. Those who did in order to put pressure on the authorities trod the slippery ground leading to rebellion where sectarian groups' and secret societies' underground activities coalesced in (local) rebellions. When these became larger and more difficult to suppress during the crisis of the nineteenth century, the local elites mobilized against the rebels and saved the dynasty at the time of the great Taiping rebellion (1851-1864). Their agency was increased in the process, but their political capacity was not. Social action was not in opposition in the sense that it would have confronted the state as a political régime or as the political center. The politicization of social groups and movements that characterizes the following century did not reverse this picture altogether. It took two ways. One was indeed confrontational (it emerged as soon as the first decade of the twentieth century with the politicization of elite activism that led to the fall of the Qing. I call the second one interstitial, in that social action unfolded politically within society without targeting the existing power structures as such. We shall see this typical mode of "social politics" and the activism it entails mushrooming on the ruins of the republican institutions from the mid-1910s on.

Until the post-1901 reforms that granted it a modicum of institutional recognition, local elites' social agency remained within the bound of empire because it was constructed as a system of communal leadership rather than as a system of political (or religious) representation. Community leaders were socially constructed as individuals wielding informal power. Intra-communal competition for leadership and local competition among community leaders on the ladder of local authority and "face" fueled the trend whereby activism was becoming a key to social classification in addition to the official hierarchy of power, wealth, status and dignity. With non-official local elites taking a greater share in the *res publica*, a reshaping took place under the ethical rationale that their actions targeted the collective life of the people in harmony with the normative order and the symbolic universe that enlarged the classic definition of the (valued) "public" (*gong* 公) v. the valueless family-clan-based "private interests" (*si* 私) by encompassing the activists' endeavor and giving them a modicum of official (though not institutionalized) recognition. The (in fact political) basis of the empire got wider as it moved from the religious ground to the ethical-social sphere. In this way, the micro-politics entailed by the territorial organization was one (important) additional wheel in the complex machine of empire. Local elite activism widened the empire's scope without changing the organizational reach of the (official) state, thus nourishing a useful quasi-political breathing that secured the territories' dynastic loyalty. Activism introduced a new "pattern of dominance" on the local scene at the same time as it nurtured a culture of proactive (local) autonomy that would be recognized and institutionalized under the label of *zizhi* (自治) during the reforms of 1901-1911.

The impersonation (not individualization) of power and authority on the local scenes may be read as a process of subjectivation close to Foucault's interpretation because the emergence of the subjects was the result of a structural change in the practices of government. A parallel evolution has been traced in the subjective dimension. As I noted, local elite competition, although it reproduced the existing social order, introduced a dimension that was not identical to it and could develop in tension with it. This aspect may be linked to the activists' neo-Confucian ethos. Thomas A. Metzger's analysis of the neo-Confucian personality during the period is in sharp contrast with Weber's classic description of a Confucian this-worldliness leading to moral complacency and political compliance.[8] According to the activist ethos, being moral was no longer just being a virtuous ruler or a loyal subject and a good father outside, a saint inside. The superior person could be a private person subjectively assuming the moral challenge of making the world better – and assuming the risk of failing. This amounted to a "predicament", in Metzger's words, from which action in the world could provide an "escape". Transforming the community from an object into a subject transformed the activists into subjects as well. Whereas activism as a practice of (local) power was proactive, the ethos (as reconstructed by Metzger) was, if not in opposition to the world, let alone in dialectical contradiction (as Mao theorized in the 1930s), in a more or less voluntarist and transformative relation of action (more or less according to the schools which propagated various theories of the practice, the one Mao came to know during his youth being rather on the "more" side). There would be no subjectivation process worth speaking of if the community leaders, while being the outcome of a social process, had not produced themselves as responsible individuals. The common ethos made them subjectively autonomous and socially determined.

Joined to the remarks (above) about the more-than-administrative space that was taking shape on the local scene, the emergence of the local powerholders as subjects gives that space a definite political dimension. It was not that their leadership and their action promoted values that were the subjects' own. The communal ethos of dynamic action serving the common good was all the more legitimate and legitimizing the non-official locale elites as it was by no means their monopoly. It spread from their sphere to that of village life and endured at that level throughout the political upheavals of the twentieth century. Studying a Cantonese village-lineage in a landmark *Enquête sociologique sur la Chine* spanning the years 1911 to 1949, Isabelle Thireau and Hua Linshan give a striking account of how village leaders are selected by constructing them as micro-political activist operatives endowed with a superior sense of the common good through a carefully organized trading of services and "face".[9] At the opposite end of the continuum, Qing officials were expected to cultivate it and some served as ethical models of good politics.[10] If actively practiced, the service of the state and serving the community belonged to *tianxia* (天下) which encompassed both state and communities in widening rings of social-moral solidarity. A lot was written at the time (and by later historians) about the role of the moral and social activism in late imperial times, especially in the context of reshuffling a dormant bureaucracy marred by corruption and "selfishness", while the social compact came under stress in view of the rising commercial economy as the unceasing crises of the nineteenth century disrupted basic state functions. The challenge addressed the falling quality of leadership, as well as the failure of the standard procedures that were meant to enhance the moral capacity of the people and the public spirit: not only rites and sacrifices, but the recurrent cycles of "regenerating the people" (*xinmin* 新民) and "education through morals" (*jiaohua* 教化) which the local officials were supposed (but often failed) to conduct. In this light, elite activism reworked the age-old distinction between governing by virtue and governing by law – action by law meaning through the framework of the state, while virtue (*de* 德) was supposed to display the self-sustaining and illuminating charismatic quality which activism was rekindling. Some pre-reformers advocated a formal role for

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8   Metzger, 1977.

9   Thireau and Hua, 1998.

10   Rowe, 2001.

(some) of the local activists with a view to reasserting the emperor's authority vis-à-vis the inefficient and discredited bureaucracy. But the stronger current was more inclined to rein in local societies (and religions) in the hope of reestablishing the (betrayed) founding principles and redressing the state. The political debate was kept under check[11] until it exploded in the Westernizing context of the 1890s.

Late imperial social activism and moral subjectivation are thus responsible for a major strand seemingly inherited by modern Chinese politics from an undifferentiated past: the re-sourcing of values within the subject's own world can change the universe without taking the institutions as a lever or as a target of change. The process is supposed to make the normative order alive and full of "public spirit" (*minqi* 民氣) – a quality which human institutions as such lack. This goes a long way toward explaining how the activist ethos worked during the twentieth century in the contexts of institutionalized and revolutionary politics, especially under Mao. But we are not building a meta-historical structure. The activist mode of subjectivation during each period depends on its actual social and political construction. The rise of the local elites and the social emergence of elite activism is a long-term trend that was matched by the full development of the centralized bureaucratic state. Put together, the two pictures mean that the empire of later times was something less than a bureaucratic system, and somehow more political than governmental, although in a way that strongly framed the political dimension in the ethical and pragmatic patterns of patriarchal authority and local governance. By the end of the nineteenth century, the moral dimension was a social one, and the two together produced a not (yet) institutionalized mode of politicization that was neither a public sphere, nor a civil society in the making, because both state formation and social change interconnected in ways differing from Western Europe's trajectories and engineered a social-political evolution within the bounds of empire. Beyond the formally institutionalized (official) state, the actual state became a compendium-continuum of the official sphere and activist sphere, the latter one being the (multiplied and segmented) social scene where the subjectivation of authority on and participation to the political process at the local level became the norm. Not being recognized in the formal system of institutions (and in the overall distribution of power), the rise of the inserted (or "interstitial") local scenes transformed the system of government into an under-institutionalized "loosened" state.[12] But as the activist elites turned themselves into the source of the common values and projected their gained moral energy on the empire, the question of their status could not but be raised, all the more so as the encompassing state was weakened by a century-long protracted crisis. It is not surprising, then, that after spearheading the reform movement at the end of the nineteenth century they welcomed the new ideas of local autonomy and constitutional government which amounted to recognizing at the local level and institutionalizing in the political center their role in the loosened empire. The change from social function to political power was the driving force behind the trend that transformed the condition of the subject from subjected activist to institutionalized citizen.

From Local Governance to National Politics: the Institutionalized Construction of Citizenship

It took more than communal leadership and local governance to make modern political subjects. For all the face the unofficial elites received locally and the marks of indirect imperial recognition they enjoyed, local governance was territorial and subaltern. An imbalance was built into the system between the high level of responsibility exerted by local leaders, together with the self and communal recognition they enjoyed, and their near non-existence in the empire's institutional framework. They were just a part of the people (*min* 民) which the officials (*guan* 官) ruled and over which the emperor reigned. *Min*, a fixed category not integrating the momentous political and social change taking place at elite level, is a good index of the imbalance. However, unlike the political dynamics posited by the historians who have

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[11]   Kuhn, 2002.

[12]   Chevrier, 1996.

viewed a rising civil society (just as some had imagined a rising bourgeoisie), the activist momentum played into the territorial interstices of the loose empire without undermining its order. It took the political crises of 1895-1901 and 1911-12 to convert the growing imbalance of institutions and local activism into the drive for political recognition that propelled the movement for political institutionalization resulting first in a constitutional monarchy (1908-1911), then in a republican nation-state (after the fall of the Qing dynasty in March 1912). The activist ethos was nurtured by those who held wealth, culture and local power in their hands. During the social wars of the nineteenth century, the resources, militia and whole armies that defeated the Taiping and other large rebellions in the 1860s and 1870s were mobilized and funded on a local basis by gentry members with the support of the local elites. During the periods of lower unrest, the "enemies of rebellion", as Philip A. Kuhn has called them,[13] organized and funded local self-defense and attended public security needs, often at the expense of communal social relief, while the delicate balance of bureaucratic government and local elite governance was faced with mounting population pressure, unregulated migrations, strained resources and growing insecurity. After the bureaucratic system was restored in the aftermath of the great rebellions (with the first attempts at modernization by introducing Western machines and technologies), the renewed foreign pressure of the 1880s and 1890s transferred the proto-political debate (induced by the protracted crisis of the state) from the issues of governance to those of power and authority in the state. China's defeat by Japan in 1895 discredited the middle-of-the-road modernizers who lost control to the arch-traditionalists until a new current of reform-minded literati and open-minded bureaucrats took over in the aftermath of the Boxer Uprising and launched a program of institutional reforms with the enthusiastic support of the local elites. In the process, the intellectual world reframed China as a nation among other nations under a politicized state representing the people (rather than as the one world-empire), some in the monarchist-constitutional vein, some in the republican one. Under the people as sovereign (or co-sovereign with the emperor) the Chinese were to *institutionally* become political subjects: *citizens*.

The movement was at once deeply rooted in the expanding local and provincial networks of elite activism[14] and driven by a new impetus, namely the Western models of knowledge, politics and society, all the way to discursive taxonomy, terminologies, religion and civilization, which were relayed (mainly from Japan) by the reformist leaders (foremost among whom were Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao), and by scattered revolutionary groups which, however, remained marginal until they were federated by Sun Yat-sen in 1905. In 1906-08, the issue of transforming China into a constitutional monarchy carried the drive toward recognition by institutionalization from the local arenas of "autonomy" and mobilizations to the central scene of state politics. In the provincial capitals, the combination of the well-established local elites and the new political templates attracted many members of officialdom into the constitutionalist movement. After a brief period of convergence over the "new policies" (which were new politics as well), in line with the proactive dimension of late-imperial activism, the central authorities and the provincial constitutionalists clashed all the way to the revolutionary uprisings of 1911-12 which were joined by various other social forces (and given their anti-dynastic turn by the republican revolutionaries). It was a crisis of the *new* régime of politics (not of the Old Régime) that transformed the pro-Qing reformers of the monarchy into Republican opponents and the empire's grave-diggers. Beijing was taking advantage of the restructuring of the central government to rein in the power of the local and provincial elites, who meant to push the drive for politically institutionalizing their power to full fruition. In fact, the Republican revolution of 1911-12 was theirs – the triumph of the dynamics of institutionalization carried over by elite activism v. the more authoritarian version advocated by the rulers (and many elite members who supported them). It was not the "first phase" of a longer revolutionary trend rooted in the post-Overture crisis (of the 1830s-1840s) and encompassing the Nationalists' and Communists' revolutions of the

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13   Kuhn, 2002.

14   Xiao-Planes, 2001.

1930-40s (and their aftermath to the 1970s). The shorter cycle is rooted in the completely opposite trend of de-institutionalization that was unleashed by the Republic's failure. The transition from elite mobilization to institutionalized political representation was fulfilled in 1912 by the establishment of civil liberties, freedom of the press, free political parties and a parliamentary republic. During the winter of 1912-13, about 40 million Chinese voted for the first (and last) free general elections (on the continent). These citizens, voters and elected members, many among whom were former local and provincial activists, were the legally active part of the national citizenry encompassing the whole people. Politically speaking, the triumph of institutionalization deactivated activism as the central component of the Republic. But all along, local elites and elite activism, with the help of Westernized scholars and ideas, were the driving force behind the emergence of modern politics in China.

Was the failure their failure, too? Given the regional scope of the revolution, and the disintegration that was to come during the Warlord era (1917-27), one is led to conclude that the forces supporting the movement of political institutionalization succeeded in producing a unified institutional framework but were not equal to the task of making it live. In a not so infrequent paradox, the institutionalized setting was the result of régime change, but the dynamics of change had been supported by those of the empire at elite level. The movement had been nourished by the lack of political recognition the local elites had experienced in the empire's framework, which was also the framework of their practices of power, of their networks, of their imaginary representations – of their ways for doing things politically. Once the framework had been removed on one side, the other side disappeared as well, leaving bare the localism and the regional segmentation that had been present but contained within and by the empire. To make matters worse, Yuan Shikai's dictatorship (enforced by 1914) overdid the fallen dynasty's authoritarian program and suppressed the new liberties all the way to local autonomy, thus depriving the local (and central) elites of the institutional means for developing the new political ways (including the new style of power relations and social networks they entail). Liang Qichao diagnosed a major deficit at elite-local level. Does it mean that modern politics were betrayed by late imperial political culture? By the *Chinese* culture? This is what a new generation of thinkers and activists thought, after 1915, when, following Chen Duxiu's lead into what came to be known as the "New Culture Movement" and the "Movement", they launched, beyond the last century's first anti-Confucius campaign, the lasting pattern that was to locate the kernel of political change in cultural change. Unlike following generations (even among pro-Confucians) who reached for various brands of "new culture", the generation who failed to establish the new régime had reached for a "new knowledge". In my view, the perspective of the nation-state was politically self-sufficient and the diversity of political visions re-ordained the culture (including historical formats) accordingly, with no need for changing the basis.[15] If we look at the history of the Western democracies, especially of the electoral processes, historians such as Maurice Aghulon[16] and Pierre Rosanvallon[17] have argued that the incipient democratic systems could not rely on democratic cultures and societies of full-fledged citizens, but rather developed them as they took roots, especially on the occasion of the regular (i.e. institutionalized) electoral contests. As Aghulon writes, the elections made the electors into citizens. In this light, it appears that the Chinese republic was short-lived (as a system of public freedom and political representation) for political more than cultural reasons. Had the Manchu regents who ruled after 1908 maintained the political momentum created after 1901; had the dictator (Yuan Shikai) who stifled the Republic (before it fell apart at his death in 1916) sustained the representative institutions and the civil liberties, the tandem of reformed empire and political subjects could have provided a winning solution, whereas the collapse of empire left the newly empowered political subjects with no working system of political institutionalization.

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[15]   Chevrier, 2012a.

[16]   Aghulon, 1970.

[17]   Rosanvallon, 1992.

Although China's national disintegration was also the disintegration of the new politics, it was not the end of modern politics but a new birth for activism. During the period of political deinstitutionalization and revolution that started in the mid-1910s, politicized activism became what it is supposed to have been in contemporary Chinese politics: a way for being politically immersed in society (in the "people") by skirting (or, in Mao's reframing, by challenging) the state institutions in the political – the exact opposite of the institutionalized citizen being a member of and participating in the life of the state. From then on (until Taiwan's democratization), democracy was conceived and activated in the dimension of activism. It was deinstitutionalized even before it could be developed from the proto-liberal template of the reformist elites to the program of legal and social democratization advocated by the left opposition in the short-lived republican parliament (in 1912-13). The state (the state of the state) appears, therefore, as the parameter determining the structure and the orientation of the mode of the political that seems to thrive without it. During the phase of political institutionalization, political optimism ran high, and the political activists were not supposed to work without but within the political state. Under Mao, a form of the state that he came to part with was the target, but his activism, although violent, disordered, factional, was not stateless – given his essential tenet that political action was to be autonomous by being organized in an activated but strong political state. Mao's concept and practice of state-led activism was developed during his rise to power from the wilderness of the 1930s to the proto-party-state of the 1940s. But, as we shall see, the oxymoron was born as soon as 1920-21, when he parted with the May Fourth activists' idea of stateless activism (which had been his also, notably in 1919). He was not alone in reinstating the state into the activist dimension, but this break was the fountainhead of his specific practice of power. This rapid overview of the historical developments I analyze below underlines the fact that the relation of activism and state is more complex than is generally assumed. It is even so in the context of political institutionalization.

The reform movement of the 1890s to the 1900s from which modern politics originated was a sudden and direct answer to the crisis of the state that had lasted for a century. The debates on the redefinition in new political terms of power, of authority, of the public institutions, of China's place in the world, of the cultural heritage, of the moral values, of history and even of the imperial function, stressed the state and the nation, the people and the new ethos of patriotism and free citizenship but granted little room to the institutional framework as such and even less to the actual citizens as subjects personally endowed with rights and liberty. This does not come as a surprise in view of the overwhelming influence of the imperial elites in the process of political change. From the provincial elections of 1909 to the national vote of end 1912-early 1913, the franchise was lowered, but still only 10% of the population were active citizens exerting their political rights. It needs not saying that the following period of dictatorship and disruption cut short the dynamics of enfranchisement. The legal construction of the subject had progressed as well on principle. Modern codes were elaborated during the reform period before 1911, judicial institutions and legal professions were established. But neither from the part of the political constitutionalists, nor from that of the legal specialists came a turn-over of the normative hierarchy giving the upper hand to the individual subject through a conception of human rights being articulated to a state placed under the rule of law. This issue was not to be addressed in relation to that of the constitution before the late 1920s.[18] In practice, as for the electoral habits, the legal and judicial state was disrupted before it could reach beyond the major cities and large provincial capitals. Even there the statutes and codes, the professional organization of justice, and the public opinion, were not infallible guarantees against the pollution of the social practices by the naked practices of power induced by the collapse of the state. The marked difference during the Republican period between the legal treatment a Chinese subject could receive in urban China and in the foreign settlements underlined the extant of what I have analyzed as the missing state: the failure of the state to organize the social and political

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[18]   Fung, 2009.

life while being organized by it.[19] Elsewhere (the greater part of China until recently), in the small rural towns and villages the local officials still administered civil justice together with the public affairs, with or without reference to the new statutes and norms, and here too under the disruptive influence of practices of power (linked to local militarism and to the strong local influence of the landlords) that connected the weakness of the individual subject to that of the state. For the most part the people had no inkling of what being a subject under political and legal institutions meant. Their idea of the subject was the village activist leaders, the "good" local elites v. the "local tyrants" (the Manichean distribution of roles on the village scenes began even before the Communists and Mao transformed it into one of their articles of faith). Altogether the local elites were diminished in status because they had to face dramatic situations of famine and disorder with no outside support and suffered symbolically from the severed link to the state. They were contested by the urban elements of rural origins who returned to the rural areas for sowing the seeds of emancipation and revolution. Many of them were educators, and part of the "good" elite. The school teacher (Mao's profession) was to be a dominant figure in rural society and in the rural re-rooting of the communist revolution.

I have spanned the brief period of political institutionalization in light of the ensuing de-institutionalization in order to illuminate the conditions on the social terrains under which political subjects were not exactly the same reality as the formal citizenship of the people would have had it when it was proclaimed. But the actual republican subject was an abstraction in the new political discourse as well. Whereas the people as citizenry (*min*) or "nation-people" (*guomin* 國民) became a political subject on a par with the emperor; whereas the political state and the citizen's political rights by law were thoroughly described and vindicated, notably under Rousseau's influence,[20] few authors tackled the difficult issue of how they would relate and none, except one, Liang Qichao, produced a full theory of the political subject. While the activists were present in the political field, the political subjects were nearly invisible. The generation of 1895, unlike that of 1915, was not the generation of the political subject. It was that of the political state.

From Activist Citizen to State Conservatism: Liang Qichao's Invention of the Undemocratic After-Revolution

Liang Qichao's doctrine of the "new citizen" for "renovating the citizenry" in the national perspective of a re-politicized state is the period's most articulated political theory. It is all the more remarkable that it was a reworking of the standard activist ethos by the thinker who is usually thought of as the most articulate advocate of constitutional monarchy and representative government. And even more remarkable, as we shall see, that Liang moved from a theory of the activist subject rejuvenating the state for the sake of the nation to a conservative theory of the state doing the job itself and assuming the role of the one and single political subject. Liang expounded his initial theory of political activism in several essays (mostly written in Japan between 1902 and 1904) later edited under the general title of *Xinmin shuo*, "Doctrine of the New Citizen", which can also be read as "On Renovating the citizenry", both (parallel) meanings echoing the classic (moral) duty of the imperial state and of its officials vis-à-vis the "people" (a political category, we may recall, designating the empire's non-official subjects, not just those of lower social status). The commentators' (and translators') hesitation (between individual and collective) points to the very heart of the theory – where Liang shows no hesitation: *Xinmin shuo* is a landmark in our investigation because it is a study in political subjectivation. Liang's new faith in the nation-people taking over the fate of China is only matched by his trust in the possibility of awakening a national public consciousness (*guojia sixiang* 國家思想, nation-state thinking) not by wishful thinking, or under the action of the state, but thanks to the example of self-activated individuals

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[19]   Chevrier, 2010.

[20]   Wang, 2010.

of exception who will open the way. Even at his most "democratic", Liang, it should be noted, views the active political subject in the light of elite activism.[21] His national politics are not the vulgar brand of a state-manipulated nationalism. They equate political liberation and self-awareness, the subjectivation of the activist elite bringing forth the element which transforms the abstract sovereignty of the people into an actual consciousness and a driving historical force. In the context of elite mobilization throughout the country, Liang exerted a major influence on them. His writings politicized the ethos by turning the values and the goals of local activism toward the assertion of the modern nation. Which is to say that more than importing the activist pattern into modern politics, he made subjectivation the kernel of the political as it was transiting from imperial and local-social to political-institutional and national. The activist (Liang addresses the singular individual), besides being no longer the imperial subject of old, is no longer a community leader operating on a local scene but a co-producer of the nation's fate on the scene of history. In the new national frame, the political became subjective, while the activist became a sovereign subject, no longer a moral one and a subaltern political entity.

Granted the harmony between the direction history was taking and the subjective aspirations of the subjects (which Liang and many others believed characterized their time), a theory of constitutional government could be built upon such premises without a clear individualization of social relations and no articulation of the citizenship on the rule of law. In short, Liang was politicizing the local elites' activist élan more than he was democratizing the new politics by appealing to the subjects on top of recommending and explaining the importance of an institutional transformation. During the first years of the redaction, Liang is supposed to have leaned toward liberalism, and even to revolution. This reading fails to grasp the fact that from the beginning his activist template for the political state was successful among the reform-minded elites because it pegged a language that sounded radical on a moderate political outlook. The New Citizen need not be a liberal or a democrat as long as he is an activist subject. During the year of the parliamentary republic, Liang was the intellectual leader of the right (spring 1912 to spring 1913) before he became the principal inspiration to Yuan Shikai's régime. The case can be made[22] that he reworked his theory into a genuine conservatism not only by raising the power of the state above that of the people (in the authoritarian fashion), but also by downplaying the role of the activists and entrusting to a state-selected and propagated tradition the task of rekindling the public spirit while buttressing the authority of authorities in state and society. A crucial political factor, government cultural action could only be in ethical harmony with the values, norms and mores cherished by the people, because it conformed to the "national characteristics" (*guoqing* 國情) defining the "national character" (*guoxing* 國性) while not precluding modern adaptations. In Liang's earlier template, performing *guojia sixiang* supposed the activists and people in eminent national harmony, but the conscious and active *xinmin* subjects were to take the lead in realizing the political potential of the nation. Not so any more: the ethos that the state was to format, diffuse and rely upon was the common ethos, not the avant-garde' one.

It would seem, then, that Liang forsook the activist ethos of subjectivation for subscribing to a state ethos enveloping a state-driven style of politics at the expense of the (elite) subjects. He would be the forerunner of the intellectuals whom Li Zehou has famously charged with betraying the ideal of "enlightenment" (*qimeng* 啟蒙) entrusting the emancipation of the people to free subjects endowed with agency for the sake of saving the nation from disaster[23] – another effect of the "missing state". In fact, however, far from disappearing from Liang's thought after his conservative turn, the subjects are an important part in the state-design of Liang's conservative politics by being redesigned as non-activist social subjects: subjects subjected by the state, by the state-ordained tradition, but also, and more

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[21]   Ma, 2013.

[22]   Ma, 2013.

[23]   Li, 1987a.

importantly, by the forces modernizing the social setting. I shall dwell on this crucial point not for the sake of unearthing a forgotten chapter in intellectual history, but because Liang's conservative package illuminates the present relation of the state in the PRC with the non-political subjects enthroned at the apex of the social layout by the end of revolution.

In Liang's time the issue of modern politics involved the public-private divide that had been for long a major concern in Chinese thought (in moral, non-political terms). Enlightened by the challenge subjectivation and its moral-intellectual perspective had posed to imperial Chinese politics, Liang was aware that the institutions, be they traditional or modern, fail to reach the desired balance of authority and participation, because, as such, they do not reach the individuals' inner self and do not transform them. While many thinkers and leaders of his generation believed that changing the institutions would ipso facto change the politics of China, he delved deeper into the matter in political terms (not in planning a "new culture") and sketched the two patterns of the political (activist subjectivation and the supra-institutional political state) that re-enchanted Chinese politics from the failure of the Republic until Mao's political demise in the early 1980s. This pair is woven along the strand of thought which led him to realize that the crux of modern politics is the uneasy balance between private interests and public engagement, the former being at once legitimate (in a modern, free polity) and advert to the making of the political community. Having decided for good that the goal of modern politics was *not* to accommodate the private man in the citizen (he definitely was not a liberal), he nonetheless considered the social side and reconciled the lofty realm of politics with the ordinary private life of the citizens. In the initial scheme, the self-activated subject would rise above the citizen's ordinary life and provide the essential linkage between the two levels at which the politics of national renovation were to operate: that of the public ethos (公德 *gong de*) and that of the private ethos (私德 *si de*), in fact the plane of subjectivation where the pursuit of personal-communal interests had to be drawn to the common good. While the activist citizen was to flare up the public spirit by transcending the public-private divide, the articulation of public on private did not erase the private plane (the non-activist, non-politically conscious part in society and in the individual). Liang trusted China would develop socially and betted on the "middle class" (his words, *zhongdeng jieji* 中等階級) supporting the autonomous social institutions, the free press and judiciary necessary for empowering a modern, free polity. In 1903-04 he realized that was not the case and changed his outlook. Modern Chinese politics lacked a modern society together with a modern body politic: as a result, the "political capacity" (*zhengzhi nengli* 政治能力) of the people was not what it ought to be. Since the activist component had not been conceived to make up for unmet social-economic conditions, rather than calling for more activist input (as the next generation will do), he put the state forward and reframed the balance of his politics by stressing order over democracy, continuity and tradition over rupture and revolution. China's society, Chinese customs and Chinese citizens had to be changed, but at a slow pace, in an orderly fashion and in accordance with the "national character" ensconced in the re-ordained cultural tradition inspiring the historical (no longer political) state. But the theory of government was not entirely refolded on the state. According to Ma Jun's reading, it was redesigned as a feat of institutional and cultural engineering whose social and historical conditions required the state to supersede the free activists on top of disfranchising the people, while the spirit of activism and the institutional setting were to be kept but directed from above.[24] Elite activism was carried on board the authoritarian ship, as a distinguished guest, not as the captain, not even as the main provider of the fuel powering the engines. In both capacities (guest and mechanic), the (reshaped) national tradition was supposed to do a more efficient job in assisting the state for driving the people forward (to progress) while controlling them. This was "power in the state" (*guoquan* 國權) against *minquan* (民權, power in the people) that the democratic wing advocated when it could take advantage of the republican constitution to flesh up the ideal of a democratic polity.

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24   Ma, 2013.

The relation of Liang's itinerary to our point is that Liang became a conservative not by moving the pivot of his politics from the activist subject to the authoritarian state (that would be plain authoritarianism); and not by betraying his early radicalism for saving the nation. His conservatism stems from integrating the passive social and cultural existence of the people as the one force able to support the modernization drive (provided it be properly maneuvered) and, even more importantly, as the historical weight precluding any political rupture, any revolution, any democratic evolution. In other words, by recognizing the non-political share – the social side – of the political as a not negligible part of its modern foundation, Liang Qichao conceived the great divide of modern politics as a conservative, not as a liberal. His outlook was more Burkian than authoritarian per se. Instead of giving a democratic-liberal reading of the limited scope of political action vis-à-vis the social subjects, he was led to limit the power of politics even though he conceived the necessity of a strong authority. Yet, the prospect of a strong and efficient power structure ruling over an undistinguished crowd of self-subjected individuals that is taking hold in post-revolutionary China (see below) was entirely foreign to him. The strong state incarnated in the strong leader as the principal subject was the opposite of the depoliticized "technical" state favored by some modernizers under the GMD dictatorship of the 1930s and by today's neo-authoritarians, while Xi Jinping's addition of a "dream" to the authoritarian premises shows him trying to capture the ever-elusive public spirit which Liang had finally entrusted to Yuan Shikai – until he turned against Yuan when the Republic's strongman betrayed the constitution by attempting to restore the monarchy (1915). Unlike the revolutionary (that is politically de-institutionalized) states of the Nationalists and Communists, the conservative government and strong governance Liang advocated were grafted on the institutionalized foundation. For him, the institutionalization of the political was the first and final foundation of the public order. In other words, he rejected on principle the idea that politics could be reduced to an exercise in authority as much as he rejected the notion, soon to become popular after 1915, among the next generation, that politics were just an ethos. Liang Qichao is therefore not the forerunner of the voluntarist bend Chinese politics took after the failure of the Republic.

Are we to understand that the active fault line was not activist politics v. institutionalized politics, but power in the state v. democratization? This could have been true had not China disintegrated, as it is true today since the crisis of the state is over. In the actual historical sequence, the *guoquan* principle (without Liang Qichao's care for the institutionalization of the political in the state framework) was blended with *minquan* by the revolutionaries, but not before the following generation stressed *minquan* alone, with no references to the state save symbolic ones. In the sundered institutionalized polity of the rump-Republic, the political state had to disappear from the activist horizon or to become the one-sidedly politicized arm of the revolutionary parties which would supersede May Fourth activism in the 1930s-1940s. The activist generation opens the new era of the voluntarist politics Liang Qichao had rejected for the sake of political institutionalization. His conservatism was conceived as a bulwark against them, but the judgement of the following generation was that he lacked the means of his politics – because the challenge of the missing bourgeoisie he theorized had become the reality of the missing state. The death threat on China as a state (political body and organizational structure) loomed on their horizon. Rather than despairing them, the emergency found in them resolute individuals who would reconsider what political action ought to be: independent, self-constructed, entrusted to the people in the name of democracy, in lieu of depending on the undemocratic modernizing state relying on a revamped tradition which had fallen into the pit of warlordism and petty local militarism. Independent, autonomous, voluntarist, not conservative, ignoring the bankrupt republican régime, it was to create its own means politically, socially, culturally – all the way from the (supposedly "horizontal") social microstructures (including in the rural areas) to the central state. Self-subjected because of the missing state, the subjects were to recreate the political movement – as a movement, not as a state. This was the

Golden Age of subjectivation as politics. The Nationalists and the Communists kept alive the faith in the political movement recreating the society and the state although they broke the mold of free social activism. The revolution would have to coopt a modicum of economic modernization and state building: hence the all-purposes dictatorships that ensued. As we shall see, even Mao's revolution had to be built, from social mobilization to military and party-state building. Tensions resulted from this necessity in Mao's formation before he designed the double-entry state-led activism that became his mark from the 1940s on. While tensions sedimented in the socialist state through the 1950s, during the 1960s-1970s Mao and his faction used the activist movement in order to bend the power apparatus to his will in what Lenin would have described as the triumph of the subjective over the objective conditions. Since the May Fourth generation did not overdo the state (Liang's way) but the activist factor, as Mao did in the communist context, could it be that before the present era of politics after the revolution, the century moved from activism to activism – all the more so since Mao's started his real political education as an activist of the May Fourth period?

Mao's originality has been characterized as either stemming from basic differences in the Chinese context of revolution (a third-world nationalist, a peasant rebel, the "sinicizer" of Marxism), or as so many oxymora (a democratic communist, an anti-bureaucratic Stalinian). None of these features adequately square up his politics. His true originality was that he resisted the (revolutionary) institutionalization that he also condoned by making it more activist than institutional. Frederic Wakeman Jr. attributed the activist élan to a peculiar relation of will and history rooted in his early schooling in neo-Confucian philosophy that has parallels in the European post-Kantian philosophies.[25] While this approach is enlightening in the realm of intellectual history, the history of the political in relation to subjectivation I sketch here is more focused on the variations in the conditions of its construction that can lead to seemingly similar politics being quite different. A telling case is Mao's youthful and mature brands of activist politics. The difference is plain to see if one looks outside the activist boiler: one is conceived and functions without the state, the other one with it. Before we take a closer look at the stateless activism (May Fourth era), then at Mao's state activism, a few more words may help clarify the issue. Just as Liang Qichao, Mao could not envision his politics as either solely activist or one-sidedly state-dominated. But whereas Liang grew out of the (imperial) activist cradle into the new world of political institutionalization, Mao had to outgrow the context of de-institutionalization that followed the collapse of Liang's (and Liang's generation's) institutionalized politics. While the conservative had to view *guoquan* in the light of *minquan* in order to remain faithful to the basic tenets of his politics, the revolutionary had to learn to reframe his activist vision of *minquan* in the light of *guoquan* in order not to appear as just another guerilla leader tempted by localism and blinded by the petty-bourgeois idealism of rebellion: these charges were levelled against him in 1932 when, precisely, the question arose of the communist guerillas becoming a proto-state.[26] The later Maoist synthesis would be: if the revolution is state-led, it has to be reactivated; if reactivated, it has to be state-led. Was it, again, politics as subjectivation? On the determinative side (if we recall Foucault's conception), the subjects were specified as such by a power apparatus and its ("revisionist") ideology which, however, prevented them from being actual political subjects (in Mao's sense). On the activist side, in order to become true to themselves, the (alienated) subjects only had to follow the Chairman's line, not by implementing a doctrine but by behaving like "revolutionary rebels" waging war against the "revisionists" and "capitalist roaders" who alienated the revolution: they would be masters of themselves and of the world while the Master would not appear as such. I anticipate for stressing the one element that persists from one style of activism to Mao's mature and final activist practice of power (while the two worlds are separated by the totalitarian abyss and the political violence spread in it): from proactive (inserted in the state or inside it), activism (and the plane of subjectivation)

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25   Wakeman, 1973.

26   Hu, Chi-hsi, 1982.

become more than defensive: resisting in spirit and action. The spirit, the actions were there from the May Fourth period, not the conflictual dimension and systematized violence characteristic of resistance in Mao's world.

Elite activism had been in tension with the world but not in opposition with the empire. Opposing was violent, disruptive – rebellion. Being opposed to as a part of the legitimate political process had been an innovation due to the movement of institutionalization. Even the republican revolutionaries, who had violently confronted the Qing rallied to that cause – before the disintegration produced a new style of opposition. The missing state could not be perceived nor confronted as a political center. The social activists who came to the fore confronted the old world, old habits, old thoughts even more than the enemies of the nation – not everything old, not even all aspects of the Confucian tradition, but they resisted – not in the abstract dimension of utopian dreams, but by deploying the concrete repertoire of actions on themselves as subjects and the social agenda I recall below, yet without confronting the issue of power. They did not view themselves as rebels, because action instead of power framed the politics of subjectivation as politics – the golden era of activism was the time when the political subjects were fully social subjects free of institutional concerns. It lasted until the issue of power recalled itself – never to vanish again. The individual activist's subjectivation was not the end of Mao's activist politics. The last word belonged to him through the re-activated state: not the vague and friendly communal horizon (in contrast with the dire reality) entertained by the May Fourth activists, but the actual organizing and directive power apparatus designed to receive the activist influx *and* to homogenize and control it by means of ad hoc techniques of power. Mao's politics were therefore not May Fourth redivivus, and decidedly not Liang Qichao's (conservatively) re-politicized (authoritarian) state, but a re-politicization of the state through activism in a totalitarian context. I sketched this overview in order to support the following counterintuitive statement: the glorious decade of stateless activism (from the launching of the New Culture Movement in 1915 to the reunification of the country under the GMD in 1926-28) looks very much like an exception in an altogether activist century. Seen for themselves, politics as subjectivation do not anticipate Mao's inferno in a mild manner. They marked the moment when subjectivation and democracy met in lieu of institutionalized politics and the state.

Politics as Subjectivation: Portrait of the Political Subject as a Young Social Activist

The generation that came of (biological and political) age during the New Culture and May Fourth Movements (1915-1919) rescinded on the institution-focused practices and discourses of the previous one. On the fragmented and militarized scene of the Warlord era, local elites reverted to the time-honored practice of local governance. The (urbanized) intellectual elites of the generation born around 1900 reinvented the politics of participation without the institutions and the logics of political representation, on the basis of subjectivation and activism. The citizen had been constructed as an institutional subject. It became social, but still political – even more so for reframing the political as social action within society where it had been structured around the institution of the nation-state, and constructing an autonomy by resistance under conditions not conducive to autonomy. The twin features became the durable approach of activism well beyond the May Fourth era and linked it to a positive image of hyper-democracy by direct action – in fact the (negative) effect of the missing state. A social construction of politics by subjectivation rather than a wave of depoliticization: such was the paradox of stateless activism during the Golden Age. It was reproduced under the revolutionary and post-revolutionary dictatorships that were in store, notwithstanding the variations in historical conditions that absorbed social activism into Mao's totalitarian politics (part II), and today's generalization in the PRC of non-activist social subjectivations that construct the political by recognition beyond the margin of social activism per se (part III). The key factor was not the authoritarian turn of the post-imperial era. It was the collapse of the national institutions and the end of the two-decade old drive toward the institutionalization of the

political. Rather than blaming the social backwardness of China, the newcomers indicted the imperial culture which the leaders of the institutionalization drive had coopted, reframed and re-historicized in order to found the new Chinese nation-state. The cultural crisis which they diagnosed and erected as a powerful myth was in fact the political crisis of the institutional process.[27] During the previous period, the question of culture had been highly political, as it had been in China's long past (under different terminologies and different types of taxonomy). The re-historicization process, because it was conceived in different formats in association with different political perspectives, enhanced the political bond (to the nation) without shaping a unidimensional national identity (or tradition). Even for those (some of the revolutionaries) who advocated a "national quintessence", the foundations of the political laid elsewhere – in the people and in the political movement itself. After 1915, the question of the cultural foundations (first and foremost the issue of religion encompassing that of Confucianism) superseded in the intellectual debates the problems pertaining to the institutional forms. But as it became central, the cultural question was not merely an intellectual endeavor. It certainly systematized many critiques which the previous age had anticipated. But the re-focusing of the political away from the state question also generated a wide spectrum of intellectual-ethical attitudes and private-public activities, not all of them new, which can best be analyzed as political life-styles that, as such, were entirely new. Taken together, they defined a new style of being active in the realm of politics ranging from the private to the public, whereby young citizens in Beijing, Shanghai, and in the provincial capitals, aimed at living in harmony with a Westernized-modernist agenda of individual emancipation in view of fostering an activated citizenry who would emancipate China.

The morally, mentally, socially and politically liberated and self-mobilized individuals were the models and actors of a self-prompted, self-fashioned and self-sustained style of mobilization for action with no institutional channels to reckon with, no rights to make use of in promoting the cause, and no political accountability except to the (demanding) self and to the people and country in general terms, and to the fundamental guiding principles of democracy (with no more systematic corpus of doctrine than of rights and institutions). In short, the new extra-institutional politics were meant to respond to a set of exemplary actions and depended only on the sheer courage and will of those who claimed to be independent from any political and dogmatic attachment. They were performative and followed a pragmatic agenda described in Chow Tse-tsung's standard account as "intellectual", even "liberal",[28] while Arif Dirlik[29] has documented a social bend showing the imprint of (Kropotkin's) anarchism and (guild) socialism on New Culture and May Fourth thinking from the beginning. The divergence among historians about ideological characterization points to the underlying fact that, in spite of differences and evolutions among the social activists, their common creed and common agenda was not to approach the issue of power via the state but socially, mainly through mutual aid (Kropotkin's motto), cooperation, science, literature, popular education, the liberation of women – and self-liberation. A related issue, which also baffles historians, is the difference between the structuration of anarchist personalities and small groups (who acknowledged themselves as such) and the widespread influence of anarchist ideas and practices among non-anarchist circles, even beyond the world of activists. The puzzle inheres in the approach of historians who stick to ideological labels rather than comprehending ideologies and political trends at the deeper level where the political is constructed – and where I analyze subjectivation patterns. The (now fashionable) deconstruction of ideologies and politics in the name of (personal or group) identities is not helpful in this respect. In my view, the difference and the numerous passages between the self-acknowledged anarchists (a world in itself) and the world of activism characterize a political construction that proceeds from below, thus skirting the state and politics instituted in the state

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[27]   Chevrier, 2012a.

[28]   Chow, 1960.

[29]   Dirlik, 1985.

as the anarchists recommended while not necessarily producing subjects who recognized themselves as anarchists. The complex relation is not explainable by the rapid and often contradictory circulation of the ideas and of the subjects between filiations and identities that characterized the period of May Fourth. It signals the effect of de-institutionalization on the structuration of the political and of the patterns of subjectivation. A further complication is history. Although the time-span was short, the political was constructed and reconstructed, from institutionalization to de-institutionalization, before and after 1915, but each construction (and each period) involved counterforces and side currents. During the first period, anarchism (with nihilism) throve by offering an alternative to the dominant trend (the political construction of the nation-state). Conversely, during the following period, when the nation-state was no longer politically constructed, anarchism and anarchist-related ideas and practices became the central current and the spine of activist politics. This summary does not integrate another important feature, namely the variations and evolutions within the anarchist galaxy around the use of political violence, to which I turn now. From one period to the other, the reason why anarchism was so visible and instrumental is that it had been adapted from European models and practiced as a direct approach of the issue of power focused (1) on subjects' direct and personal involvement in (violent or not violent) action and (2) on society as a dynamic actor and not just as a *content* of the "social revolution" that was envisioned in left circles as a necessary dimension of the anti-Qing revolution. While Sun Yat-sen famously exemplified the "content" approach by entrusting to the (future) state the implementation of the "welfare of the people", few non-anarchists deemed the "masses" were to play a decisive part in the revolution (Zhu Zhixin, the most articulate one and a member of Sun's circle, was more populist – in the Russian sense – than anarchist, and an early translator and commentator of Marx). Heroic activism and active society were therefore available as ready-made solutions for a period of political deinstitutionalization such as the one that started in the mid-1910s. The major difference between the pre- and post-1915 approach is not that May Fourth activists stressed the cultural dimension more than the social one. In their vision of the New Culture necessary for "saving the country", the two were not separable – this is one aspect that differentiates them for the more moderate, non- activist elements (all the way to the opposite end of the political spectrum) who also shared the idea that culture had become the major stake in and the main ground of political action. For instance, renovating education by joining intellectual and manual labor (as advocated by Cai Yuanpei, the dean of Beijing University) was more consensual than "popular education" – one of the activists' favorite areas of action. The major difference between pre-1912 anarchism and post-1915 activism is the mellowing of the political violence that had characterized the earlier period in discourse and practices.[30]

Even there, however, the anarchists had foreshadowed the activist package by responding to a dual trend: one, overtly violent (and stemming from nihilism through Russian and Japanese channels) in confronting state authorities by means of political assassinations (viewed as heroic deeds); the other one, of Kropotkinian persuasion, giving more room to society's movements and self-centered organizational potential (such as mutual aid and cooperation) than to the violent confrontation with the state. Although the two orientations were not clearly delineated and exclusive currents (even in the circle of the Paris-based anarchists, who are often viewed as embodying the mellowed version), the anarchist imprint was globally determined before 1912 by the context of a power confrontation with the state, and the extensive anarchist influence after 1915 by the missing state entailing a reconstruction of the political from society that disregarded the state. Violence was transferred (with the intention to break with the past) from the political to the cultural plane, that is from the issue of oppression to that of domination and alienation. Besides the anarchists, Zhang Taiyan (one of the main leaders of the anti-Qing movement and a "culturalist revolutionary" betting the success of the republican revolution on the liberation of a Chinese "national essence") linked culture and politics in domination and emancipation well before Chen

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[30]   Chevrier, 1990a.

Duxiu's declared a culture war in 1915.[31] Yet, just as the use and the forms of political violence had been nuanced before 1912, the activists' relation to the culture issue, to the past, even to the Confucian past, is not to be understood as a black-and-white agenda. What was black and white – iconoclastic, as I have suggested – was the idea that emancipating China would entail a cultural and personal emancipation of the individuals in order to emancipate society and found democratic institutions, rather than founding democracy in the state in order to free the people. The iconoclasm was directed against the political institutionalization that had modernized Chinese politics as much as against a "tradition" or a Chinese "culture" per se (these categories were not by then delineated). No less than Confucius, Chen Duxiu and his flowers indicted the "national essence" advocated by Zhang Taiyan who, however, had marked his breach with the past by searching for such an "essence" in a non-orthodox vision of China's past since Antiquity.[32] The fundamental idea of a necessary and decisive rupture antedated the emergence of nihilism and anarchism. By publicly provoking an assembly (of scholars) in order to protest against the peace articles with Japan in April 1895, Kang Youwei had opened a breach in the political modes prevalent under the Qing. On the intellectual plane, he had already broken with the orthodox tradition by criticizing two thousand years of scholastic errors (in his own breaking with the past, Zhang Taiyan broke with Kang's way of reframing it). Although Kang advocated a constitutional monarchy, his program also broke (radically) with the empire's religious arrangement. As we have seen, Liang Qichao, also a reformer, signed his personal breach with the past and past politics by his advocacy of a politicized form of activism in line with his idea of "renovating" not only the people, but also literature and history, in order to promote a "moral revolution". From moderates to radicals, modern politics after the mid-1890s have the definite "avant-garde" look of "breakings the frame": in a succession of breakings of the existing frames, including those perpetrated by preceding "breakers". The radicals outdid the reformers by betting symbolically and practically on violence. The post-1915 activists, then, outdid the radicals – and the reformers – by impeaching the "old" culture (whatever nuances in the articles of impeachment). As I explain below, the radical rupture lies more in the gesture and in a style of action (and of life) than in intellectual contour (often imprecise and shifting). Suffice is to stress here, as a general overview, that political violence per se is not only to be studied in relation to different discourses and modes of violent action, but also as one form of rupture in a history of the successive ruptures that underpinned the political crisis of the world-empire from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. In other words, if one considers the construction of the political on top of the cultural, ideological and sociological factors that have been envisioned by historians, anarchism emerged and grew as practice of power while May Fourth activism was a social practice determined by the collapse of the political state. The main difference is therefore not to be found in anarchism or in activism per se, in a specific "Chinese" identity or in personal negotiations of the available ideologies, but in the state of the state.

The fact that ideas and practices linked to anarchism radiate beyond the anarchist kernels and mingle with other strands that (loosely) qualify as "liberal" in that they do not engage the state, is not specific to China at the beginning of the twentieth century. European histories of the period manifest a similar bend, as a reaction against the structural shifts in social and political life entailed by the development of industrial capitalism. China's case differs in this (a fact that most thinkers of the period noted: Liang Qichao's example is one among many). However, the idea that it was possible to skirt the state altogether in order to emancipate individuals and humankind occupied a wider range in the intellectual and political space than in the Western countries, not due to a particular cultural substratum – notably Daoism, as Peter Zarrow would have it[33] –, or to specific Chinese adaptations (of nihilism, anarchism, socialism, liberalism, conservatism, etc.), but as a direct effect of the vicissitudes of political institutionalization.

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[31] Chevrier, 2012a.

[32] Chevrier, 2012b.

[33] Zarrow, 1990.

These vicissitudes were at work in the pre-1912 revolutionary movement, as underlined by the ineffective efforts Sun Yat-sen deployed in order to shape the Sworn League of 1905 into a viable, centralized political party. Another factor that undermined the "statist" dimension (in thought, organization and practices) of a movement that was immersed in a life-or-death battle against the state, was the pervasive view that China, beyond the imperial state, was also, and primarily, an aggregate of bustling local communities, solidarities, cultures, etc. In this respect, the "other side" of the "loose empire" appeared as a viable alternative to central politics – and to violence – in a wide range of opinions and practices, including "local autonomy" and local activism. Prasenjit Duara has rightly opened this gate to our investigation.[34] It is central to the argument I make about the state of the state and the relation of the activists to the state: the "missing state" does not mean there was none. In many cases (as with the influential post-May Fourth federalist movement), it means the state dimension is deflated and rechanneled on the local dimension where politics seem to be social in that they are far from (central) state politics and actors, and amount to social practices of networking, alliances, mobilization, reformist initiatives… and social agitation. Although claims pertaining to work, welfare, and equality, were articulated, we should not therefore take "social" in the usual sense – the one emphasized by Dirlik. In sum – as a way for introducing the following discussion (and for preparing the analysis of social subjectivation patterns in today's China) – activism with the state and activism without the state are not identical. Both forms may be defined as social, but in different ways. Although the within version entails strategies and subjectivations that integrate the state (as we have seen with the imperial framework and as we will see with the non-activist and activist subjects in present-day China), the state occupies the legitimate locus of the political and subjects perform as proactive or resisting social subjects in their own spheres – a social world that may be characterized as para-political. On the other hand, in the without state perspective, the locus of the political is devoid of the state and free for the activists to occupy: social activism is the world of social subjectivations that are essentially political. In all cases, of course, the legitimacy of social action belongs (in the activists' perspective) to the social world, not to the state. The difference that specifies May Fourth is that social actors who would have supported the legitimacy of the state under "normal" circumstances found themselves obliged to assume the responsibility. A telling example, far from the radicals who exemplify the trend in the most ardent manner, is that of Shanghai's entrepreneurs at the start of the 1920s.[35]

This orientation has often been misconstrued not only as an abandonment of politics, but also as the triumph of reformism over revolution. Many activists were revolutionaries (notably those who clung to anarchism) albeit without actually organizing a revolution against the state. Which is not saying that the activist were subjects imagining they were in politics. The revolution was to be led against deeper forms of domination and coercion embedded in the culture, in the mores, in families, lineages, villages – in every corner of the cultural and social life, as well as in the high-brow intellectual citadel of the elites more than in the political institutions. Many pre-1912 revolutionaries (including those who, like Chen Duxiu, did not trail the anarchist wind) had expressed the idea that the people had to be freed (and mobilized) culturally as well as politically. What was new was that the revolution was henceforth to be directly and exclusively lodged in this kind of action among the people and performed by freed individuals practicing revolution in their own personal life and environment as well as publicly as a way of life. Performing revolution, like articulating the other features of the activists' life, was a way of doing politics by subjectivation. The previous generation of reformers and revolutionaries had wanted to signify that their politics were in rupture with historical continuity, some by politicizing elite activism (as we saw with Liang Qichao), some (the more radical ones) by resorting to political violence. As I examine below, the patterns that were at work during the May Fourth era did not innovate as far as

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[34]   Duara, 1995.

[35]   Bergère, 1989.

the basic components were concerned (the sense of rupture, even the violence involved in the cultural breach with the past): the radical departure was that the collapse of the political center gathered the political (with all its components) on one side – the activist side – of the construction. Which is not to say that the activists engaged in personal politics. They certainly were self-recognized individual citizens performing individually and/or in small groups, but they did so publicly and in the name of the people. Keeping away from established politics (if only for want of proper social connections and for reasons of personal security) was highly political. The comprehending way to characterize the emergence of May Fourth stateless social activism (and to separate it from Mao's ulterior state-led political activism) is therefore that a social practice of politics replaced the practices of power.

Indeed, after the intellectual controversies focused on religion and Confucianism in their relation to politics prompted by the Republic's institutional failure that marked the turn of the mid-1910s, it did not take long for political overtones implicit in social activism to surface. It was Liang Qichao's inaugural agenda in *Xinmin shuo*, with the essential difference that it was to be performed without the state institutional framework. The difference gave the new politics of stateless activism an immediacy and a distinctive radical coloring that the activists expressed in declaring that they were enacting "democracy". While the political bend during the period of institutionalization had not been democratic, the democratic subjects of de-institutionalization gave Chinese politics a markedly radical turn, but as the first spinners of the long strand of "elusive democracy" induced by the missing state.[36] Democracy by and in action was no longer the equation of the people and of the citizenry at the abstract level of sovereignty it had been for the previous generation. It was to be so in actual, concrete, small-scale actions. The marginalization of the political center as the main focus of reflection and action explains the closely-knit feeling of personal and collective emancipation that is the specific characteristic of the period – democracy liberating itself from the constraints that prevent it from being really democratic – and the impression that the activist political life-styles seemed to occupy the entire political range. The progress of democracy was that of an unhinged political form missing the essential frame of a politicized state responding in institutional-political ways to the initiatives and movements of an active polity. But the sheer factuality of action built a circle that seemed at once to avoid and to solve the problems inherent in the institutionalization of the political. Deinstitutionalized democracy's Nemesis was also a sublimation, and the reason why it still stands at the symbolic apex of China's contemporary history. Even the more overt flux of ideological systems and political denominations that flowed in 1919-20 did not end the Golden Age of individually- and small-group-based activism. More importantly, the consensus was fluid by construction. Most activists moved freely from one creed to the other. As we shall see below, the end of the golden era did not occur before the eschewed issue of power came to the fore when some activists started arguing that the best mode of action was to give priority to the struggle for power in the form of a party producing the revolutionary (nationalist or communist) politics they were opting for. Pending this turn, the main line was emancipating the individuals in order to emancipate China rather than emancipating China in order to emancipate the individuals. In short, the new generation – the first in the cycle of de-institutionalization – propelled subjectivation from the margin to the center of Chinese politics, as its full-fledged and dominant mode of production.

Liang Qichao, we may recall, exemplifies the main thrust of the previous period. The state was to be the focus and the subject of the political transformation of China: subject in the dual sense of the agent of the transformation (the institutionalization of the political) and of the focus of the discourses and actions pertaining to it. The people (or people-nation) was a more fundamental subject than the state, but only so at the foundation level, thus marking the decisive reorganization of power and symbols in the order of sovereignty that heralded the end of the old empire-form. As Liang explained, the shift pertained to

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[36]   Chevrier, 2012b.

the "form of the state" (*guoti* 國體), a concept that did not describe the institutional layout (or "form of government" *zhengti* 政體). In other words, the old empire was politicized (and re-historicized) in a way that transformed the state into the overall political subject we have analyzed. While the individuals could identify with this subject as a whole (the people, the nation, the reformed empire, the republic…). Yet, even in the case of the activist ones (in Liang's theory of the renewed citizen renewing the citizenry), the political process still amounted to serving the state. This is another way to restate the fact that the definition of the citizen and of the citizen's freedom in terms of individual rights was not really on the agenda. The institutional reorganization and the attendant symbolic of the sovereign people-nation (democracy in the most fundamental meaning) had not produced a subject qua person.

Not so in May Fourth activism. The double process still took place. But the overall political/symbolic reorganization put to the fore *the people as a society of subjects* empowering the democratic nation thanks to the action of the self-empowered individual subjects. In politics as subjectivation, individual agency and collective liberation were one same process. The trajectory was of the individual to the exemplary (activist) subject, and of the activist individual to the activated society becoming the collective subject (people, nation, democracy) through a moving and proliferating wealth of associations, groups and publications. Because the state and the political institutions of representation (parties, elections, etc.) were missing, there was no gap between the two processes, and the loss of the state as the effective political center could be viewed as a further emancipation of the subject enabling him/her to engage in really autonomous (i.e. democratic) politics. Chen Duxiu exemplifies this shift by (apparently) withdrawing from the (official) political life in 1914/15 (his rationale was not the sundered political center but avoiding dictatorship) and turning to the cultural issues which, as we saw, were replete with political/social concerns and a launching pad for the new independent style of doing politics. The activist subject was in itself a power instituting the political. By observing this we introduce a helpful distinction between the institution and the institutionalization of the political that enlightens the contrast between the two periods before and after 1915. Political institution with no (valuable, working) political institutionalization was what "stateless" meant for the May Fourth era, not that no state was extant, nor that the activist generation did not refer to the state, the constitution, the government, local autonomy, rights – that is to the whole array of institutional matters that had been the major concern and achievement of the previous generation. They remained a main topic for a number of professionals who worked in the fields of law (even constitutional law) and public administration at central and provincial levels, some of whom shared the activist spirit. But for the majority of those who were active in the public sphere, the state was neither the instrument, not even the goal of the social progress they looked for by means of bottom-up approaches, from small-scale educational schemes to mutual aid and cooperation to rural reconstruction. As a symbol and the objective of what the free nation needed and should accomplish, the democratic state loomed high on the horizon – and low: the influential anarchists contesting even that project. But the contradiction did not disrupt the consent. Because the citizenry was left without individual and public rights, without a free press, not mentioning free and regular elections, and whatever means of control over the collective life, the body politic was merely imaginary (the nation, the people), and the challenge for those who entered the political stage was to keep away from the remnants of the previous periods (the warlord-dominated central and provincial rump-governments) and to take over by themselves the fate of the country.

The "liberation" of democracy was, as all political constructions are, the effect not just of the activists' agency, but of the fundamental shifts in the political (from state-led to stateless) I just analyzed. Did changing social conditions explain this dramatic turn in the political toward the subjects? From "Occupy Wall Street" to the "Indignados" and "Nuit debout", the social movements in our time which desist from state politics and enthrone the subject also indicate such turn. They embody what the May Fourth activists realized: the taking over by the individual subjects of the public concerns biased, distorted, betrayed, deserted, alienated by state politics. But while today's stateless activism seems to be supported

by (and reacting against) the massive individualization of society (just like the anarchist wave at the end of the nineteenth century in the West reacted against the disruption of old social orders), no disruption of such magnitude occurred in China at the time of May Fourth. The breach with the politics and cultural outlook of the former generation was underlined by the fact that the activists were younger and more radical than the founders of the Republic had been. Their networking was as extra-institutional as their politics were: they were social outsiders when the founders had been insiders. Apart from this, no earthquake was remodeling China's social landscape. The demographic explosion and rapid social change in Shanghai, from Western life-styles to industrial districts, was more visible for being an exception.[37] Canton (Guangzhou) also stood apart. Few other large cities offered a modern setting to modern politics. In Tianjin, the "social activist" Liu Mengyang studied by Laurent Galy bridged the two worlds in the name of local autonomy.[38] Beijing showed signs of modern "street" politics while remaining tuned to the old ways – and to the institutions of the rump-Republic,[39] not to mention the elite politics of the "1911 generation" in dormant Xi'an,[40] or provincial Chongqing abruptly visited by modernity when the GMD régime under Jiang Jieshi installed its headquarters and attracted Japanese bombers during the war – [41] and Ah Q's emblematic backwater village where nothing new happens.[42] China's social modernity was at best marginal, and the tiny social minority of intellectuals and activists who seemed to play the top role on the political scene were in the insulated situation of an intelligentsia. It has been easy to declare them "alienated" from the Chinese traditional culture, and to portray their followers (the democrats who remained politically independent in later years) as betrayers of the collective cause culturally inherited or imposed by the new tides of history. Li Zehou, as we saw, reframed these ideas by suggesting that their Enlightenment ideals had been superseded by the (national and revolutionary) commitment to "save the country".[43] However, we should not view them in this light. They were the product of a deep change induced by the educational reform (launched after 1901) that preceded the rise of the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie and of the industrial workers' movement in Shanghai and was immediately more widespread than they ever were. The state dimension of these dynamics is to be underlined. The rise of a new elite of educated urbanites, mostly from rural stock and modest conditions from which the activist generation sprung, also visible in the remote provincial cities and even in rural towns and villages, was the outcome of the Qing heritage in terms of state and social formation (the widespread system of schools supported by local elites and local lineages) and of the state-building reforms during the last years of empire. Thanks to this relay, the modern disruption had a far more profound impact than its actual breadth would have entailed. One further and not marginal implication, as I remarked, was the activist bridge established between city and countryside when urban educated youths and educators of rural stock (like Mao, after 1925) made their way to the rural areas and prepared the (future) implantation of revolutionary cadres. The "urban origins of the rural revolution" were not an accident of history.[44]

The second major turn in the modern political (after that of institutionalization) was thus directly linked to the one major social change that took place after the rise of the local elites in the empire's territories. But whereas imperial elite activism had spanned the centuries, the new urban activism cropped up in a matter of years. Such dramatic change in a social landscape that was far less mobile than the political scene could not but have drastic political consequences. Producing a modern generation of educated

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[37]   Bergère, 2002.

[38]   Galy, 2010.

[39]   Strand, 1989.

[40]   Will, 2010.

[41]   Peck, 1967.

[42]   Lu, 1923; Veg, 2009.

[43]   Li, 1987a.

[44]   McDonald, 1978; Wou, 1994.

outsiders under regressive political conditions in a society that was not moving at the same pace was a sure recipe for shifting the political pivot to frustrated and ambitious political subjects. We therefore must conclude this survey of the social conditions by returning to the political determinations. At this level a comparison may be adduced with the so-called "Arab springs" of some years ago, although the young urban activists used the web for circumventing the political center in dictatorial polities. The state can be strong at the level of controls and repression and still missing. Alain Roux has documented the detrimental effect on the Shanghai labor movement under the GMD dictatorship.[45] Marie-Claire Bergère shows how the emergent entrepreneurial bourgeoisie in Shanghai experienced its own brand of political self-infatuation in the early twenties (as we saw) prior to acknowledging the need of an effective state and giving support to Jiang Jieshi's drive to power – only to be faced (after Jiang's takeover in 1927) with an ineffective state, weak where it should have been strong (in matters of state building), strong (authoritarian and repressive) where it should have accommodated the economic elites' and society's political needs.[46] The liberal politics and intellectual-social agitation of the so-called "Taishō democracy" in Japan at about the time of May Fourth would provide an enlightening historical counterpoint. The unescapable conclusion is that political factors ranging from state building to institutional disruption were more instrumental than social trends in the subjectivation of stateless democratic subjects.

The (Social) Illusion of the Political and its Demise

Moving one step further, one reaches an illuminating observation: not only were the political scene and prime mode of action politically determined (in etic analysis), but the political was reworked by the Golden Age activists (in emic perspective) as an autonomous social scene and, indeed, given autonomy by dint of their action. A parallel can be drawn with the conception of culture (that has been so prevalent during the post-imperial twentieth century) as an autonomous carrier of the country's destiny (paralleled with the intellectuals' belief, from modernist Westernizers to neo-traditionalists, that they were invested of and accountable to that mission in lieu of the missing state and civil society). As with the stateless cultural nation, the stateless political nation finally depends on the individuals' commitment, with the result that collective intellectual and political determinations are superseded by personal engagement. In his *Histoire de la Révolution française*, Jules Michelet attributes the deep reason for the Terror to the "climate" of political empowerment that seized the urban populace *at the level of the individuals*, men and women alike, when the monarchy was abolished (August-September 1792). Each one became a sovereign, he writes, and the consequence was the "anarchist tyranny" he sees in the Terror of 1793.[47] François Furet[48] views in the same episode (and in later Communism) an "illusion du politique" with a stern overtone recalling Dostoyevsky's famous diagnosis in *Demons*: the rise of autonomous political subjects could only lead to terror, because it created an autonomous world wherein the power of political action knew no limits. While Mao's activist practice of power falls into this kind of illusion (I call it below the political illusion of a revolutionary society induced by the subjectivation of activist elements in the communist polity), May Fourth activism seems light-years away. As I noted in discussing the general conditions determining how the political was constructed during the period, violence significantly abated in the activists' symbolic vision of their action and in their actual practices between the anti-Qing movement and the onslaught of the civil wars followed by Mao's terror. Replacing the practice of power by a social practice excluded violence from the horizon of thought and action. I shall argue, consequently, that the roots of Mao's activist terror are not in the activism of his youth: Maoism is the outcome of a completely different setting in the construction of the political. To put it differently, Mao's state activism

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[45]   Roux, 1995.

[46]   Bergère, 1989.

[47]   Michelet, 1850.

[48]   Furet, 1988 and 1995.

only related to the activist source through his later totalitarian reconstruction of the political.

Yet, we witness in the May Fourth outburst of autonomous activism a characteristic social illusion of the political induced by the individuals' sense of political empowerment after the institutional collapse of the political center.[49] Let us observe, again, that subjectivation is better analyzed in the "objective" social and political conditions than in the subjective consciousness. Subject, subjectivation, activism, autonomy, etc., are analytical categories in our historical discourse, not historical objects. So is, of course, the "illusion" we are concerned with. This rather cumbersome item (for historians) may be precisely qualified in light of the self-subjectivation patterns that delineated the new politicized subjects. They were (by way of a transition between the etic and the emic) individuals who existed as political agents through what they did and said they were doing as free subjects in a non-free country. The exhilarating and distressing feeling of having to take over is clearly thematized in the writings of the period, notably through the practice of diary writing.[50] The cultural indictment of the tradition (and of the republican foundation), who, to some, appeared as unpatriotic, was balanced by the hope that the new culture would foster a revamped public spirit. This faith was supported by the flourishing of associations and "horizontal structures" (as Li Dazhao, one of the prime thinkers of the period analyzed them) which seemed to renovate in the political dimension the social "other side" of the empire and herald the emergence of a "great union of the popular masses" (Mao's words in 1919). Subjectivation was the spearhead of the political radicalization that marked the 1910s and 1920s, but its idiom was not restricted to radical concerns. The range of dedicated actions (to the common good, the public, the country, democracy, reform, revolution, anarchism, socialism, communism, etc.) reached far and wide. Studying, becoming a professional (above all an educator), going abroad (to France) in the "work-study" program, embracing a self-improvement plan in the modern style, practicing "mutual aid" and the union of intellectual and manual labor, educating the "small people", engaging in experimental communal life,[51] being economically and morally independent, especially if one was a woman, loving, living and marrying without respect for the old customs, were so many ways for being oneself and serving the country at the same time. The specific construction of an "autonomy", underlined by Vera Schwarcz[52] in the Kantian sense of the Enlightenment and by Li Zehou[53] in the context of the post-Mao Chinese Enlightenment of the 1980s (in agreement with his post-Kantian conception of subjectivity cum agency, as we have seen), works as a post-facto reconstruction. The fragmentation and appalling moral bankruptcy of the public authorities led many non-radical individuals to reframe their private life-projects in the non-self-centered dimension that propelled the activist consciousness.

Many illustrious examples of public commitment were available in China's ancient and recent history. The "martyrs" of the anti-Qing movement had responded to Tan Sitong, one of the leaders of the reform movement of 1895-98, who had died a hero in September 1898 (when the anti-reform faction had launched a coup) after theorizing the need for the individuals to activate the march of history toward progress by getting totally (personally-morally) involved in it. As I noted from the start, this blueprint for activism contrasted with Kang Youwei's evolutionist-deterministic thinking and exerted a strong influence. My previous remarks on the sense of historical emergency and of a necessary rupture with the past that characterized the successive political waves at the turn of the twentieth century should be complemented here with the observation that commitment was linked to rupture. The linkage was even more important than the one violence operated. Liang Qichao's first essays in *Xinmin shuo* underplayed the violence ensconced in Tan's heroism and converted the life-or-death commitment into a feeling of historical optimism and

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[49]   Chevrier, 2012b.

[50]   Yun, 1981.

[51]   Gustafsson Chen, 1998.

[52]   Schwarcz, 1985.

[53]   Li, 1987a and 1987b.

responsibility by extolling the private and public virtue of heroism and greeting the nascent century as an era of heroes. While extolling individual heroism was breaking the frame without actually breaking it, the radical revolutionaries, as I noted, broke Kang Youwei's and Liang Qichao's frame by resorting to actual violence – not without the important nuances I underlined. Political assassination was deemed a heroic deed and was the modus operandi they retained from the Russian revolutionaries' lesson. The general strike was deemed irrelevant in view of the lack of industrial workers, but the deep reason was the heroic mood of activism which also barred the institutional approach of both the movement (as a political party) and of the future state (in spite of spectacular conversions to the state approach, such as the one Zhang Taiyan made public in 1907). Far from being a side current in the revolutionaries' galaxy before 1912, de-institutionalized politics heralded the making of autonomous politics (of autonomy) that marked the post-1915 period. On the intellectual plane, Kang Youwei's theory of a necessary "age" of the state institutions in nation-states as an intermediary stage toward a stateless global world was highly influential and a convenient way for accommodating opposite views.[54] The anti-Qing (and anti-state) revolutionaries were not all-out utopians. The enthusiasm that marked their entry into the world of institutionalized republican politics and government (in 1912-13) disproves this analysis. Similarly, the activists of the later period were not when they deserted the deserted institutional politics. My hypothesis is that subjectivation as politics, their new way for braking old and old new frames, provided a secure subjective anchor with the actual world of politics and history. Political action moved to social activism (including cultural criticism) on the wings of self-subjectivations addressing power in the realm of social and cultural domination rather than targeting the political center.

We should not, therefore, misread the mellowed mood so characteristic of May Fourth as a great leap into Utopia. It translates in subjective and collective modes the passage from institutionalization to deinstitutionalization I have analyzed. It certainly did not indicate a mellowing in the urge (born in 1895, we may recall) for braking frames. Domination continued and was to be fought in other ways. During the May Fourth period, the stress on peaceful means of action and fraternal feelings of belonging (to the same nation and people, or "great union") supplanted the rhetoric (and the implementation) of violence addressed to the state that had characterized the anti-Qing movement. The issue of power was also circumvented in the vision of social relations. They were deemed fraternal rather than conflictual, and amendable by reform, not by disruption. From various sources sprung the idea of "society" (with the modern term) as a valuable, commendable and resource-rich element in itself (not just in relation to morals and politics by inverting the classical negative vision of "selfish" interests). Above all, power, violence, injustice and all the social and moral evils were the fact and the effect of the other side – the face of China and of the world (including the West) which the activists resisted more than confronted. It should be underlined that resistance was positioned without constructing an enmity, with no violence in minds and deeds: the exact opposite of the spirit of conflict and of the systemized violence Mao was to graft on activism. The (temporary) mellowing of political violence contributed to the blending of universalism cum patriotism, nationalism and localism, modernism and native culturalism, democracy and anarchism-socialism, political reform and social revolution that formed the activist continuum and gave its unique tinge to the period. For the same reasons, the activists were both Chinese patriots and arch-universalists, and while universalistic and patriotic, many of them also communed in the defense of their root cultures and extolled the local traditions that had been scorned by the Confucian high culture. The marginalization of the state and of all power issues in the construction of their world (and of themselves) alleviated many contradictions that would have torn apart the consensus in a more conventional context of political construction.

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[54]   The age of the rising nation-state was that of *xiaokang* (小康), a trend of rising « modest affluence » shared by all. As we shall see, the formula has been captured by the after-revolution régime in the PRC.

One related aspect was the presence of the continuum formed between self-focused concerns, group-centered organizations and militant public causes within the same (unstable) subjectivity, thus generating episodes of self-doubts and ideological over-enthusiasm. Religious qualms and sentimental bonds were also essential components of the subjectivation process and markers of the "standard" activist life-style. One could go as far as saying that the activist subject was a production of politics with affects. Qu Qiubai, the focus of a famous essay which developed this line of interpretation,[55] was perhaps not the "tendered hearted Communist" the author saw in him, but his political engagement was at the very least strained and not dogmatic, as his final piece, an autobiographical sketch written on the eve of his execution by the GMD on 18 June, 1935, demonstrates.[56] Sebastian Veg has been able to connect the despair expressed in Lu Xun's fictions, and indeed the strained contrast between Lu's esthetics and his politics, to the absence of perspectives entailed by the failure of the revolution.[57] Seen from afar, the activists' horizon seems obfuscated and even strained. But the very process of subjectivation raised their solid and unitary belief in the efficacy of practical action above any misgivings about the eclectic and shifting contents. I would argue that subjectivation patterns, rather than subject's subjective pangs of consciousness, reveal the intentional character of the political. By reconstructing subjective narratives, the trend in cultural studies that emphasizes the negotiation of individual identities erases that characteristic in stressing the mixed and mobile nature of milieus, of influences, of personal montages and "passages". Yet, unlike in Thackeray, Balzac, Flaubert or Proust, by following this approach historians do not capture the political inscription of the personal journeys and fail to grasp the reflexive social construct that is revealed in subjectivation. The crux of the matter is not private v. public. Looking at identification processes provides drama but is descriptive at best and tends to remain on the subjective side – which is fine only if one equates the political with what it is becoming today. Integrating the subjective by investigating subjectivation processes amounts to integrating the social, economic, religious, mythic dimensions of the political without deconstructing it at the individual's level. In the stateless context (for Chinese residents) of Shanghai's International Settlement, Robert Bickers' study of how their concerns for (local) public matters, expressed in letters they sent to the authorities, gets over the intrinsic limitations of the identification paradigm as he analyzes the steady accretion of a "citizenship by correspondence".[58] We do not have to document the affective side of subjectivation in order to assert it as a workable hypothesis supported by a historical assessment of the construction of the political for a definite period of time. The etic is not the emic.

The importance of the affective influx is related to the paramount axis of politics as subjectivation: choosing a life-style seems to have been more instrumental in the making of the activists than the ideologies they were tossing over – as another marker of their style of politics – something we may well understand because, from self-fashioned politics to self-fashioned religion… and self-fashion, it makes them our contemporaries. There were standards and variations on standards. They produced free but not Bohemian or Dadaist personalities: concerned, enthusiastic, at times passionate, always dedicated and serious. As I remarked, these personalities were often in flux and whatever the highs and lows, the fluctuation of ideas, of associations, of periodicals, of friendships and love partners, the flux was in itself a performative proof that in the depressed institutional setting of the early 1920s everything that was not officially political was subjected politics per se. While the previous generation of activist outsiders had been driven (to the institutionalization of politics) by a strong urge to gain the official recognition in and by the state it thought it and the country deserved, the new generation had no use for such state-recognition because it was self-recognized. Personally "taking arms" (peacefully) against the forces (be

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[55]   Hsia, 1966.

[56]   Roux and Wang, 2005.

[57]   Veg, 2004, 2009 and 2010.

[58]   Bickers, 2010.

they cultural, familial, social, or political, within or outside the country) that prevented China from being a democratic nation and the individual from freely and fully developing his or her self, transformed the spirit of recognition into an exhilarating spirit of resistance.

Struggle, another dimension of the politicized activist framework which Mao's later state-led activism was to coopt and distort, was the final word in a world of politics in which power and conflicts were remarkably absent. Yet, the rupture enacted by the activist was a violent fight. My answer to this riddle, as we just saw, is that the activists renewed the sense of rupture and resistance that had underpinned the radical side of the new politics since the mid-1890s. The renewed sense of resistance was that the May Fourth "heroes" implemented Liang's call for a "moral revolution" in the all-out modernist sense which he had eschewed (in favor of a mutually selected mix of Chinese traditional values and Western practicality). From conventional Chinese private attitudes to modern Westernized ones, and from private to public modernist concerns, the double-leap experience was radical in itself (it has often been thematized in literature as coming out in closed familial contexts) and did not have to entail any systematic or dogmatic political-ideological or cultural approach in order to be perceived as radical. As I explained in delineating the overall political construction in the period, breaking the frame was signified by the breaking act more than in the frame. This is why the anarchist influence was so strong and at the same time so diffuse and even contradictory (and for us difficult to capture), as we saw. Hu Shi, who was perceived as an arch-leader of the radical-Westernized version of New Culture after launching the "new literature" movement in 1917, reveals a more complex pattern of subjectivation in his *Diary*[59] replete with old-time literary style and references.[60] Not surprisingly, the same Hu Shi came out as the advocate of pragmatism in opposing the systematization of thought (in order to systematize action) advocated by the early Marxists (such as Li Dazhao) in the famous controversy of 1919 on "questions" v. "-isms" (i.e. systems). There was more in the controversy than the sign of radicalization (revolutionaries v. reformers, Marxists v. liberals) pointed in the standard historiography. Again, the fate of ideologies is not determined by ideologies and individual passages through ideologies alone; and, again, it is necessary to reach for subjectivation patterns, and for self-subjectivation as politics, for capturing in the web of contradictory influences and apparent contradictions the objective factors and subjective reasons which made the activists belong to one same world of recognition and political intentionality rather than singling out each individual as a self-enclosed world and concluding that there was no "activist world" worth speaking of.

Brought together, these observations on the acute sense of rupture; the (relative) secondary importance of (shifting) ideological filiations and denominations; and on the transfer of violence from the political and even cultural dimensions to engaged life-styles, converge on a basic pattern of activist subjectivation: one became an activist by daring the moral-mental leap to heroism from the abject obscurity of a dormant, dominated, ordinary life, thereby communing in the new idiom of the day which imbued the young generation with a passionate sense of mission. In the general mood (in the urban intellectual layer), serving and saving the country began by privately asserting oneself as a modern, independent individual – a subject of one's own. One should recall Russia's trajectory and reread Dostoyevsky's *Demons* in order to grasp the melting of the intimate and collective and the intensity of feelings and ideas that were involved. Beyond the small-scale, cooperative and educative modes of action I have already earmarked, and beyond publishing and debating that were intended to communicate a message, literature and poetry were privileged ways for the self-expression whose performative strength alone (not the message) was supposed to reshape the culture and mobilize the public. As exemplified by Lu Xun in his (1923) collection of short stories significantly translated as "A call to Arms" (*Nahan*), writing in new, singular styles, was producing the intended singularity. Not only was braking the frames in itself the message (thus, Sebastian

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59   Hu, Shi, 2004.

60   I am indebted to Mr. Yu-jen Pan for this observation.

Veg's translation[61] opts for the more performative "*Cris*" (Screams)). The act of artistic creation (even when it was inspired by a more conservative cultural outlook, as was the case with the Southern Society (*Nanshe*)), partook of the idea that since direct action alone could save the country, the magnitude of the mission imparted to activists, intellectuals, writers and artists, meant they were the privileged carriers of the nation's cultural needs and political fate. That the "conservative alternative"[62] could be made as radical and, in fact, not conservative at all, as the modernist and universalist one (by looking to China's "essence" through the past) for being politically stateless, is something that escapes the conventional approaches of ideologies and literature in intellectual and literary history. Yet, viewed from subjectivation and the construction of the political, the paradoxical phenomenon points to the fundamental aspect of stateless activist politics and stateless cultural action becoming autonomous by being thought and practiced as the new central locus of the political. Unlike the established line of argument claiming that New Culture was culturally radical and politically leftist, an emerging view among historians holds that there were two trends in New Culture: the radical innovation tuned to Western modernism that departed from the cultural mix of the earlier national culture, and the pursuit of the culturalist endeavor in progressive or conservative perspectives. For both sides, not only had politics to be "made", but "making the political" by means other than the use of political institutions made politics autonomous.[63] Far beyond the circles of radical activists, the new creed held that the foundation (be it social or intellectual action) prevailed over the practice of institutionalized politics, thus endowing the concerned agents (intellectuals or activists) with the extraordinary responsibility of taking over on their own. Politicians (and warlords) were approached by Kang Youwei for implementing his plan for a Confucian-based state religion, or by Liang Qichao and his "Research Club" in favor of the conservative politics based on the traditionalist culturalist outlook he further developed against May Fourth radical modernism. As these examples show, the new sense of autonomy cum public responsibility entailed various degrees of dependency toward the powers that be, but, at bottom, the trend outlived the May Fourth period and did more than expand from social activism to the culturalist "invention" of a tradition. The revolutionary parties which rose during the 1920s with the idea that they were invested with the monopoly on social action that justified later un-democratic forms of government, were a further outgrowth in the de-institutionalized constructions of the political, as was the migration of CCP operatives from city to countryside after 1927. In sum, the "making" of the political was politically constructed from the start and became more so as it went on.

In the wake of the May Fourth wave of mass protests in 1919 and under the impact of thought-provoking events (the Russian revolution, John Dewey's tour), ideological debates, labor organization and public mass demonstrations[64] delineated a more political activist *res publica*. These concrete and not always unsuccessful actions seemed to provide society's and history's answer to the activist call, thus (in the beholders' eyes) vindicating what in fact was the activists' true gambit: that action could reach the people and make it move. One aspect that looks utopian in the observer's eyes but that in their own built their endeavor on the solid terrain of social action is the claim that they inherently were in, as well as of, the people, thus bypassing the normative, legal and institutional construction of freedom and authority in a democratic polity. Under Mao (who was steeped in Golden Age activism), the myth of inherent leadership was to become a fatal flaw. In line with de-institutionalization and subjectivation as politics, the sheer fact that the people were to be activated meant that they were willing to be so, because their consciousness would be changed. The difference with later-day Maoism in the operation of subjectivation was that the mature Mao no longer trusted the foretold harmony, and formatted party

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[61]   Veg, 2010.

[62]   Furth, 1976.

[63]   This is Leigh K. Jenco's characterization of the stance taken by Zhang Shizhao, a one-time republican democrat turned cultural conservative under the warlord government in Beijing (Jenco, 2010).

[64]   Wasserstrom, 1991.

and people accordingly in addition to relying on direction, thus bringing the process of "making the political" to its dreadful culmination (as we see below).The missing democracy in democratic activism was another effect of the missing state. Democracy was conceived and practiced at the exact opposite of the political institutionalization that had marked the emergence of modern politics in the cradle of the reformed empire. The activists worked in small groups and elite networks and relied on personal contacts in local arenas – in a "traditional" way that bypassed the regulation of relations in the political dimension as it skirted the issue of power. Although conflicts with political overtones strained personal relations and groups, they were not put to test in the actual practice of government, not even in steering mass mobilizations. The democratic assumption of activism – an essential component in the illusion – could grow unchallenged.

The challenge crept in by 1919-20 when the impact of the Russian revolution did raise the issue of power from within the activist consensus. As the soviets' democracy that had first been acclaimed by the anarchists[65] soon gave way to party-led Civil War and Red Terror, it was confronted with a version of social action based on the deliberate building of a power (the party) matching states and armies that made it look utopian. During the controversies between the anarchists and the first adepts of communism, party-organized class struggle challenged the mellow social vision and the assumption that social action alone was the key to all problems. On his path to communism, Chen Duxiu declared (in 1920) that the labor question, the question of women, education, social development, and personal freedom belonged to class struggle and could only be solved by a party leading the masses in revolutionary combat: gone were the parliamentary parties (in the plural) of a pluralistic system of institutions. The party was viewed as the activists had viewed themselves, enacting democracy by leading the resisting people's march forward with no system of political representation and thus entitled to exert a political monopoly. Becoming communist was to believe in organization more than articulating the (as yet unknown) Marxist theory of history and revolution (not to mention the Cominternian rhetoric of class alliances). In the interview he gave to Edgar Snow in 1936,[66] Mao portrayed himself as an anarchist rallying "Marx's party" by 1920. Nascent Chinese Marxism was utopian, as I wrote some time ago, but their will to reframe their activism into a robust organizational structure was decidedly not.[67] As we saw, tensions in the predominant political construction of the 1890s-1900s between institution- and activation (subjectivation)-based politics were duplicated and exacerbated among radicals as tensions between violent activism and organization. Following Zou Rong's influential "Revolutionary Army" (published in 1903), many who shared the anarchists' distaste of states and militarism believed (in line with the Russian nihilists' addition of secret organization to overt disruptive political violence) that the war against the empire required (besides political assassinations) that the revolutionaries be organized for the purpose. Organization and organized violence were linked. Early communist texts commend with the hair-raising innocence of a (by then) pure abstraction a power mechanism worthy of Pyotr Stepanovich Verkhovensky, Dostoyevsky's Nechayev in *Demons*, at once blindly responding to one central will and unimpeachable by its members – a feat of party discipline that well outdid Sun Yat-sen's secret society model of leadership (and convinced Sun to reorganize the GMD along "democratic centralism" in 1924). In the 1919 text on the "great union of the popular masses" I mentioned, Mao pointedly came out against violence and the organization of violence by a party – "Marx's party". During the following year, he surrendered to reverse reasons, not in adhering to Marxism, but to what communism from then on meant in his eyes: organized activism for the sake of revolution. The early Communists turned a blind eye to the contradiction between the objective organization and the subjective claims on subjectivation Dostoyevsky does not fail to underline, thus launching his nihilists on a monstrous course of blood and

[65]   Dirlik, 1989.

[66]   Snow, 1938.

[67]   Chevrier, 1987.

blindness calling for the murder of one of them, Chatov, and for the savior-figure of a charismatic leader (Nikolai Stavrogin) that anticipates Stalin or Mao (in Pyotr's mind, not in Stavrogin's, who is nihilist to the point of being a reluctant savior). Dostoyevsky had borrowed the murder episode from the history of the Nechayev-Bakunin group. In actual Chinese history, the (abstract) organizational compulsion did not do away with the (concrete) mellowing of political violence, as if Pyotr Stepanovich had been his own father, Stepan Verkhovensky, the "soft" liberal, instead of Chatov's murderer and the promoter-manipulator of Stavrogin. One prime reason for violence to remain abstract was the prevalence of activism within the new Communist Party – to the dismay of Comintern analysts. The disruption started in the late 1920s with the CCP-GMD civil war and the internecine and violent power and line struggles that tore the CCP apart. Integrating violence into his politics was a second decisive step in Mao's formation (during the 1930s) – the first one being the organizational structuring of activism and the basic principle from which he never departed. As we shall see, the threshold to mature Maoism was passed (during the 1940s) when Mao managed to graft his structured and violent activism on the revolutionary state. This made him the revolutionary institutionalist he remained through the most chaotic and seemingly stateless phases of the Cultural Revolution.

All in all, the politics of subjectivation in the context of the missing state, if not utopian in the eyes of the subjects, throve in the one-dimensional bubble I call a *social* (not just subjective) illusion of the political. The social illusion inhered in that the politics of activism posited a self-empowered society of self-powered citizens and mustered ad hoc objective social justifications on top of subjective commitment. The point here is not to decide whether such dynamics qualify as a civil society in spite of their peculiar ecology (the missing state), and whether they were sustainable (they were not). We should rather take the full measure of the momentous implication: the self-institution of the political by the self-mobilized subject was such that it not only produced the politics of autonomy, but also became autonomous by itself as a self-enclosed construction (and thus perennial, where and when the public institutions had proven they were not). Before fostering violence, terror, and tyranny, such construction was prone to myth-making and proved itself in this domain first. There was a marked tendency to overrate the omens of social modernity while finding in them (e.g. the appalling condition of the workers) new reasons to resist. In a sense the early Communists were the most modern-minded, believing in a myth of economic and political development that would recoup the (failed) institutional and (insufficient) cultural transformations Liang Qichao and the New Culture had advocated. In the typically utopian vision I have mentioned, they had to reconcile the proletarian myth with a mixed reality by positing the (not missing) development of capitalism in China (as a Marxian prerequisite) while they condoned Liang Qichao's diagnosis on the missing middle class. This led them to expel the class struggle from China (by declaring it international, in accordance with what they retained from Lenin's internationalism) and to declare (in Cai Hesen's words) that China was "fully a proletarian country", which, of course, meant the peasants were the actual proletarian class. The most significant social trend in *new* China was thus contested and mythologized in a dual spiral of action and illusion we shall also analyze in Mao's politics, with the all-important difference that the violent focus on power in mature Maoism shifted the delusion (that resistance politics are free of all determinations, except that of determined subjects) from the social illusion of the political to the political illusion of the social.

The early Chinese Communists' synthesis of action and organization might be a case of less illusions leading to more – in other words, yet another case of the politicized subjectivity (in a tightly knit group) occupying the entire space of the political. However, one historical reality was not illusory: if the activists were not successful in transforming China (and the world), they provided the momentum from which the revolutionary élan of the new parties sprung, together with the militant men and women who became the first kernels of Nationalist and Communist operatives. Contrary to the historical dependency of the republican revolution vis-à-vis the empire's elites, this legacy owed nothing to the Ancien Régime and

did incarnate the ideal of autonomy and renewal – in short, the democratic culture – that the coming revolutions inherited from the May Fourth activists. Had they not dedicated their life to it, they would not have reinvented liberty by making the political autonomous. The self-sustained engine depended on more subjects entering the political sphere: they never failed to show up in spite of the mounting pressure of repression. In Marilyn A. Levine's apt words, they were the "found generation".[68] A biographical dictionary of China in revolution reads like an encyclopedia of activism.[69] Does their contribution encompass the democratic failure? In the scales of history it belongs to the worlds of political violence and state organizations created by the Nationalists and Communists, not to the legacy. The context and the conditions for doing politics were entirely different from what they had been during the golden era of activism for two reasons pertaining to the political center (it was reinstated when the GMD restored the central government in 1927-28) and to the state of the state: the GMD state – a dictature under the one-party – was not politically institutionalized (in so far as it was institutionalized, it was so alongside corporatist structures). Although the régime was weak, it inaugurated the new trend in making the political autonomous – by implementing a political monopoly on social action – that Mao would bring to full fruition. The "free" period of social activism shows characteristic features of a civil society in the making – had it not been for the fragmented character of the state counterpart. The evolution was by default, and the political scene was also fragmented. While the dictature stopped the evolution toward a civil society, the régime's weakness provided interstices (also by default) for social movements as well as contentious activists to operate between its lines of power in a fragmented manner, not unlike the conditions and the effects we are witnessing for social activism in the PRC after revolution.[70] Which is to say that as a result of the conditions presiding over the political construction, and due to revolutionaries' practices of power, the activists were deprived of the capacity to mobilize the people that, after all, was their raison d'être. The revolutionary parties claimed they were the true organizers, and during the 1920s the GMD had occupied that space with some success, far outdoing the CCP's limited performance (mainly in Shanghai). With the totalitarian building of New China that swelled up from the 1940s to the 1950s, the Communists in turn outdid the Nationalists by projecting over the country and cities the organization, stronger in scope and reach, they had founded in the rural areas. Many activists rallied the cause of the revolutionary parties. It was not easy *not* to move from free action to unfree organization, because the activist impetus had become a revolutionary drive and the parties seemed to be taking over the duties of the missing state in a convincing perspective. The politics of dependency did not look like the end of independence.[71] Only a (dwindling) minority chose to remain independent and found themselves constrained to defend the democratic cause from the interstices of the new state powers. The "Third Force" that had resisted the GMD dictatorship during the 1930s and become more important at the time of the Civil War (1946-49) was all but eradicated by the communist régime (and marginalized, if not terrorized, under Jiang Jieshi's dictatorship in Taiwan). From then on, democratic activism survived in opposition and under sharp repression. It took Mao to bring activism back to center-stage in the entirely different perspective of the total state. The significant question is thus: how did he turn the social practice of the Golden Age into a practice of total power?

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[68]   Levine, 1993.

[69]   Bianco and Chevrier, 1985.

[70]   Chevrier, 2010 and below.

[71]   Vidal, 2006.

MAO'S ACTIVIST TOTAL STATE AND TOTALITARIAN SUBJECTS

From Social Practice to Practice of Power

Revolution in the revolutionary state seems to be the accepted answer – Mao's answer. However, I shall not argue that activist political subjects emerged at his call against the state – that he turned his power against the régime which resisted his tyranny and his initiatives for keeping the revolution alive. The socialist state was his as well as that of his opponents. The "rebels" of the Cultural Revolution were the product of his state. Not just in social terms: the *political* output. They were the activists he had from the beginning installed at the heart of the revolutionary organizations. This positioning held when it came to confront his opponents and to disempower the party institutions, because Mao's vision of the total state (including the party) in the light of activism made it the target of itself. Through struggle and violence. Not in the orderly fashion of the institutionalized "rectification campaigns" his opponents favored; not in Stalin's bureaucratic and police way, which was also used, but more parsimoniously: the state qua institutions and bureaucrats had to be the personal target of each active member of the total polity. Activism transferred the revolutionary state to the activated polity. The remaining backbone was the target of struggle. No matter the group structure and the mob behavior of the rebel activists, class struggle was to be a singular combat. And no matter the degree of violence. Activism, for Mao, was a practice of power, not a social practice, and political subjectivation a practice of power as well, designed for selecting and mobilizing revolutionary cadres, soldiers and workers, then "revolutionary successors". From revolutionary organization to revolutionary disruption, Mao's system of action encompasses a pole of organization (state apparatus, army, security system, administration of the terror, etc.) and a pole of action (mass movements, activist movements). Maoist politics imbedded in the socialist system became *his* politics when he based mass mobilization on subjectivation alone and turned the terror inherent in the system into an activist one. Mao's activism and the Maoist subjects have therefore to be viewed in the perspective of the one-party, not without it, or against it.

With the irruption of the (non-democratic) party in the world of democratic subjectivation, a major tenet of Golden Age activism, creed and practice – autonomy –, was lost: the politics of emancipation could not be a matter of private-public life-styles; the movement could not just go on as just a spontaneous social movement. This was the price to pay for the return of the issue of power in the lasting context of the missing state. Activism had had its discontents from the beginning, but this turn of minds (and of events to come) changed the master template for the subjectivation process in a fundamental way. The quasi-state and military structure empowered in the name of a revolutionary *guoquan* which the GMD and the CCP developed were the outgrowth of the circumstances, of basic patterns in China's society and politics at the time, and of the primacy of organization over independent action. Mao's historical originality was that his practice of power and his style of politics in revolution and in government were an intimate fusion of the two. This led to the not so paradoxical activist revival in the totalitarian state that opened a new stage to political subjectivation. Scholars have searched for the roots of Mao's power in the depth of Chinese culture, of Chinese souls, in saltationism, coercion, collective hydraulic works, etc. – nearly everywhere but in his politics. My contention is just the reverse: his politics explains his power. The challenge is to show how a practice of total power could pass for, and actually was, a political practice. A further contention is that organized subjectivation did the trick of enticing millions as subjects becoming political subjects by declaring and enacting their autonomy. And that it could not have been so without the organizational build-up that swept the country from the 1940s through the 1950s, before the Great Leap, the famine and the Cultural Revolution. In a word, Mao's political system of power was a carefully constructed *system* of action, including during the disruptive episode of the Cultural Revolution. With it, the cycle of de-institutionalization politics turned into revolutionary organization. In other words, Mao did not have to add a further revolution in order to turn against the socialist system, because he had built this system in the 1940s and had continued building it during the

1950s as a system of action, not of institutions. What he did was turning this system against his political opponents. He was as "new class" or "caste" as they were, and not less bureaucratic. Looking for radical social roots is a moot point: radicalism was the outcome, not the cause. Mao's mode for organizing the polity (the party-state and the activist elements in the social body) rested on an overall economic-social-political structuring that diverged but did not depart from the initial soviet-type model of "ideology and organization"[72] and rested on countless cadres and micro-institutions. While the Maoist system of action had effects on governance in the sense that it took it as a practice of power in mixing political style and ideology with organization, Mao's reading of the common script and his ideological choices did not lift him above or out of the double-helix code. When divergence prevailed, the Mao governance was even more bureaucratic, generating more petty cadres and officials, and more redundant small-scale institutions. Far from fostering a stateless polity, the effect was that the segmented organizational skeleton produced a segmented society working on a communal basis in the basic cells, be they (small) rural collectives (work-teams) or urban work units (*danwei* 單位) and neighborhoods. One main line of action for Mao was to melt the smaller units (even the families during the Great Leap) in larger collectives (the people's communes). After failing to dissolve both the pre-communist structures (and habits) and the first layer of (small) communist collectives, mainly as a consequence of the ensuing famine, Mao froze the resulting organizational mix and was content with letting the political winds blow in full force over the cities, while his zealots tried time and again to revamp the large communes in the countryside against contrary winds blown by his (central) political opponents, the myriads local cadres and the peasants.

According to Andrew Walder's seminal work on urban industrial factories, the overall dynamics was more "neotraditional" than Maoist, with communal structures and attitudes reworking the system's institutions and values.[73] In the communal structures replete with "advanced" and "activist elements" (heroic workers, political operatives…), Mao's political activation tended to become a social practice responding to social mechanisms in small-scale, community-centered social worlds. As we shall see, the subjected individuals were not under such conditions social subjects. Under Mao, subjects had to be political activists. The same analysis holds for the economic side of the picture. It should not be surprising, then, that the main thrust of the post-Mao economics (after 1978) under Chen Yun's guidance was not so much to free the productive apparatus and the management from ideological interferences, or to introduce market mechanisms, as to remediate the segmented and counterproductive small-scale horizontal structures in favor of large vertical organizations. The protracted quarrel of the mid- and late-fifties between Mao and the "economists" (industrial planners and organizers under Chen's political aegis) pertained to this very difference. Leaving power struggles and ideological constructions aside, the "struggle between two lines" in the early sixties pitted Mao's segmented organizational horizon (including in the military and people's militia) against the industrial planners as much as against the "restorers" (of the familial peasant economy). While Mao's system of general activation did not spare the economic techno-structure, a "compromise" was found in favor of tilting the investments in developing the military industries, the heavy industrial sector and the infrastructures serving it at the expense of consumer goods, housing, and higher incomes – the very targets and levers of the post-Mao economics. Political government and economic governance could have been turned to other purposes, as they were in the 1980s under Deng Xiaoping, but, except in the rural areas where the people's communes were disbanded, new China's early take off started in a remarkably stable organizational environment. As we shall see, change was more institutional than organizational and social, as the new leaders restored in the cities the socialist structures and practices Mao's tyranny had disrupted during the 1960s-70s.

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[72]   Schurmann, 1968.

[73]   Walder, 1986.

During the fifties, Mao was certainly as keen on economic and social development as he was trying to melt the technical and Soviet-imported methods in a political formula. After the famine, the relation between the two concerns was reversed. Political action clearly predominated in a way amounting to making it independent, and to make it so by struggle: the issue was no longer socialist transformation or economic development, but power naked and simple. This changed the status and the practice of politics, not the organizational state. From politics in the name of socialist transformation to politics as politics, the organizational setting had been and was to serve politics. Mao's "radicalization" was that politics were to serve politics. The state qua state (as an administrative structure) and the party (as an institution) were an exoskeleton enabling the body politic to crush the enemies in fits of endless struggles. When it came to target state structures and party institutions (as well as cadres and "work-styles" tuned to them), the exoskeleton was not in question: the political state was the enemy, to be brought down and replaced by a better one. In Mao's way, the target state is not the specific organizational structure (under the State Council) but the party-state political system which Mao diagnoses as politicized by default, like a dead body requiring to be re-politicized in itself and in operating over a politicized society. The political state is therefore the "total state" transforming the party, the state (qua state) and society in a revolutionary polity – the schmittian implications have not escaped astute commentators. Just as subjects do not exist in full light except as political subjects, society does not exist as a society (it therefore does not have to "served" economically as a society). In addition to being integrally state-organized it has to be integrally politicized and regularly re-politicized. The "total state" is the revolutionary polity also in the sense that it unites the (political) people and excludes class enemies by struggle. As with other organizational-ideological aspects, the struggle state is not Mao's radicalized creation or destruction. It stems from the violent drive during the fifties against the régime's enemies (GMD officials, so-called counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, people with poor (hereditary) class backgrounds, deviant intellectuals and rightists), the significant evolution, according to Jean-Luc Domenach's landmark study of the Chinese terror system, being a growing institutionalization of the "savage" practices of the early fifties over the decade, followed during the next two ones by processes of fragmentation.[74] One present historiographical trend,[75] stressing the terrorist nature of the so-called "Liberation", is correct in underlining the responsibility of the so-called "moderate" leaders, but, in the same vein as the "black-book" historiography of communism, the emphasis on the systemic texture (including Mao's divergence and disruption) freezes history and blurs the dynamic impetus of a system that exists only through dynamics of political building. These dynamics are the factor that explains Mao's one-man act at the turn of the first decade. Contrary to the standard account, the high-noon power struggle that ensued was not due to Mao's loss of power, but to the steady build-up of his political power over the activist cadres recruited and mobilized through the campaigns of the fifties. They were the social-political basis of the Great Leap. The failure broke the élan in the early sixties and forced Mao to look for another basis in the army and in the student population while party cadres were disputed between the "two lines". Domenach's study of China's "gulag archipelago" documents the declining trend in the camps and the local cadres paying lip service to the overarching political discourse while attending to local concerns verging on community survival. I examine below the process of totalitarian "erosion" that created "niches" for social practices and social subjects on a reverse side of the system.

At the turn of the 1960s, as the enmity was reconstructed inside the polity, with new enemies (the "capitalist roaders" and "revisionists" masquerading as revolutionaries), political mobilizations were directed against the elements in the state that prevented the polity from being totally revolutionary. The clash was rationalized in good Marxist-Stalinian parlance, but at bottom it was and un-mended and naked

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[74]   Domenach, 1992.

[75]   Dikötter, 2013.

rift among top powerholders and between their vast clans, as Simon Leys famously explained.[76] In doing so, that is in transforming the terror into an un-Stalinian chaotic episode, Mao, who had elaborated a refined theory of "contradictions among the people", aligned himself with the "we" against "us" that is standard in totalitarian environments. Mao is not more or less terrorist than his opponents, just as he is not more or less bureaucratic or democratic. Again, Mao's political style differs in that declared enmity and applied terror – the standard power practices organized from the top – are diffused by techniques of subjectivations along the communal segments I mentioned, with the end-result of unbridled violence and factional chaos, followed by rampant "social" factionalism and fragmentation during the bleak seventies (I return to these aspects below). Even before Mao's politics outreached themselves, political subjectivation had been more than a collateral production in the system of action: it was structuring it. Action as subjectivation had been built by Mao in organization since the 1940s. The subjects responded to a practice of power built into the system of action that determined them as subjects enacting the correct "work-style" well before they were called to be rebels. A case in point is the tide of cadres-mobilization in Henan that launched the Great Leap in the fall of 1957, before it became Mao's (and Liu Shaoqi's) countrywide policy. Another landmark study by Domenach shows that the grass-roots were not coached from above.[77] They moved on their own, as true activists steeped in Maoism, responding to local conditions ranging from bureaucratic infighting, personal rivalries, ideological differences and social pressure generated by the chaotic pace of urban development. Mao's state activism was the occasion for political subjects to sprout on a scale (before the chaotic masses of the Cultural Revolution) that far exceeded the Stalinian precedent of heroic workers and soldiers patronized under a solid system of institutions. The activists emerging from the rank and file of local cadres, rural collectives, urban factories, and on the occasion of the recurrent mass campaigns, were not just a decorative element added to the state structure like so many flower pots neatly disposed on well dusted shelves: they were structuring the polity. The citizens, the workers, the peasants, the cadres, were educated and reeducated in the activist spirit that came in full bloom at the time of the Red Guards.[78] When (at the start of the 1960s), Mao came to tear apart the political consensus he had assembled in the top leadership around his synthesis, he did not have to direct a revolution against the state. He only had to activate the activist component in his total state. In fact, the extra-bureaucratic, the not orderly dimensions were not added to a bureaucratic and ordered order by the messy-maniac tyrant: they had structured since the 1940s the very construction of the Chinese communist polity at the local grass roots. Following Lucien Bianco's suggestion that the "peasants without the party" might have rebelled locally but would not have constructed the revolution,[79] a generation of historians have explained that it did not result from the party overtaking the peasantry, because the apparatus had to be constructed as the revolution was. Mao's genius was to create order by disorder and to formalize and normalize the practices by local activists and cadres without altogether suppressing what departed from the "line", thus founding party-building on the recognized subjects recognizing the leadership and the organization.[80] The greater part of Mao's theoretical production of the late thirties-forties (public speeches later Marxized by patented ideologists and canonized, notably in the Red Book) conjugates what amounts to prompting grass-roots activist subjectivation with ideological normalization by mixing bottom-up and top-down practices. It has been often noticed that the guidelines for educating "good party members" edited from speeches by party luminaries such as Liu Shaoqi and Chen Yun dwelt more on the hierarchy: but it is not the case that activism was shunned by them, just as order was not by Mao. He was not the hapax, the subversive element resurrected from the imperial past, coming from Utopia or sheer folly for sending storms of alienated zealots on a régime that was not his.

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[76]   Leys, 1971.

[77]   Domenach, 1995.

[78]   Yang, Guobin, 2016.

[79]   Bianco, 2001.

[80]   Park, 2002.

Isn't it here, however, that we see him breaking out of the common fold? There had been two readings of the Maoist code since the early 1950s. There were divergences due to interest groups and ideological inclinations, with Mao leaning on the side of action while his colleagues, most of whom were no less radical than he was, bending toward a more orderly fashion of politics. Tensions well explained by Roderick MacFarquhar emerged at the time of collectivization and de-Stalinization (1955-56) when techniques of "open rectification" (re-politicization of the party extended to campaigns involving the "masses") favored by Mao where countermanded by the standard ("routinized") intra-party techniques of "closed rectification",[81] until Mao prevailed and created (through the Hundred Flowers campaign and the anti-rightist movement) the political conditions in the polity for the Great Leap to be launched from bottom up and be adapted by the supposed "rational moderates". As many observers have shown, the irretrievable division occurred in the wake of the famine. By then, Mao broke with the rituals and the normative order of the small community of top leaders he had himself regulated.[82] But his transgressive and aggressive attitude does not belie the conclusion that the parallel organizational and activist building of the party-state system (plus activated society) spanned the founding of the PRC in 1949 and the conventional divide between the 1950s and the 1960s to the 1970s. The political dynamics engineered by Mao and his followers were supported by the very construction of the régime, including the phase during which Mao's tyranny turned again his colleagues who stood by the institutional and normative charter of the founding period. Mao's decentralized terror, based on public political struggle and social violence on a scale entirely foreign to the Stalinian "model", had the special profile of his tyranny, but it is plain that he was behind the two readings of his system of action (organizational and activist) and that, after the split in the leadership in the 1960s, his line oscillated between instituting the political by rebelling, that is effectively and violently "struggling" (active verb in Mao's jargon) the supporters of the institutionalized state, and episodes of bland re-institutionalization. We should not view Mao's activism, and the activist pattern of political subjectivation as linked to his struggle for power, but power, in Mao's way, as linked to activism and activist subjectivation patterns. Activist power was the divisive issue among the top leaders, not power, not the activist common script, not political violence and terror per se, not ideological extremism (in which so-called "moderates" like Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping had their share), not the reliance on the police and security side of the state. We should not view Mao's defeated colleagues in the light of what some of them, the survivors, proved to be during the 1980s and 1990s: fierce opponents of their mentor's violent activism and devoted advocates of a stable, re-institutionalized state reigning over a de-activated society.

Interpretations thus shift from singling Mao out of the common fold to stressing his banality – by underlining his peers' obvious Maoism. Terror is not the only ground where the shifting occurs. Mao is also viewed as a nationalist, although a closet one, even deviant – compared with his reputedly sober lieutenants whose muted strings had to wait until he died for giving the pure notes. It is possible, of course, to contend that his politics pursued nationalism by other means. But this amounts to explaining China's contemporary history by nationalism instead of explaining nationalism by history. The national framing of Mao's politics disrupts the conventional nation-state frame, just as his activism disrupts conventional institutional politics. One thing Mao had learned about the world during his youth (it had surfaced in scholar's discourse at the time of his birth in 1893) was that in his time the plurality of political entities (*guo* 國) China had known during its long pre-imperial, about two millennia before, was back. *Guo* (the word whose ancient meaning designated a territory under a civilized political rule as well as the ancestral descent of its legitimate ruler) could no longer be the world-empire (*tianxia*). A second thing Mao clung to relative to *guo* was that politics must be rooted in the grass-roots but deployed at *guo*-scale: shorter than this, they amount to petty local banditry and dead-end rebellion, no matter how heroic the deeds

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[81]   MacFarquhar, 1974.

[82]   Domenach, 2012.

and moral the politics. This was a lesson he had had to learn at his own expense. Mao's uneasy relation not to power, but to the state, had been the drama of his career before he reached the top position in the CCP (1938-1976). To caricature, during the 1920s, he had been a social activist and an apparatchik in the GMD. In 1927, he had lauded the disrupting violence of the peasants (in the famous "Hunan Report") while, as a cadre in the GMD organization, he deployed efforts to rein in the peasant movements. The explanation is not that he was (already) a dubious hypocritical double-gamer, a frightened bureaucrat, a nationalist at the expense of the revolutionary: he knew *some* rural disorder would not bring about the revolution he could not imagine not developing at *guo*-wide scale. During the 1930s, he had initiated his own activist politics in locally mobilizing the peasants and had broken not so much with the cities as with the *guo* frame and the state horizon. As I remarked already (thanks to the historian Hu Chi-hsi's illuminating work),[83] the "missing" state (in Mao's concept and practice of revolutionary power) costed him the leadership over the guerilla bases in south-central China from 1932 to the Long March (1935). It is only after 1938 in North-West China that he reconciled organization and action *in the state* by fine-tuning his theory and practice of the revolution as a practice of power involving division, struggle and violence. What he accepted was not the GMD state (to which the CCP paid lip service under the resurrected United Front), but a state politicized in his activist perspective. Mao's synthesis of state and activism was the hallmark of mature Maoism, carried from the 1940s to the 1970s. The synthesis was his original contribution to the political construction of the communist revolution (and of his personal power), rather than the move from cities to countryside, which was not Mao's invention and was a temporary (if decisive) turn (from 1928 to 1948). Mao's political legitimacy among the top leadership rested on the post-1938 synthesis – not the Leninian or Stalinian script – which his colleagues had reasons to think he tilted in favor of political action and organizing organization for political action from the mid-1950s on. The two brands of state Maoism, the institutionalist and the activist, which became externalized and opposed the two dominant factions, had been internalized in the Chairman's own construction as a political self. Rather than following the nationalist path in reframing *guo* into a nation-state, Mao politicized his *guo* perspective by making China the locus of his activist politics. The organizer of activism he had become since the early 1920s learned he needed the *guo*-frame as much as he had needed the party. *Guo*, therefore, differed from nation as the total state was to differ from the state, and *guo*-politics differed from nationalism as activism differed from institutional politics. Just as the state structure was the exoskeleton of the activist polity, so was the nation in the organizational and (pluri-)national framework borrowed from the Soviet Union. Mao is not a state-builder for the sake of the nation-state. He is a state-builder for the sake of activism, a political-*guo*-builder in one country. One cannot put it in the reverse: that he was an activist for the sake of the nation-state (as is Xi Jinping according to me, which considerably deflates his supposed return to Maoism, as we shall see). It did not turn him into an emperor either, since no Chinese emperor had dreamed of mobilizing the people by using political means politically – which is exactly what Mao did, while he ignored the "wealth and power" means used by the nationalists. In a history of Chinese nationalism, Mao figures as a (big) footnote, whereas he is the sunken star in the black hole of political activism in one country. The annexation of Tibet, the confrontation with the US and with the New Tsars, the stubborn building of heavy infrastructures, the development of the military and the nuclear weapon were aimed at preserving the *guo* as the locus of politics which were precisely not nationalist. Mao vied with the USSR for revolutionary leadership, but his practice of power was to let other communist movements follow their *guo*-wise course, as was the case with the Indonesian Communist party before the 1965 massacre. But in doing so, wasn't Mao a *national* communist? He was a *political* one, not using old-time Chinese means for recasting the Stalin model, but having learned his political lesson from state politics to guerilla activism and back to state activism. Finally, then, comes the question central to our topic: did Mao need nationalism to activate

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[83]   Hu, Chi-hsi, 1982.

his subjects? He politicized them in a completely different dimension. There was no *Blut und Boden* ideology or mythology. The cult of revolutionary martyrs paid tribute to the revolution and to the party, not to the nation. The Mao cult that sealed up the activist compact and the subjectivation process was more religious than nationalist. As a national leader, Mao's image would have been diminished (to the level of Jiang Jieshi, Putin or Xi Jinping) compared to his status as political god-emperor. The national god he has become raises the post-revolutionary pantheon to his extraordinary historical stature – not that of a banal nationalist founder like Sun Yat-sen. State activism – the twofold texture of Mao's politics – is what prevented Mao from being a state nationalist.

The genealogy of Mao's political oxymoron depends on another effect of political deinstitutionalization: the rise of non-parliamentary parties (GMD and CCP) incarnating, organizing and directing the nation or the revolution. From 1915 on, the New Culture movement became the quest of a democratic culture empowering subjects with their personal and political autonomy in the perspective of stateless activism I have described. But, even before Chen Duxiu launched the movement by reproaching Confucianism with the republican miscarriage (1915), Sun Yat-sen had diagnosed (1914) the organizational weakness that had plagued the Sworn League of anti-Qing revolutionaries he had assembled in 1905. The Revolutionary Party (Gemingdang) he created that same year along the secret society model was China's first political party based on organization cum direction. In fact, direction, equated with the leader's absolute authority, came first. The next step was rebuilding the GMD along the Bolshevik model (1924). By then, as we have seen, the idea of the party had been legitimized for organizing activism, and the directive-collective aspect inherent in activism had been transferred to the party. The One Party had the further characteristic of reincarnating the abstract collective political subject the state had incarnated in the perspective of political institutionalization. But it was a more singular and concrete figure than the Republican state had had enough time to become by political and symbolical construction. During the Nanjing Decade (1927-1937), the GMD régime (of party domination over the state) was torn between those (in the party and the urban opinion) wanting to go back to the era of representative constitutional government, and those who stuck to the dictatorship for the sake of nation building. The "abortive revolution" famously diagnosed by Lloyd Eastman[84] was also an abortive after-revolution. In this context, Jiang Jieshi's rise to personal power frustrated the neo-constitutionalists as well as those who resisted his bid because it violated party institutions. Jiang followed Yuan Shikai, who had wanted to exchange his position of institutionalized republican strongman for that of emperor in a régime de-institutionalizing the political, that is by moving from the abstract to the charismatic superior subject. Be it state or (single) party, the (modern) collective-abstract subject was found deficient on political grounds (and not just an instrument for maximizing the leader's power). In the course taken by the CCP from the 1940s on, it became clear that once Mao had risen to top position he would have the best of both worlds: party organization and personal direction, as he had the best (in his view) of state and activism by having them together and each correcting the other's deficiencies. His status was constructed in this way, albeit he was maintained under the common norms applying to all top cadres.

Rather than being recognized as a whole, Mao's political oxymoron has made commentators uneasy, prompting a search for more conventional keys to his singularity. The standard cliché portrays an uncanny despot in a competition of evil with Stalin whose politics operated in a void and served nothing but an inflated ego. No one seems to fathom the contradiction between messy activism and egomania, since a widespread belief is that Mao's politics were an illusion, and that the despot was mad, subjected by his folly and forcing party, state and people into it. Why not recognize in the disruption of the revolutionary state the classic (Western) portray of the imperial tyrant (Caligula, Nero) who subverts the very institutions that have subverted the *res publica* (Augustus)? These strictures are alleviated in the variants

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[84]   Eastman, 1974.

according to which he was a lonesome utopian lost in an impossible fight against the tides of history (official version in 1981) or the more-than-human emperor of old breaking the mold and disrupting a "bad" dynastic order for replacing it by a "better" polity. Some have seen in him the embodiment of the cyclical alternance of order and chaos (*luan* 亂) that is prevalent in ancient Chinese thought.[85] This is denying the obvious: Mao's politics were political and politically answered. More struggle entailed more violence and prompted more activist subjectivations, leading us to exploring (below) the seemingly unexplainable (in rational ways): how struggle and violence were conducive to political action. While historians have had difficulty coping with the fact that Mao ruled primarily by using political means politically – what I call politics as politics –, a useful clue is to remark that unlike Stalin he did not reign over the revolution, but by the revolution. Revolution was in the state in the double sense that the state was in the revolution and in revolution – as an exercise in political activism. The standard Lenin plus Stalin addition does not adequately characterize Mao. He added activism to the party much as Lenin had added the party to history but he maintained the Stalinian exoskeleton in (marginally) adapted forms tuned to his political needs. The unescapable conclusion is that activism was the political foundation of the total state and the technique that prevented it from becoming plainly institutionalized, that is (in Stalin's way) a bureaucratic organization and a power structure insulated from the politics of mobilization they impose on the "people" against the "enemies of the people". We may recall the difference between institutionalizing the state and instituting the political I introduced for contrasting the two main political modes before and after 1915. Without suggesting a religious interpretation that would not help (wouldn't we have to explain certain violently subjected religious attitudes by Maoism?), the word "institution" is an adequate marker of Mao's concept of the political if taken in the sense it has in Jean Calvin's *Institution of the Christian Religion*: the building of God's city on earth on the active participation of the faithful guided by the framework of adequate religious and civil institutions reaching deep into everyone's soul, not just a system of institutions. Under such conditions, the subject is recognized as such and performs as a hyper-subject because the border between the self and the social (what is not "self", according to Durkheim) is erased *without the subject being erased*.

To sum up: Mao's practice of power and political style have from the beginning been more political than institutional, although they have used the institutional channels of the state as much as they have tried to adapt them. As the Red Guards discovered to their dismay with the bloody repression of 1968, activism was Mao's way for preserving and further building his power on a political, not institutional basis. One frequent misunderstanding has been to portray Mao as a rebel tyrant (not quite an oxymoron!) within and finally against his own régime. Mao is not a rebel more than he is an outcast although he mobilized young people who subjected themselves as rebels and outcasts. The Red Guards were the followers of the Great Leap zealots who were the followers of the activist cadres and "heroic workers" in factories and rural collectives recruited and mobilized by millions since the early fifties. They were Mao's political army against his colleagues, but the Red Guard groups who propelled the Cultural Revolution on a chaotic-violent course in Beijing during the spring-summer of 1966 were extracted from top bureaucratic and military families. Their remarkable acumen in responding to Mao's call (and in opposing his line) was insiders' agency. They were part of the political state. Similarly, seen under the political angle, Mao's activism was not his. It was the state's – his state, reshaped by him, but the state – not just the tyrant's whim and his henchmen's operation. At some point during the Cultural Revolution, Zhou Enlai was put in charge of arbitrating between feuding factions that all claimed to embody the Helmsman's line – no doubt a snare devised to test and secure the prime minister's loyalty),[86] but not less certainly a vital state necessity considering the factional feed-back effect of political activism, and assuredly not a contradiction in Mao's founding conviction (as we saw) that activism from below needed to

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[85]   Solomon, 1971.

[86]   Domenach, 2012.

get organized from above – with no harm done to the revolution and democracy as long as the dynamics involved were activist at all levels, below and above, with the Chairman keeping for himself the ultimate revolutionary certification. Then – only then, above the state, not without it – the tyrant could truly utter the words (falsely) attributed to Louis XIV: "l'Etat, c'est moi" – I am the (activist) state. Far from being a rebel (in the class of those who became emperors), Mao is vis-à-vis the state a proactive activist, much like many self-mobilized local leaders were under the last Manchu emperors, at once loyal to and critical of the state. An abyss lies between the two worlds, though, like the total state lies between May Fourth and the Cultural Revolution. A frequent interpretation of Mao's dual politics has been to view his action as a two-pronged strategy using time for exhausting his opponents and for replenishing his forces. This may be true in the tactical sense but the cyclical model is descriptive at best. If anything, he did not add de-institutionalization to de-institutionalization during the Cultural Revolution. The outcome for the re-politicized state emerging from the great activist purge on the threshold of the 1970s was not a different brand of institutions, but an unstable institutionalization-cum-activism mix leading to a generalized situation of small-scale factionalism and localized or generalized bouts of mobilization with the prospects of other cultural revolutions in the future. The neat dialectical agenda veiled the harsh reality of strategic calculations and factional struggles at all levels where power and privileged were knit – and contested –, from Mao's own entourage to the grass-roots work units and party cells – and families. The restoration of the "old" system together with the rehabilitation of the "old" cadres was in line with the speedy institutionalization of the Shanghai Commune, the military dictatorship, the suppression of the Red Guards: for Mao, it meant organizing and reorganizing action. It did not mean failure. The retreats were part of system dynamics, as were the flaws (economic, social, cultural) and all other obstacles. The Cultural Revolution induced a marked increase in the level of violence and conflict built in the system from the beginning. The factional involution in the polity during the 1970s was certainly more action than organization – the organizers would have done without it, as they did after Mao's death. There was an element of resistance in the social dynamics that diverged during the last years of Maoism, but it was resistance by fragmentation that did not create a different system or a (civil) society empowering the individuals with a sense of autonomy. To anticipate my analysis of these developments, the breaking of the activist spine left the political body paralyzed and unable to move forward, though spasms agitated the muscles under the creased skin. The bland effect of the activist energy being withdrawn that characterized China during the few years before the new leadership instilled its reformed brand of economic activism is a telling testimony to the fact that Maoism had been political through and through.

The Politics of Violence and the Making of the Total Subject

Andrew Walder's analysis of the Beijing Red Guard movement attributing their dynamics to the sheer effect of politically-made divisions presents a similar argument.[87] The diagnosis is not circular if one recalls Michelet's and Furet's remarks on the anarchist tyranny and on the illusion of the political if it is not regulated by a system of independent institutions. Loose factionalism describes well many aspects of the Cultural Revolution context, but when it comes to conflicts, violence and repression, one feels compelled to underline the effect of the practice of power as it induces divisions from the top to the grass-roots and from the grass-roots to the top. These artificially-provoked divisions were not necessary. Mao the tyrant could have eliminated his opponents thanks to his firm and constantly secured grip on the army and security apparatus. But engineering divisions was necessary to his politics: struggle and violence were what made them a self-sustained process of emancipation for emancipation's sake. Political action was certainly not independent from the social-economic context, as we saw, but the dependency was the régime's, and the political construct was built *against* it. Mao's divisive tyranny carries to the

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[87] Walder, 2009.

extreme of activist terror and social fragmentation the autonomy of politics that surfaced during the gentler May Fourth era. It was not his tyranny per se, but the very autonomy of the political action he came to realize on an immense scale that made him *not* accountable – to state, party, the people, the revolution, the nation, the activists – to nothing except politics (which include his personal power). His (personal) worlds were contained in this one, which he managed to recreate in the mental and social depths of a whole country – with less control and exclusivity, but with enough success for having launched one of the largest and most chaotic mass movements in history, and also one that did not primarily respond to the religious or nationalist impetus.

Once the political determination appears as the key, it still has to be specified. China scholars, like Walder, and students of politics, like Claude Lefort,[88] see politics being driven and made autonomous in the totalitarian context of communism not by eliminating but by cultivating political divisions (in spite of the proclaimed "oneness" of the people). Building on this insight, the "enigma" of Mao's politics[89] is best resolved in my view by dwelling on the subjectivation factor. Do Walder's and Yang Guobin's[90] arguments based on political division and subjectivation hold together? Or must the historian decide which key will unlock the principal political door? My answer is that the two are the two sides of the same coin: a disruptive system of mass violence, endemic factionalism and political normalization whereby Mao could contest the primacy of organization over action by inverting it in the activist mode. As we shall see, struggling and exerting violence were essential catalyzers. Thus, state activism became the subjects' state-led activism as the revolution became "uninterrupted". It was not May Fourth's subjectivation as politics: Mao's politics as politics supposed the subjects were directed. The "uninterrupted revolution" was entrusted not to the activists alone, but to Mao's state encompassing activism and directing it against its own non-activated, non-Maoist reality. State-led activism transcended the state by activism just as it transcended the activists by the state. We should always bear in mind that Mao's de-institutionalization of the communist state during the Cultural Revolution operated in the context of his activist idea of the revolutionary institutionalization. Chaotic effect, violence, factional involution and social fragmentation notwithstanding, the directive aspect was central. It should not be viewed as control (in the sense of bureaucratic or police control), but as a technique of dominance through violence and struggle. This is where "action on action" (Foucault's definition of the political activity as political) prevailed on organization while maintaining the overall direction and the system of action – the two dimensions lacking in May Fourth activism. Autonomy by action superseded the ("bourgeois") autonomy of action and generated the political illusion of a revolutionary society, thus transforming the totalitarian system into an activated one generating patterns of political subjectivation. With this, the central question regarding Mao's practice of power and the political subjectivation of the activists moves from action and organization to action and direction. We then find ourselves with the unpalatable task of explaining how totalitarian *political* subjects are possible by practicing the autonomy of politics as a practice of power, and, even worse, by applying violence to the ensuing politics of division.

One way for facing this challenge is to regard our analysis so far as an illusion. The result of this history of power in the party dominated by a carefully elaborated practice of power that invested it in political techniques rather than in the party's institutions, is that we have (relatively) autonomous politics (made possible by the social organization), politics of autonomy (vis-à-vis the institutions, hierarchies, values…), but no autonomy for the agents. The subjectivation process we view as reaching the singular subject and reconciling state and activism in Mao's total state is nothing but subjecting patterns producing agency-less subjects: political zombies, if not monsters, rather than hyper-subjects fully realizing their subjectivity in acting on their own will. Introducing subjectivation does not seem to lift the enigma of

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[88]   Lefort, 1999.

[89]   Walder, forthcoming.

[90]   Yang, Guobin, 2016.

Mao's activist politics producing anything other than his tyranny and enslaving the automatized (not autonomized) subjects who pretended to act politically according to his will. They were subjects in the traditional sense under a total power. According to Montesquieu, dead social and political bodies surround the oriental despot. Living dead souls and bodies surrounded Mao. There could be no political space under the system of mass terror and mobilization. The revolutionary polity of revolutionary subjects was an illusion where and when there was no autonomous society worth speaking of. The subjective existence, if any, was to be confined to the most secretive part of the residual private sphere. Subjectivation would be politically determined, whereas subjects (what could be left of them) were non sequiturs. The analysis would thus square up with the standard view on the totalitarian nightmare producing automatons between terror and massification. Arendt's well-known theory would be vindicated – save that Mao's system of action sheds light on one blind spot in her famous book: that totalitarian systems must be activated or perish. Mass mobilizations and mass terror were supposed to provide the necessary élan, thus further depriving the subjected subjects from agency and human subjectivity. In typical humanist fashion, the argument fails to grasp that totalitarian subjectivation saves the subject by transforming it politically instead of annihilating it. The impetus of resistance and emancipation is not transferred to a remote entity but deferred to subjects as such. What is more, the transformation hinges on each subject personally renouncing his/her former self by exerting violence and identifying with the supreme leader in a subject-to-subject relationship. Transformation by identification (first operation of subjectivation) and identification by transformation (second operation) seemed to be alienation-free because they were parallel. The political subjects could feel they were autonomous when the leader told them to be autonomous in implementing his politics by themselves in the most concrete and realistic way. The directive line made them free by calling forth struggle and violence on the subjective scale. Dostoyevsky is a sure guide in exploring the abyss. When Pyotr Verkhovensky's "group of five" vacillates (because the members resent being manipulated like pawns), the group is re-cemented in declaring one of them, Chatov, an enemy and having him killed. It is not enough, then, to remark that Mao's system of action implemented the political dynamics underlined by Hannah Arendt better (so to speak) than the bureaucratic-repressive system borrowed from the Stalinian model (and kept along the way). It reenacted in the totalitarian dimension the activist switch, based on politics as subjectivation, from the abstract collective subject to the activist subjectivity that had occurred in the democratic universe during the 1910s. In the full sense of the word, Mao achieved what we tend to regard as unthinkable beyond the bounds of modern democracies: political singularity. This is why the revolution was to be "cultural", that is total in reaching to all subjects and totally changing them in ways the political, social, economic revolution could not approach. The scaling down of the transformative action to the individual subjects was that of the New Culture movement – in a completely different history.

Alienation was total and yet there were subjects – political ones. Mao's total state cannot be explained away as a mad utopia enforced on helpless, passive, coerced, terrorized, Mesmerized, non-agents: his objects. They had their share of consent and initiative in the subjective scale of the subjectivation process that Mao coopted in his idiosyncratic resurrection of the activism he had practiced in his earlier days. The historian feels compelled to add that they had their share, too, in the conflictual and violent turn of events. The subjecting process endowed the subjects with agency by building the system of domination on struggle and violence. Mao's politics were political and politically answered, as I remarked, because subjects responded politically in this way. We have to face the unpleasant issue that the engineering of the mass mobilization would not have succeeded on the scale and at the level of violence that were reached during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution without a steady preparation during the 1940s and 1950s, without the state and polity being designed for just this purpose, and without a modicum of willing and conscious participation by the agents. The difficulty for us to face this phenomenon as a historical reality per se, not as a set of extraordinary attitudes due to a chance assembly of conventional factors, is made greater by the fact that the call was total and the answer total as well. Hard as it is to

conceive that total submission may enhance the subject's subjective liberation and his/her belief that he/she enhances the potential for emancipation in the world, other kinds of subjected terror in nowadays' world, based on religion, should open our eyes, reluctant as they may be.

The answer does not lie in subjectivation in general. We are speaking of a universe in which the totality of meaning and action (including struggle and violence) that in our universe would suppress the subjects was what pressed them into being. Their universe was total along the well-recognized lines of totalitarian systems, in that it left no meaning and no action aside and submitted anyone and anything that differed from its unity to the action prescribed by the meaning. But, contrary to the standard account (as it has been reconstructed based on these systems' ideological claims), the political totality-unity was not effective nor operating as a whole in the collective, and it did not pit a public whole (the One People) against a residual sphere of individual, non-political privacy. It was the responsibility of each individual, and was achieved only through the singular transformation of the individuals that made each one the total political agent of a terror that was not monolithic but activist. Terrorist subjectivation in the singular thus works not against or in spite of massification, centralization, bureaucratization (what I have called Arendt's trilogy), but on top of them, as the fundamental political ground legitimizing the trilogy and empowering the terrorist régime with the irresistible strength of a *shared* "illusion of the political" – in Mao's case, the illusion of the politicized society as total polity of singular activists. Furet's diagnosis of the limitless power of ideologically-motivated agents producing the politics of terror, like Michelet's "anarchist tyranny" and Dostoyevsky's insight on the nihilistic fundamentals of organized-dictatorial terror (in his view, nihilism is a moral pathology of subjectivation), have to be read in light of Hegel's conception of the French Terror (in chapter 6 of his *Phenomenology of Geist*): it amounts, through violent factional strife, to the very annihilation of the political by liberating the total-political agency whose only regulatory function is death. As a result, contrary to that of the activist agent, the unity of the whole was a (desired and fought-for) goal, not an effectivity. Rather than being an embarrassment (as it should in an institutionalized system of action), obstacles, conflicts, resistances, divergences – anyone, anything that contradicted the total unity in the outside world stirred the agents' resolve through further struggling in direct action. The political dynamics were such that the group did not produce the activists: it was produced by them under these conditions. Struggle and violence in direct action welded the unity of total singularity and total meaning through the transformation of the self: the unity was total and operative only if the transformation was total. The paradoxes of guided activism and normalized political subjectivation could not have been sustained if the Maoist activists had not been political subjects *in their own eyes*. To be sure, coercion, totalitarian massification and the sheer dynamics of mob violence were instrumental, but it was the self-sustained melting pot of political violence and subjectivation that gave Mao's activist terror its irresistible and puzzling characteristics.

The activists were thus driven by a Weberian-like ethos in which the tension in this world between the self and the world was brought to incandescence and total conflict. Rather than expounding on the relevant clichés (psychopathology, or the study of sectarian extremism would portray Mao as a supreme political guru), we should reflect on the means of the (total) subjective transformation and on the prerequisite of the unity that was achieved. The dreary conclusion is that the violent exertion of power in direct practices of struggle was the model-action that sealed the devilish pact. Violence (direct and concrete, or symbolic) was rationalized as the legitimate expression of class anger triggered by oppression, and as the just punishment of enemies and counter-revolutionaries. But it was by no means a byproduct: it was the main productive factor of the total political agent in the singular. Explanations may be found in the psychological or social study of individual and collective violence, but when it comes to political violence and, indeed, to violence as politics, one has to bring power as it singles out subjects back into the picture. The "ordinary" subject was made into a political subject by being political in directly addressing the issue of power. Power, as the objective pattern of dominance exerted by the

system on the activists and contradicting the sought-for autonomy, was alleviated by the power each one exerted in struggle. Political agency was catalyzed by division and violence. Slaves were thus masters and tyrants on their own, as Hegel famously explains in analyzing the struggle for recognition when it is blocked at the primitive level – as a struggle to death. Each activist was empowered with agency in action by personally and effectively facing the possibility of death – of the action leading to self-death or to the elimination of the enemy, with the result that individual deaths (just like individualized violence) were insubstantial. In the whole array of Maoist techniques of mobilization, rectification, criticism, self-criticism, etc. meant to develop agent's autonomy by exerting power against specified targets, the stress on practice always involved violence, symbolic or physical, pegged on various degrees of enmity and not necessarily involving death but always regarding death as the accurate marker. The deadly root was captured in the slogan: "Do not fear suffering, do not fear death". The ready objection is that explaining the system by the limit hardly makes more sense than viewing it ideologically. One could also claim that Maoism was constructed in the context of the rampant social disruption and recurrent extreme violence that had marked China since the crisis of the imperial state had begun at the dawn of the 19th century. Does the limit define the system? It does – because it is what makes it a limitless system of political action disregarding institutions, rights and "objective" laws as well as social and individual inadequacies and resistances. Through violence, activist subjectivation was a practice of power empowering the activists under an absolute power. By dint of *that* power, Red Guards were suppressed in 1968 out of political calculation, not for the sake of order and lowering the level of violence (the repression did the reverse). The return to revolutionary institutionalization that marked the early 1970s (after years of turmoil and quasi-military dictatorship) was built into the system, just as the other shows of unchained activism Mao envisioned. We may guess that only age prevented him from living up to his words, as he had done in 1966 after threatening his peers (in 1959) with a new Red Army unleashing a new revolution. The official judgement (in 1981) declaring him 70% "good" took the unusual step of mentioning his admirable yet losing fight against adverse objective conditions: Mao's politics (as opposed to the party's). For once, party history was in earnest in declaring the "subjective" part the most significant. The political Mao was readily swept under the carpet and resurrected as the national myth of the post-revolution.

If activist politics were defined in the singular and in toto by their limitless and violent character, shouldn't we include another kind of limit – the limitation entailed by their failure to realize the dreamed-of activist society? Was not a non-activist society taking shape in the 1970s, due in large part to the Cultural Revolution's failed attempt at changing the socialist system and to the disruption of *this* system that ensued? I shall analyze (below) *that* side of the picture, involving far more people and social actors than the patented activists ever did, even at the Cultural Revolution apex – with the caveat that it was the *other* side of the system. The state was total not because it exerted (or pretended but failed to exert) total control over and through its agents, but because the agents made it activist in the most primitive life-or-death sense. Violence, struggle, institutional collapse and public disorder were by design structuring factors embodied in the activist-actors rather than de-structuring side-effects. When considered (as it should) in the perspective of political subjectivation, Mao's state activism belies the oxymoron it seems to be. The more division, the more struggle, the more violence, the more politics as politics; the more politics as politics, the more violence, struggle, division. The infernal machine went to the abyss, but it worked. An additional footnote to a set of questions that are too briefly introduced here (and to which I return below in examining the dynamics in Mao's system of action that diverged from the planned action), is that we should regard the melting of ideal-ideological motivations and personal or family interest in moving along the social ladder (as it still existed in Mao's world) as we view the mix of subjected practices and coercion cum manipulation in Mao's terror: the oxymoron resurfaces when confronted to the working of the system that was not the subjective engineering of political action.[91]

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[91]   Material benefits, statutory gains – as Walder (1986) shows for the activists in the industrial factories – were constitutive of the

The activist part worked till the end – with highs and lows. Yet, by all accounts, the activists (including Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution) were a minority. Mao had always stressed political capacity over massive recruitment (as we saw, it had cost him the leadership over the first generation of red bases in the early 1930s). Not unlike Lenin, he calculated that under certain circumstances, and properly mobilized, minority groups may become a majority. This tallies well with the caveats introduced above: being an embattled minority steeled the activists' resolve, and becoming activist by exerting power according to the Chairman's model made sure the minority would rule over the majority. Numbers, however, were not decisive for yet another reason: I mean the vast and complex phenomenon which I would call the social counter-transfer of political activism that has to be linked to the emergence of the underside I just mentioned. The making of the activist subject involved a total political transfer of ego and social concerns. Yet, transferring to politics personal relations, conflicts at the work place, etc., as the norm required, did not necessarily produce total political agents. When a conflict between a cadre and a peasant, or between neighbors or coworkers, was on a par with the war against imperialism and the new bourgeoisie (because it had to be constructed as such), it is easy to understand that (unreformed) hierarchies, arbitrariness, selfish strategies, personal feuds, and the like, could find a convenient home and deadly weapons in the unholy alliance of power, violence and struggle that was officially promoted and enacted. The difference between the activist kernel (composed of rival and feuding packs) and the (non-activist) whole meant that the political transfer established a language that could be used for managing unequal, personal, social, communal relations and operations – the (in effect) non-political dimension of the all-politicized collective life which, far from being more democratic, was subjected to the ordinary tyranny of ordinary tyrants in addition to having to submit to political tyrants. The socialist institutions were not as broken as is often assumed, even during the peak years of state activism, but state institutions had to implement rules bent by the ambient radicalism and were too weak to offer a reliable protection against in both circles of inferno. This is why the counter-transfer of politics to social and personal concerns had the vast social ramifications and political implications I analyze below. Suffice is to underline here that under Mao's activist total state all Chinese were not active total agents – true believers of sorts – but that all were obliged to practice the political language he and his zealots imposed as the norm, and that many found expedient to do so in view of their or their family's or community's interest. Liang Qichao would have diagnosed *si de* (the "selfish" social chaos of communal factionalism I comment below – "selfish" in the sense of *si,* the private-communal drive not tuned to the common good and the sphere of national politics) gaining ground and vindicating his hostility to total politics. The paradoxical outcome was that unrecognized social rump-subjects could sneak their way in masquerading as *gong de* activists under the umbrella of routinized and institutionalized political subjectivation.

It follows that Mao's ordering of disorder by subjectivation raises the question of standardization and reinstates that of massification, not in the sense of Arendt's massification (which addresses the de-institutionalization of the political), but in subjects being standardized while being subjects. Standardization was effective for the Maoist subjects qua subjects without being detrimental to their being full and autonomous subjects, as it is for the social subjects in present-day China and in the globalized world. It didn't show in the process of subjectivation, as each single individual could be a singular subject by personally enacting the revolution in personally fighting and exerting struggle and violence against concrete enemies. Singularity is an essential part of subjectivation, as was shown in the life-styles if the May Fourth period, and in today's world of social subjects self-fashioning their world. In Mao's mature system of action, subjectivation and activism were a matter of orthopraxy rather than of orthodoxy. Political correction depended on how one acted in the implementation of the chairman's line in the party, the administration, the army, in schools, in urban and rural production units, and as

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activists' world and cursus, as well as personal gratification in gaining an exalted status among groups of peers (much as the buzz on social networks works).

ordinary citizens – "ordinary" meaning politically-driven. Acting like the Chairman meant concretely disrupting the established codes. Mao wanted to preside over active political subjects reenacting the revolution in their daily life by concretely struggling against concrete enemies. To be sure, orthopraxy and orthodoxy had been conceived as parallel lines of command and mobilization since the founding rectification campaign of 1942. Yet, at the apex of the activist development of the revolutionary state, the Cultural Revolution was more a matter of struggling for the sake of struggling than cultural in its targets – save that "cultural" meant what the New Culture had meant for Chen Duxiu and his followers around 1915-1919 (the battlefield of a fundamental political reorganization of the subjectivity) plus political normalization by struggle and violent action. According to the Maoist scriptures, normalization was to be obtained not by absorbing abstract ("bookish") norms and rules ("bureaucratic"), but by struggling and following the revered examples of the heroic strugglers of the revolution and, above all, the Chairman's godly image as the arch-struggler. The "good" cadres, the "correct work-style" of the revolutionary period, the model workers and farmers, the heroic soldiers and engineers, all had Stalinist and so to speak activist precedents in the Soviet Union. Yet, at the core, stood the activist imbued with *Maozedongsixiang* (毛澤東思想, Mao Zedong's thought) who was expected not only to be an enthusiastic obedient subject of the régime, and to entirely dedicate his or her life to the party-state, but to do so by rebelling, resisting and fighting, that is by proving his or her existence as a self-mobilized and inspired subject not asserting his/her independence by replicating the régime's ideology and finding a proper place in its gallery of heroes, but by rising in anger to obtain and to do justice, including against the established order of things in the new socialist universe – a nightmare Stalin would never have let happen. Neither would have Liang Qichao, whose idea of activism inspired by *guojia sixiang*, as we saw, precluded disordered politics and gave way to the received common tradition instead of an enforced unitary ideology for founding the nation.

Rather than Liang Qichao's conservatism, the historical reference that keeps surfacing is May Fourth self-subjected activism. It may sound questionable to analyze in the same breath terrorist subjects and harmless activists or social subjects, practices of power, social practices and individual practices. Yet, the analytical link makes sense, if the historical analysis clearly differentiates. An important part in the difference stems from the changing aspects of the de-institutionalization trend that determined China's *Sonderweg* after empire and tied the knot of subjectivation and violence well after the May Fourth episode. The later link shows clearly enough, with other historical examples and today's instances, the dreadful private and public consequences of de-institutionalization. All considered, however, the relevant reference of this world is to itself: the fact that political chaos engineered phalanxes of actual political subjects believing in an ethos of emancipation and not mere instruments/victims of Mao's terror: *xinmin* subjects whose experience of politics demanded that their action be violent. We this in mind, we should turn back to my preliminary observation that the subjectivation paradigm may seem to lead to circular explanations – all the more so as the instance we consider here functioned along patterns that very strongly determined subjects into behaving as their own masters in engineering their subjective transformation and that of the world. Subjectivation is a private and public process in that it seals up a subjective world in reference to an outside world that the subject deems his/her own choice and his/her choice for the course of his/her life and of the world. The more singular and concrete the process, the stronger the experience, the tighter the link with the world of reference, the organization that is linked to it, the leader, the guru, the god or any overarching figure. We are not so much speaking of action and direction, standardization and singularity, as of normalization and participation. Violence in the context of struggle provided the decisive experience. Although it is not easy to look with cold eyes at the horrendous, we must explain *this* historical world by having the etic analysis restitute the emic vantage point. The historicization of subjectivation calls for a political history of violence – that is, a history of violence in politics that is not quite similar to the social history of violence that would stress the context

of endemic violence in post-imperial China. Politics were instrumental in determining the descent of the May Fourth activists into violence, but as a matter of strategic intelligence and practical means rather than a question of value and ideology. Which is to say that violence appeared as a self-evident technique once the Communists left the cities and the tasks of labor mobilization for engaged into rural guerilla warfare. As I remarked, the cycles of rebellion and repression of the nineteenth century were part of Mao's revolutionary myths, but the prevalence of violence in his *political* world can be traced back to the violent character of the war with the GMD (and inside the CCP) that ended the mellowed perspective of the early 1920s. In this context, struggling for struggle's sake, violence – divisive violence at that – as a practice of power (not just for exerting power, but including the formation of total political agents), is a technique he carefully devised and normalized.

It has often been surmised that struggle and violence were designed for transforming the revolution into a vast public theatre of politics. However, struggling for struggle's sake (with the ensuing individual and collective violence) involved public performances of violence, but not as dramatic representations to be watched by the militant people: the public had to perform the script. From the beginning (early 1930s, even during the 1920s for some pre-Maoist "pioneers" of rural action), the public performances of violent political struggles (on the minute scale of the guerilla operations) were not meant (by Mao and other guerilla leaders) to represent, but to enact the revolution, to make it not only radical against the landlords and the well-to-do peasants (as it was supposed to be at the time) but also and above all to transform the heart and mind and the life of the peasants the Communists were trying to rally by mobilizing them. In the early history of Chinese rural communism, the crude violent scenes the peasants were constrained to watch did not transform them into revolutionary subjects. The results were at best mitigated and it was soon realized that sustained support depended more on the Red Army's regular presence in the villages than on a real inner transformation of the peasants. This is the main political reason for which Mao was dismissed in 1932 (as we saw). He kept this in mind ten years later after he had recouped his political fortune and could unfold his complete system of action. During the so-called "agrarian reform" that started in 1946-47 in North China (in fact, the economic annihilation and micropolitical smashing of the rural elites), the technique was perfected and widely used as a practice of power leading to the local empowerment of the cadres (many of whom were activists selected and recruited in the process). Prompted by outside (or covert) Communist operatives, the assembled peasants of a village or a district would be incited to abuse a "class enemy" (most of the times a landlord), which often resulted in severe injuries and not infrequently in death. Before the acme occurred, carefully staged "narratives of bitterness" unleashed the fits of collective anger prompting the participants to move from verbal to physical abuse. The ritual, as all rituals do, carried a (political) narrative which in turn informed the participants' action. Even for those who did not strike, or maintained an evasive attitude, participating in the "struggle meetings" was like opting for the revolution by enacting it – much as in the *Demon*'s climactic disruption, Pyotr Stepanovich does not only need Chatov's blood but each member spilling it (by moral implication) in order to rekindle the group's spirit. In China's real history, the formula infamously served during the Cultural Revolution, but had become standard in the public performances of struggle that accompanied the régime's mass campaigns from the 1950s on (notably against the "deviant" intellectuals who resisted the "thought reform" and the so-called rightists would had voiced their critical view of the régime during the Hundred Flowers campaign). Violence was power, but only if it was politicized, that is 1) shared between leaders and led masses, and 2) singularized (so to speak) for the purpose, thus welding the activist compact by a not abstract declaration of enmity to an enemy that was not a distant abstraction. As I noted, this was, after the (early) turn to organization, Mao's second reframing of activism. The two together transformed it into Mao's recipe for taking, holding, contesting, regaining power by politics.

Pulling the time-honored string tying together collective violence and power is a banal technique. Basing a system of political action on such technique is quite different. The difference depends not on the outcome, but on our assessment of the practice: is the technique of power really a *political* practice of power? In saying so, are we not caught by the illusion of the state-society totalization by division, with troublesome overtones reminiscent of Carl Schmitt? Violence as politics is something students of Mao's China have found difficult to conceive, with the paradoxical result that many studies document and analyze the central role of violence in the régime but refrain from attributing it to a political modus operandi. The mad utopia, the police state, the system of terror, notwithstanding the political implications, do not seem to need the political dimension in order to function. Violence is therefore the main argument for declaring Mao's system unpolitical and reinforcing the idea that he terrorized as he governed, in a void. The outcome was not so: it was mixed, and even where and when segments of the polity-society diverged, the Maoist idiom of struggle and violence still produced subjects who were political or social, or both – but subjects practicing the technique at their own scale and speaking the language in their own tongue. How many were in earnest? How many did experience a trance-like transport rather than the metamorphosis into the political universe? Nothing at all? Or disgust? Or fear? Such questions are certainly legitimate but point to the etic rather than to the emic dimension: Mao's domination could not be a political one. Moving from the subjects to the processes of subjectivation disproves this assertion. The subjective hesitations, the pangs of consciousness shed light on subjective stories, but we should bear in mind that in closed environments where norms and power point to the same direction – what I would call the world of references – the subjectivation process takes place and takes over – in the shape intended by the Mastermind – for a (wide) minority of believers.

It would seem rational to hypothesize that a receding or non-totalized world of references would give more opportunities for more disconnected subjects to emerge: this is, after all, the main driving force in post-Mao China, as we shall see. But not so under Mao – and under other forms of subjected terror. As I explained, the seemingly counter-factor of division was, if anything, hardening the activist compact and steeling the world of reference instead of undermining it. Dostoyevsky's *Demons* owe their depth and the author's uncanny ability to foretell catastrophic histories. In staging Stavrogin's nihilistic destruction of nihilism itself as a counterproof for the dreadful power of self-chosen fanaticism, Dostoyevsky's *Demons* reach an unknown depth and the author the uncanny foreknowledge of catastrophic events to come. The extra-unpalatable fact about political subjectivation is that, like the religious brand, it not only clings to the totalization of meaning (like the one a closed total state organizes and a god-like leader incarnates), but thrives even more when the world of references is embattled and seems threatened. Under Mao, the politically subjected person could remain a united self and become a purer one in the very performance of struggle by declaring enmity on the Chairman's enemies. One divided in two, yet, through struggle, "oneness" reemerged purer on the activist-revolutionary side. Smashing obstacles, as we saw, was an essential part of the system of action: political purification by struggle became the order of the day with the "clean-up" campaign that preceded the Cultural Revolution. Between 1966 and 1968 (mostly), embattled oneness and heroically obtained purification were tied up in violence. Struggle and violence were not the effect of subjects implementing the leader's line, to which they would rally for ideological-political reasons (or for personal reasons). They were the melting pot in which the individuals became the politically subjected persons partaking in the revolutionary struggle. The model, and the struggle, not only required selflessness and a total dedication to the cause (values that were put forward as cardinal guidelines for enacting the proper Maoist work-style) but made the destruction of the self itself a top requirement. The enigma of emancipatory self-enslavement (the deep topic of Dostoyevsky's *Demons*) is *not* an enigma for being a historical fact. What in our eyes looks like de-personalization, collectivization, objectification, with the additional alienating horror of brutal violence, worked as the emergence of a greater subject identifying with the great subjects (the party, the revolution, the Chairman – especially the beloved and adored Chairman) in the world of references. The crux of the

matter was that the alchemy of subjectivation, by not being intellectual and abstract, was not a distancing process but a total experience. One is tempted to add: a religious experience like conversion. A better parallel in religion is the enraptured experience of mysticism that separates the mystical person from the ordinary believers by bringing it closer to the divine and enhancing the spiritual life of the soul. Since Mao's style was all but mystical, the proper and not surprising parallel in the religious world is with the terrorist experience and the experience of the martyr which the Maoist example suggests may also be interpreted in terms of subjectivation.

Nothing could better illustrate the difference between subjectivation and subjective subjects. The two can merge (as we shall see in today's China), but these examples would tend to show that the subjectivation processes that erase the subjective individual (the collectivization or the so-called "radicalization" of the soul) do not transform the subjected person into an object, but, rather, the enemy world and, above all, the enemies, from concrete, singular living people, into generic objects. Hence, once the process is engaged, the parallel progress of exhilaration and brutality all the way to the extreme that I have analyzed (above) as the limit where meaning and action seem limitless in their joint power (tied up by the activist subject, Dostoyevsky's nihilist, Mao's Red Guard) to change the inner and outer worlds. Subjectivation also helps distinguishing between the experience of extreme violence and the pathological experience that may also lead some alienated individuals to depersonalize the objects of their violent acts. In the non-pathological perspective (which does not preclude the psychological co-factors and singular life-experiences verging on the pathological one may well think of), violence is not violence but the objective course of history (or of the divine) realizing itself. A further qualification, borrowed from Hegel's analysis of the French Terror, is that these contexts of subjectivation transform the hyper-subjective into a hyper-objective that still retains the quality of a subject, at the limit (where death itself does not mean dying) that becomes the very plane of meaning and existence for the concerned subject. Thus, risking dying for the cause vanishes as death just like exerting the utmost violence vanishes as violence: mixed feelings, doubts, fear, etc., notwithstanding (they certainly accompany the experience), the dynamics of killing and war go all the way to the absurd extreme (e.g. on Beijing's campuses before the summer of 1968). The mandatory melt-down of the subjective in the collective (or in the divine) does not result (as long as the world of references holds) in sacrifice – because, if we use again the religious parallel, the dedicated activist (or the martyr) is on the side of the divine (the cause), not on that of the "object" whose symbolic (religious or political) being, differing from the divine and therefore blemishing it, must be eliminated by taking the real life. I shall only add a few words to this dark perspective by remarking that the compacity of the world of references hinges on the state of affairs in the world through the subjected person – that is to say not exactly on the conditions of subjectivation making it possible or impossible, robust or fragile, etc., but on the exercise of subjectivation itself. This explains the other device for making the subject and the world hold tightly together that high-Maoism illustrates so clearly in the political universe: the unceasing reiteration of the rituals (including the rituals of violence). The organized mass campaigns at all levels were designed to do so, and doing so was, of course, a paramount technique of power allowing the Maoist, and Mao himself, to strengthen their hold in the face of adversity. When adversity became enmity, the level of violence and disorder increased, but there is no doubt that even in the midst of chaos Maoism was conceived and implemented not as a random conversion of Mao's politics into techniques of power, and vice versa, but as a *system* of *political* action.

Opponents, Victims: Subjectivations in Mao's Afterworld

It is not surprising, then, that the system which obliterated all political opposition engendered *political* subjects who were not its subjects, because it created a historical universe that was that of the opponents as well – individuals whose de- or re-subjectivation led them to contest Mao's model of politics in a political dimension of asserted self-consciousness matching his total outlook. In this sense, political

subjects cropped up in spite of political subjectivation. Such was the case for many who had fallen prey to Moloch: the former Red Guards and other activists fallen from factional grace, sent to the countryside, discovering on the dark side of the reality they had believed in, among many astonishing and distressing things, a self that did not belong to the Chairman, in various nuances of personal and political perspectives (sometimes tinged with or structured by religious faith). Hua Linshan's arresting account depicts the ways many became aware of the trap that had captured them and de-subjected the "line" while re-subjecting a life of their own.[92] Yet, the captured had been captivated – as was the case of Lin Zhao (shot in 1968), a figure of the democratic movement who had been a staunch Maoist before taking side with the "rightists" (1957) and supporting the régime's opponents. Her letters (written with her blood while she was in jail) give testimony to a towering subject who refused to be a slave – and a victim. Yet, between the two poles (Maoist and freedom activists), the vast majority were non-participant victims. Their ruined life, and soul, surface in Yang Jisheng's memorable chronicle of the post-Leap famine – the equivalent of Jacques Lanzmann's "Shoah" in the (successful) attempt at making the obliterated subjects (transformed into "objects") as re-living subjects.[93] One feature of this work is that it shows life-stories as idiosyncratic and reflecting singular subjectivities in open-ended worlds – a significant contrast with the unifying and totalizing tension in action that characterized the zealots and sealed their world in spite of Mao's hope that activism would keep the world of revolution open. Yet, the same universe was shared by activists and victims. At the most horrendous, we witness on the part of the latter forms of violence (such as the still debated instances of cannibalism) not prescribed by the total state but its sure effect when one reached the line of bare survival. In another area of China's "bloodlands", Domenach's *L'archipel oublié*, and memoirs published by the victims, document the crushed subjects eluding suffering and taking refuge in subjective worlds of their own. The cool inner concentration, the detachment they invoke as so many helpful religious and philosophical evasions could not have "worked" had not the subjects of the state's wrath re-subjected themselves. The point is they were not lost as subjects between the political world that rejected them and the vast cosmos: they were subjects who had had the strength and the resources to exchange worlds in the most extreme circumstances. I am not going further in that direction, where the experience of the concentration camps should be considered. There were subjects in Mao's China who were politically subjected and not political agents, and subjects of their own.

As was revealed during the immediate post-Mao transition (late 1970s-early 1980s), the panorama of dissent and opposition that took shape in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution upheavals was intellectually and even politically diverse, from Marxist orthodox thinkers and critics (for instance the so-called Li Yizhe group who demanded in 1974 the restoration of socialist legality and appeared as forerunners of Deng Xiaoping's restoration politics) to humanitarians and democrats, some of whom, like Wei Jingsheng, criticized the restoration and broke with the régime. Many had been sent to the countryside, where networks of ideas and people emerged, some of which structured the intellectual-political life of the more open (or less closed) 1980s. Historical trends were more complex than the compelling myth of a homogeneous democratic opposition facing the régime head-front would have it. Once the political myth is dismantled, another one lingers: subjects – the only ones worth speaking of – were the opponents and victims. The (respectable) thesis of subjectivation by opposition or victimization certainly works for them, as we just saw, but it does not hold the field in that it eliminates the subjects on the other side. Many theories give credit to this thesis by emphasizing the massification effect of total power, even when it is not conceived as monolithic (this is the case of Arendt or Lefort, as we have seen). It would seem that due to what Sartre called the "practical-inertial" effect, massification and subjectivation are mutually exclusive, when, in fact, the latter precedes and enlivens the former. But, according to the thesis, total subjects may not even be phony, clonish subjects: they must vanish in the mass. I insist on

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[92] Hua, 1987.

[93] Yang, Jisheng, 2008.

this picture (in adding that it was developed by the Frankfurt philosophers-sociologists, for whom the bourgeois régimes, even democratic ones, de-subject the subjects under the conditions imposed by the development of cultural capitalism as would a total political power) because it remerged in the work of Li Zehou on true subjectivity (his "subjectality") that I have mentioned at the beginning of this essay in comparing his theory with Foucault's concept of subjectivation. Li had formed his conception during the Mao years and published his widely influential essays around the mid-1980s. They were, therefore, a direct answer to Mao's régime, and contrasted the inert masses Mao falsely activated with the creative potential of real subjects. His debt to Marx and the Frankfurt school prevented him from giving too much to the autonomous subject (Kant, phenomenology and Confucius being influential in this). He therefore did not view individual agency quite as an absolute and related its potential to favorable historical circumstances. During the following decade, having been forced to leave China, he considered that the turn of events under the CCP did not point in the right direction and came to call for a clear-cut split with the revolution (to which I return in part III). This was a major departure from his critical stance of the 1980s, with a wide-open political-historical vista added to the perspective on true subjectivity. In retrospect, in spite of the philosophical elaboration and without disparaging the daring political stance, the latter comes out as a mirror image of Mao's model of subjectivation.

This observation should be enlarged. It could be argued that a good deal of the freed expression during the 1980s in intellectual circles that criticized Mao, and even the régime, reflected the all-out politicization of life and society that had been Mao's hallmark in yet another case of opponents sharing the same historical world. In this light, *Ziwo* (自我, "me first" or "only me"), the motto that became popular at the time, did not so much reflect changes that had not yet left their imprint on the actual context as they came from an afterworld – which is why I examine this form of subjectivation in the trail of Mao's comet, while the analysis of the *limited* change in the 1980s will have to wait for part III. The irony was that Mao's afterworld prompted the creative imagination and thought in heralding the revolution's afterworld before it had actually occurred. *This* afterworld, now a reality of salaried men and women, consumers, etc. – a world of individualized social subjects – is a far cry from the total subjects Mao engineered and from the free subjects Li, his profound critic, envisioned. It would appear, then, that the marginal formation of independent subjects is not a sufficient factor for founding independent politics for independent social subjects, and that the (total) deconstruction of Mao's total world that redefined the subject on the sole basis of the individual subjectivity missed the essential step of reconstructing the political through rights and institutions. As we shall observe, today's critics and opponents (before the freeze enforced under Xi Jinping) have found ways for circumventing the régime's defenses in pressing these issues from inside (by taking advantage of the régime's state-building policies). Forty years ago, with such reality lacking, it was hardly possible to part ways with an absolute hell without brandishing near-absolute counter-ideas. Even those who argued for democracy articulated general principles. The political, the philosophical, the literary imagination of these subjects is all the more admirable as they also lacked the support of a dynamic civil society, comparable to the ones that gave credit and momentum to the political alternatives that toppled Europe's communist régimes.

Crippled Subjectivations and the Social Dynamics of Rampant De-Totalization

How can we qualify, then, the growing space of actual political inertia and segmented social constructions (including social agitation) that seemed to spread over Mao's total state, or, rather, in ever more numerous and gaping interstices, during the shadowy years of the Cultural Revolution? Was it a space, albeit marginal, offering patterns of subjectivation congenial to self-centered subjects? Was it another circle in the same inferno? Besides the two political poles and the distressed victims who were lost souls in hell, those, far more numerous, who managed to live an "ordinary" life with and within the system without actively taking part, did not invent another kind of politics and other patterns of subjectivation.

As I remarked, they inverted the political transfer of individual and social life prescribed and enacted by the activist state. Recalling Albert O. Hirschman's famous trilogy of "exit, voice, and loyalty",[94] we may well describe them as "exiters" constrained to voice loyalty. The process did not allow for the emergence of democratic citizens or of a civil society. By pointing to processes that harnessed the institutionalized activist subjectivation to non-political purposes, the (social) counter-transfer of Mao's total politics I have alluded to exemplifies de-subjectivation without re-subjectivation. Rather than addressing singular cases, it involved for large numbers and many institutions other kinds of relations and dynamics between individuals and groups amounting to what could not exist in the total state and could not but pass as its enemy: not an autonomous society (in spite of the ex-post discourse of some actors and contrary to the hopes of many commentators), but a social (in the sense of self-centered) ordering of the collectivity. This raises anew the issue of political and non-political determinations in the making of Mao's power politics. It has been suggested time and again that they did not respond to artificially induced political conflicts in the polity, but to social tensions in the system (between different layers, groups, territories) with Mao leading a social revolt of the "outs" against the dominant "red bourgeoisie" – the establishment, the Nomenklatura (high caste and low bureaucracy) who had appropriated the party and the state. This is misconstruing the occasion (and the target) for the cause of Mao's and his zealots' activism. Mao's divisive politics were certainly grafted on social divisions that his political reorganization of the basic socialist structure routinized and aggravated. The cause, as I argue, was making politics independent of all kinds of determination by taking the activist form through the channel of political subjectivation. The technique of power did not wait for the contradictions within the socialist system to unfold in order to get organized in the complete system of action I have described. In the course of his formation and rise to power, Mao's politics became his (complete with ad hoc technology) by making a technique of power political. He was not a social rebel. There were social dynamics in the political system, and if not social subjects, routinized and socially-driven subjectivations – but we should look for them on a *reverse side*.

Social dynamics had been at work from the beginning as they do in all totalitarian systems. In the fifties' open landscape people had been able to circulate between city and countryside as well as between and around unequal urban social statuses entailing unequal job, career, housing and welfare opportunities. With the Great Leap and the ensuing famine, Mao's reorganization of the revolutionary organization congealed the inequalities by closing the cities to the peasants, integrating the entire urban work force in a standard model which itself integrated the statutory inequalities, and freezing wages and careers. Social segmentation cum stratification was therefore added to political classification and division, thus inducing dynamics involving social causes whose roots developed "inside the people" where the absence of social mobility was in sharp contrast with the perpetual political movement. Political dynamics made things worse by barring alternative perspectives. The Cultural Revolution stifled those initiated by Mao's opponents in the wake of the famine in response to social tensions and demands (plus meeting the starved population's basic needs): they were the basis of the post-Mao reforms after the major obstacle could no longer block the way. Worst of all, the régime's dynamics also stalled. After the failure of the Great Leap no large movements aimed at bettering the material conditions and at changing the organization were launched, thus denying opportunities to transcend the actual conditions that were perceived as unjust and frustrating. The mechanism explained by Domenach that had transformed the social crisis of mid-fifties' Henan into the Great Leap's activist lab did not work anymore. The Cultural Revolution was not social. In addition to being blind to social needs, the socially stalled political movement did not stop dividing and sowing violent strife. At the interfaces with the local units that formed the organizational web, the system of action was like a wave whose ups and downs agitated the surface with no real transversal movement. As he had explained (in Henan) the social and political factors of its ascending momentum, Domenach gave in his *Archipel oublié* the first in-depth study of its descending

94   Hirschman, 1970.

curve (inside the various territories of China's gulag archipelago).[95] What could be the reaction of a socially frozen society artificially agitated by divisive politics? The power v. (civil) society paradigm is entirely misleading for understanding the resulting social and political dynamics that characterized late Maoism. Division and strife were built in the citizens' social life in ways that did not respond to Mao's expectations and qualified the system's actual reach relative to the intended political scope. *Interface dynamics* reveal that instead of turning against the designated abstract enemies, or against the system, petty cadres and common people followed Mao's cue and Mao's techniques of power to turn against targets close at hand, that is against themselves. A disjunction between the high-brow ideology of struggle and the down-to-earth motivations of the tensions and conflicts took place in all walks of society as many pretended to speak Mao's political language and connived between themselves in order to comply with surface performances or used it for private purposes in gaining advantages by eliminating competitors or resolving private quarrels.

Some scholars see the depoliticization process that is a striking feature of Post-Mao China (relative to what politicization was under Mao, not in absolute terms, as I explain below) starting as a form of social distance and even resistance. We may recall Marie-Claire Bergère's illuminating remark: the urban society during the 1970s gives signs that it resists the activist submersion imposed from above by withdrawing in "disconnected" social spaces rather than by confronting the régime on the political terrain, that is by transforming the organizational segmentation and the political factionalism into a social fragmentation cum rampant violence that was added to the bureaucratic one.[96] As we saw, whereas the factional *social* epidemic was typical of Mao's last years, segmentation had been built in the system from the beginning, either by (ideological) choice (basically, the one that pitted Mao against Chen Yun's advocacy of rational overarching organizations), or by the social dynamics paradoxically generated by the excesses of the total state. The outcome was that the political individual (even the Red Guards) was socially communal. When the communities in the rural and urban organizations diverged socially, a process of erosion – the one Domenach[97] has charted for Henan – was added to the organizational segmentation, thus "privatizing" the system's ideological language and practices of power. In addition to the fledging "parallel market", rural overpopulation, urban structural unemployment and rising (petty) criminality, the first signs of people illegally migrating from rural to urban areas or between cities were further and unsettling signals that the political system (action plus organization) could not absorb "real" China socially.

Mao's system of political action generated a fragmented set of disconnected social actions at the level of the basic-cells where they took place. The parallel social dimension could not exist qua non-political and private in full light (as it has done since the 1980s). It borrowed the (political) language of orthodoxy and took advantage of the lapses in the system of action that allowed orthopraxy to convey and cover messages and practices that were not orthodox. The "parallel" world was mainly the communal world reworked along the communal organization imposed by the régime. As I stressed, even during its heydays, the social layout did not correspond to the two poles of Mao's politics: the collective for mass mobilizations and the heroic individual for activating the masses. In the downgraded environment of the 1970s, subjects could and did perform as local cadres assuming communal social roles while performing as (local) powerholders and political brokers with the higher units (very much like the downgraded rural elites before the Communist takeover). There was room left for the heroic-activist roles commended by the régime, and they were taken up (with the symbolic and material gratifications attached to them). Just as Walder[98] has shown how the trading of statutory advantages and material benefits against political performance could take roots in factories because it took place on the communal scene and legitimized it,

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95   Domenach, 1992.

96   Bergère, 1979.

97   Domenach, 1995.

98   Walder, 1986.

the dynamics of fragmentation analyzed by Bergère[99] reached deep and wide because they grafted Mao's activist politics on the communal structures. Instances of straddling were the rule, not the exception. Pitting Chinese villages (or Chinese society in general) against the socialist state, as Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden do in one case study[100] would be going too far. The end result was a mix of political and social dynamics, even individual practices, in which, however, politics in the official garb remained the paramount language of power and of social recognition. There was room, to be sure, for subjective experiences breaking the old and new codes as shown by the anthropologist Yan Yunxiang's analysis of sexual behavior deviating from the public norm in the very context of the Cultural Revolution.[101] But in most cases subjects turned into political subjects by the official political practices were made into social subjects by social practices (which also entailed a modicum of in-bred recognition limited to groups and localities) in addition, not by substitution. This is most clear in the (local) religious revival that started in some areas in the wake of the famine.[102] Most studies document autonomous social dynamics ranging from reproducing (by then) traditional patterns such as the ones presented in Thireau and Hua's "enquête sociologique" (the investigation into a Cantonese village-lineage I already quoted) to reworking the socialist framework. These dynamics were not the triumph of tradition over the revolutionary order. They mustered a mix repertoire of social forms and norms which, in Bergère's reading, can be viewed as resistance by fragmentation. Different as they were, they shaped local scenes where individuals of exception emerged as local leaders in de facto communities. Communal structures and social subjects were "privatizing" or "socializing" the all-political official space as so many rivulets eroding the big mountain. The parallel world, at once omnipresent, unrecognized, and still compelled to lodge inside the system, can be described as "interstitial". It introduced a significant amount of social norms that were foreign to the official structure but did not lower the level of lingering violence. In another clear contrast with post-revolutionary China (and with the late imperial local elites), the sphere of the subjects was not recognized even on the reverse side of the official world where it was taking roots. In sum, the structural equivalent of late imperial China's loosened structure was just starting to emerge, not by dint of historical determinism, but by the process of erosion entailed by the dead-ends political dynamics of Mao's system.

The analysis of subjectivation supports the conclusion. The subjects we see emerging from the social folds (rather than from the mold directly) look like late-imperial ones (but downgraded, as we saw): they are neither socially nor politically autonomous but find themselves in positions where they can claim and exert a modicum of autonomy. Unlike dynamics that unfolded after 1895 or after 1978 (more topically, after the mid-1990s, as we shall see), the process did not transform the world of reference. Although political subjectivation tends to produce self-sufficient subjects, it is not a self-enclosed process. Subjects need an objective world (of values, directions, examples, etc.) to perform the subjective transformation: the transformation makes the objective world subjective as well, but it has to be objective in the first place. I thus underlined that (political, religious) divisions cement subjectivations. The case of the Mao-enraptured Western intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s verifies the assertion. But the alignment of meaning and forces that induces totalization induces de-totalization as it unwinds, producing not one standard form of subjectivation, but several, some political (including the reactive kind which tends to radicalize the remaining believers), some not. These dynamics have been instrumental in the post-Mao construction (and de-construction) of the political, as they were in the emergence of the social dimension in the Maoist construction, but they did not work in the same way with the same effect. Though the world(s) of the subjects could be modified, multiplied, in doubt, the universe was not shattered. The

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[99] Bergère, 1979.

[100] Friedman et *al.*, 1991.

[101] Yan, 2003.

[102] Aijmer and Ho, 2000.

polity remained the encompassing instance of the fragmented society. No other (political or intellectual) authority was its match. While the post-mortem dismantling of Mao's system during the eighties led to régime change (under the party's aegis) during the 1990s-2000s, the power structure and the practice of power prevailing until Mao died prevented such paradigmatic change. If, among higher levels in the apparatus and through channels connecting them with the working population, the non-Maoist alternative was known and expected (as appears from the first Tiananmen demonstration and repression in April 1976, in the wake of Zhou Enlai's death, when the premiership accrued to Mao's heir apparent instead of Deng Xiaoping), the crushing wedge of power performed its constraining part under the seal of the containing system. The political construction of the social change that was taking place did not take place. As I remarked, Mao was not the political leader of the social forces that were undoing *his* world.

Distance is a form of resistance, but resistance may be nothing more than distance. Contrasting history's harsh facts (the 1970s' unmistakable social disruption and intellectual disarray) with Mao's and the Maoists' belief that they were creating a living historical world, helps understand how the subjects' inner beliefs could contradict their public performances with no visible political effects on the individuals – until the practice of power changed. As a whole, Mao's activist politics of autonomy were not as autonomous (independent of social and economic conditions) as they were supposed to be, but no social autonomy, no individual autonomy could be constructed by the subjects. Just as there was not one side for power and ideology (the political activists' side) and one side for a "real" society, struggle and violence were not on one side, social dynamics on another. For all the distance between Mao's world of politics and the myriad microcosms at the grass roots, the Chairman imposed a common language for everyone's words and practices: the other world was under his world. Although it tied his power package to social dynamics that contradicted his creed, together with his clonish zealots of true believers had succeeded in spinning the thread of divisive violence China's polity-cum-society (the two circles in Mao's inferno) was busy weaving – in various colorations and with various degrees of intensity. This was Mao's system of political action's final master-stroke: the unmaking of the system was making it.

If there were two sides, it was in politics. The murderous utopia functioned as a framework of references necessary for living and surviving in that world – and, to some, a true historical world, because it was precisely not a paradise, but a universe in which one realized oneself as a subject by fighting for a cause uniting power and conviction. What, then, was Mao's system of action? A real political environment opening political spaces for political agents while adapting the organization to its political purposes? A practice of power resting on political devices that were mere techniques of mobilization and control? What to do of mass murders? Of the murderers? The illusion of May Fourth stateless activism was that political action was a social practice. The illusion of Mao's state-led action was that a practice of power pegged on struggles for power could generate autonomous politics. Mao's politics were certainly not his subjects' politics, but his system of political action was centered on and succeeded in transforming politics as subjectivation. It seems to me too that while he instrumentalized the dynamics of activism, he deliberately exploited the potential in subjectivation that does not just make room for political ideas and activities in people's life but recreates life as politics in the Aristotelian sense of *bios politikos*. Revolting as it may sound, I suggest that, without forsaking the necessary judgement of value, we enter into this emic world as it was, that is as it was gnawed by the activist work-style. The political god-emperor believed and made believed that with time, and much struggle, the activist government would be realized. He could be satisfied in the present that, because of its very imperfection, it was already a living political reality – not a dead institution. The belief was widely shared and the atomized terror that ensued had its agents as well as its victims. The line is all the more blurred as the sublimated memory of Mao's total state deprives it of its political dimension. Together with the official omerta, the revolution's apotheosis confines private memories to the scant expression of grief and loss, while the oblivious younger generations, who live light-years away from historical Maoism, do not care about

the bereft recognition that still haunts the older ones. The history of Maoism has yet to be written on sound historical ground, including in the perspective of the political subjects, that is beyond the victim/ terrorist paradigm. The post-Mao régime's censure of the political dimension is not a reason for not investigating it in ways that do not attribute the tragedy to the leaders alone. Subjectivation is not the alpha and omega of the politics of emancipation. When de-institutionalizing the political and subjecting subjects do not bypass the reality of power, as happened during May Fourth, but address it specifically, as under Mao, the subjects are political subjects at the great risk of being fully alienated by being fully subjects. By bringing the subjects in the picture, history reckons with such phenomena qua political, in a way that does not align the etic on the emic but depicts the latter better than do the domination-alienation-manipulation or sectarian-religious paradigms and the commodious cliché that sees in this and other examples a pathology of the self, as in the totalitarian de-institutionalization of the political a pathology of history.

Reckoning with subjectivation also serves history's purpose. It is precisely because patterns of subjectivation are considered (rather than subjects' agency) that stateless and state-led activism are shown to belong to different emic worlds in the same trajectory of de-institutionalization. This is yet another example of how far apart historical worlds can stand, no matter how close and interlocked they seem to be to their inhabitants – and to us. Notwithstanding subjective memories, official narrative, personal commitments and objective continuities, the spring of May Fourth democracy did not flow unaltered to the 1940s-1960s. In 1966 the aged Chairman looked back when he donned the soldier's insignia of the Red Guards: May Fourth activists had *not* been soldiers. Ending Mao's activist practice of power and the attendant economic choices has led to ending the revolution and changed the conditions of subjectivation in fundamental ways that have opened a new historical world for the subjects. While the activist spirit of resistance has become, again, the province of protesters and critics who have to adjust to a jealous if politically de-totalized state, the subjectivation processes have found new grounds in the making of self-centered social subjects who seem to be disconnected from the political dimension. De-institutionalized contexts are not necessarily depoliticized ones, as the worlds of May Fourth and Mao show. Deactivated ones drastically diminish the nature and the level of violence but are not necessarily free. Therefore, we will not ask if the de-totalized state liberated the totalitarian subject (or whether the subjects democratized themselves against the state), but how changes in the practices of power have de-totalized Mao's subjects.

AFTER REVOLUTION: SOCIAL SUBJECTIVATIONS AND THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

From Work-Style to Life-Styles: De-Totalizing Subjects

In contrast with the activated total state, the post-Mao settlement of 1978-81 may be seen as the restoration of the institutional drive Mao's thrust had disrupted from the mid-fifties on. The historical survey shows Mao coming up with political answers to the crucibles of the missing state and elusive democracy, loose activism and revolutionary organization. The trouble is that at the end of his life, China's political problems were no longer the questions historians compile in a list paralleling those he had confronted during his formation. They were the problems of his régime and they were not identified by the mainstream in the polity and society as the lack of democracy. This strand of political consciousness was a clear, sustained, admirable demand, but a rivulet. What many cadres and most people hoped for amounted to de-activating Mao's activism and delivering the economic benefits he had not redistributed (not because of corruption but by keeping already fast-growing resources away from incomes and consumer goods). The survivors translated the political equation as a call for restoring the process of socialist institutionalization that was under way before Mao's disruption and for readjusting the economic system by restoring private farming in the countryside and the initial socialist social blueprint in the cities, while supplementing planning with selected market mechanisms and opening

designated zones to foreign trade and investments. The restoration program was implemented during the 1980s, with the social thrust of reform bypassing the major (urban) sectors of the system and not reaching the social heart of the cities before another decade. Thus, during the 1980s, de-totalizing China was primarily deactivating the linkage between the state and activism, and the connection between activism and the subjects.

After empire, the challenge was to institutionalize the political state. It failed. After Mao, it was régime re-institutionalization by discontinuing Mao's practice of power– a far cry from institutionalizing a free, pluralistic polity, but a far cry, too, from high Maoism. The change, decisive in relative terms, was less so on the historical scale, since it amounted to restoring the régime's structures of power as they had emerged from the revolution and were still expected to pursue revolutionary goals (in building socialism). Decisive change occurred during the two following decades with the full de-collectivization of the urban cores under a system of state capitalism and the step-by-step phasing out of the revolutionary format for party and society. The twin strands, viewed together (as they should), ended the restoration and amounted to nothing less than régime change under the continued aegis of the (changed) CCP. The turn of the 1990s-2000s might be analyzed as primarily social. Indeed, it has changed old China as it never had changed, by tilting the rural-urban divide and by giving free way to what I analyze below as a bourgeois society. The socio-economic change is all the more spectacular in contrast with the régime's apparent immobility. Yet, the post-restoration turn has also been a political one. From deactivating Mao's practice of power in the revolutionary perspective, the leading party has gone to practicing power in the perspective of government. From Mao to after-revolution, the new logics of government meant that the state's main task moved from politically resisting its very institutionalization and politically organizing and mobilizing the population to governing a reconstructed society. From the angle of subjectivation, the substance of the change to non-revolution is not the turn of the patterns of power to government but the full recognition by the patterns of government of a social side comprised of *social subjects*, that is subjects not expected to qualify as such by entering the political realm. Thus, my contention in the following pages is that the real turn that has shaped present China was not ending Maoism and restoring the ancient socialist régime but ending both revolution and restoration in replacing (revolutionary) action by (social) recognition. Power by recognition became the practice of power after revolution from the angle of the state and from that of the subjects (whatever the continuities in the techniques of power). It signified establishing a system of government qua government governing subjects qua social subjects. The party did not institutionalize the political but instituted society and the social subjects socially.

The patterns of recognition and subjectivation changed accordingly, and the world of the subjects changed dramatically, when de-totalization became normalization. I take the word not as I did for analyzing the standardization under Mao's practice of power of the politically subjected personality, that is the paradoxical fact that calling for individuals to rise in single combat is what brings them into the norm; nor in relation to what a state-society compact is in a system taken as reference; but in the sense that the party-state stopped being a system of (political) action centered on the party's goals and values and started being a "banal" power structure ruling over the society without imposing (to itself and to it) the goal of transforming it by politicizing it along its own political norms. "Banal" means recognized not as non-revolutionary but with no need of the revolution for existing. In 1995, one century after the reform movement had taken leave of the ancient form of Chinese politics, Li Zehou (with Liu Zaifu) signed an influential book bidding "Farewell to revolution".[103] Although the authors had broken with the régime and were writing from abroad, "Farewell" was vastly influential in that it went well beyond explaining the reasons for an exile. It stirred a new strand of thought that did away with the revolutionary myth and reconsidered what China's history, and China's subjects, might have been and done without the

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[103]   Li and Liu, 1995.

revolution. As during the founding period when Li and Liu's forerunners had examined what China and the Chinese could be and could do without the empire, the open vistas they were reopening amounted to re-empowering the subjects by re-historicizing the political. From then on, as it was possible to construct the future and reconstruct the past with no binding reference to the revolution, the whole spectrum of non- and anti-revolutionary forms of thoughts, especially the liberal family, came to the fore as they had not done for half a century.[104] In fact, as we have seen, Li Zehou had already published (in 1987) his idea that sacrificing subjects' freedom for "saving the nation from disaster" had eliminated the most creative and critical part of contemporary Chinese reflection. But while this suggestion had been part of the pre-Tiananmen "Enlightenment" in intellectual circles, the sensational pronouncement of the mid-1990s impacted the régime itself in providing the key to the unnamed changes that were taking place in the official sphere. Li and Liu, of course, were not the régime's mouthpiece, but, as is often the case, their critical discourse shed light on the historical environment. Throughout the ensuing controversies, one idea became consensual among opponents, critics and pro-régime intellectuals: that the use of the power of the party could no longer be independent and unaccountable (in the sense that politics had gained their autonomy by fighting for the nation and people in the revolutionary endeavor). Political action was to be accountable to the needs of the people forming the existing society in a continuum of society, history, and subjectivity. It does not take long to realize that pro- as well as anti-government conclusions could be drawn from such premises – as they were –, with conservatives challenging liberals on the theme of historical and social continuity for arguing in favor of authority (as we shall see, Liang Qichao's time had come).

In fact – if we leave intellectual circles and look at the social landscape –, the end of revolution means far more than economic reforms. It has involved coopting social forms and norms as well as historical moments that do not belong to the revolutionary outlook, although many of them had been used by the CCP during various episodes in a long history of variegated practices of power. This legitimate repertoire has guided the leadership's steps in giving up Maoism, then the revolution, while keeping its grip on power and revamping its authority. If normalization is not democratization in the institutional sense, it involves phenomena affecting the logics of recognition, the status of the individuals and their access to goods, education and the professions that could be described as "democratizing" society (relative to the past logics of unequal social segmentation by status and locality), while social and regional inequalities have vastly increased. However, "democratizing" dynamics operate in a conservative context. As we shall see, power by recognition, even when it informs and leads social subjects' agency (for instance in higher education and business or official careers), is not democratizing per se. The practices of power are not democratized although they are no longer what they were under Mao and are not returning to his activist practice under Xi Jinping. The conservative compact has social as well as political roots and cannot be attributed solely to the repressive and containment policies of a state that has reproduced its former structure of party-state in the process of its political transformation.

In order to clearly identify what has changed in the subjectivation patterns, this process has to be carefully delineated so as not to underestimate the range of political change after high Maoism was deactivated (as many observers have done), and, once it is recognized as an actual change, not to misread it. In following Franz Schurmann's steps, ideology can be taken as an index of organizational change and political reorganization.[105] This is what Emmanuel Jourda has done in analyzing in the United Front an ideological-and-organizational concept whose significance is usually misinterpreted as only covering the relations with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Overseas Chinese, while it is a crucial instrument for expending the social scope of the state and, in its twists and turns, a sure index of the

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[104]   Chen, 2002.

[105]   Schurmann, 1968.

turn from post-Mao to post-revolutionary politics.[106] It could be said that the régime has become more "social" (in scope) as it became national (in goal). But it is not so. The end of the ideological drive is not the end of ideology and of orthodoxy – which play a major role in the political-symbolical-normative definition of the new order by recognition as well as in the patterns of subjectivation in "normalizing" subjects' agency (and are therefore not the "empty nutshell" many observers dismiss as irrelevant). The emergence (in the 1990s) of a narrative inserting the revolutionary saga into the whole of China's history and culture which many have construed as a conversion to nationalism (and as the driving impetus of post-post-Mao change) is inscribed in a continuum. The best way to assess how the credo has morphed is to relate the ideological metamorphosis to the significant steps taken in implementing the practice of power by recognition and government I have explained. The most important of these steps is, in my eyes, the "Three Representations"[107] that were canonized at the start of this century. In my reading, the new ideological canon formalizes the re-formatting of the régime not by declaring the party as an organ of government, but by transforming it from revolutionary mobilizer to political representative of a non-revolutionary people. As I remarked, most observers have underrated and even ignored this capital step, and it seems to have been a soon-forgotten political slogan now ensconced in the Party charter with other dead ideological bodies (like Mao's thought) and replaced in the living world by Xi Jinping's "dream". I hold it as the threshold of recognition that legitimates the patterns of subjectivation producing new China's new subjects. The change does not ark back to the institutionalization process of the late Qing period. It leaves the party as the sole and self-appointed political representative in a system of representation devoid of the institutions of political representation. Not only is representing the "whole people" (plus, specifically, the modern elites and the culture) not quite like leading an array of allied classes in revolutionary combat. The (mostly unnoticed) thrust of the "Three Representations" is not in what is represented (the focus of most comments: capitalists in the first place under Jiang Zemin, and now the people!). It is in the very act of representing. I already explained the breach with the revolutionary positioning. But there is more to it. We should not construe the representation of everything by the party as a limited, biased, monopolized, rump-representation. In a non-pluralistic system, representation is not part of the mediation of social divisions conducive to political decisions and compromises, and not an instrument for delegating power: the party does both in its capacity *not of political representative,* but of supreme recognizing power. Representation means recognition. The new social order is recognized as it is, for what it is: the world of social subjects. In representing/recognizing the "whole people" (former "third representation" moved to first place under Xi Jinping), together with the new entrepreneurial-professional elites and the cultural continuity, the party recognizes society as it is and governs it as it is – and expects to be recognized as its recognizer. Mao's divisive and disruptive practice of power could be analyzed as *recognition by action* if action in his view did not altogether supersede recognition in absorbing the social dimension by struggle and violence in the activated polity: the political illusion of a revolutionary society, as we saw. Representation in lieu of revolution, recognition in lieu of representation: the foundations of the political are entirely changed and so are the basic patterns of subjectivation. As a result of this inconspicuous yet epoch-making turn, the régime has changed, and régime change has delivered a re-institutionalized and re-historicized state while the politics of normalization have delivered a "normalized" society under the ancient party-state in its new garb as governmental state. Liang Qichao would write that the "form of the state" has changed, not the "form of government".

So far, I have delineated the post-revolutionary turn in political terms. But régime change is also social change. The change in the "form of the state" can be formulated in saying that the régime has become social in political scope. The *social turn* would not be so visible and decisive had it not been for a convergent fundamental transformation in the "form of society" (so to speak): the emergence in vast

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[106]   Jourda, 2012.

[107]   *Sange daibiao* (三個代表), usually translated by "Three Represents".

numbers of privatized social subjects in association with the rise of a fledging middle-class – subjects who are not subjects by being activists (social or political ones) but qua subjects. In describing the social turn in this way, I use three levers of analysis: classification, self-subjectivation and recognition. The criterion of classification as a social process mixing objective and subjective factors stresses the fact that something sociologists can describe as a "middle classing" trend is making its way and remodels China's society. I use the verbal form in the same sense as Jean-Louis Rocca for underlining a process in progress in the huge mainstream of seemingly depoliticized citizens who are silently rebuilding Chinese society from the middle.[108] A reality "in the making", the advent of "middle-classed" China is the most visible marker/outcome of the process of de-totalization and normalization that has de-revolutionized China. The urbanization of "agrarian China" would not be so spectacular a development were it not for the transformation of the socialist urban society by the repositioning of the post-revolutionary urban landscape around the middle-classed pivot. The process is progressive in two ways. One is that it is an overwhelming trend but not (yet) China's unique social reality. There are poor peasants in numbers, poor urban workers, poor regions and migrants moving between these categories and areas who do not belong to the class and are not "classed" according to its criteria (income levels and capital, jobs, housing, education, way of life…). Still, the middle-classed class is on the rise, not diminishing as it does in other (older) parts of the capitalist world: it is the driving force and the axial mass from which disparities and inequality are experienced throughout society and can be safely analyzed (for us) by using the "middle" as the standard index of the overall classification process. During the 1980s, the independent peasants who did business in the cities, and the (less numerous) urban self-entrepreneurs (*getihu* 個體戶) were marginal and peripheral curiosities. If "real" people's communes complete with work teams and work points, or urban *danwei* also complete with cradle-to-grave welfare would reappear (beyond the normative propaganda I comment below), the astonishment would be similar: this is what I call axial-mass dynamics. The class in progress is structured inasmuch as the objective factors of classification that concur to the emergence of individual subjects are middle-classing factors. Such are the dramatic changes in the family, in the work place, in the allocation of manpower, on the job market, in the rise of salaried men and women as a standard sociological pattern and model of individual-social success; in the social security systems that are disconnected from enterprises; in the way the government apparatus reaches the individuals more than the communities; in accessing the markets of housing, consumer goods, communication and leisure; in the system of higher education that, although it is biased by class and caste, also points to the (competitive) individual, as does the job market. The redrawn landscape shows various layers and groups of professionalized subjects branching off from the axial mass (in trend and to be sub-classified, as everywhere, according to stratification by income and capital, occupation, education and cultural level, housing and geographical location, leisure activities, religious creeds, etc.). The sociological description would also include (and differentiate) the social activists we introduce below, many of whom are professionals, journalists, lawyers, etc.

Using the second lever – self-subjectivation – we realize that the class is also a reality in progress because the subjects are factors through self-classing and self-recognizing processes that tend to generalize middle-class norms while "privatizing" the subjects. The opportunities offered to self-styling by the consumer culture are a major marker. The generalized – and, on this plane, individualized – cultivation of personal identities and styles – life-styles, food styles, fashion styles, vacation styles, recreative styles, etc. – is one of the defining standards of the class and certainly the one that engages the self-centered subjects as self-acknowledged autonomous persons making use of "objective" economic and social opportunities (or taking into account objective obstacles) for reworking the social norms in a subjective way. As we shall see, the job market driven by professionalization and competition also draws on the subjects' agency and their potential for personal identification. Self-subjectivation processes are therefore

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[108]   Rocca, 2016 and 2017.

patterns of subjectivation in which the subjective part that engages the subjects' agency predominates. This feature is linked to another main characteristic of the middle-classing process that can be described as depoliticization. As the following pages will show, we should be cautious against hasty conclusions in this respect. Yet, in first approach, it can be said that the dynamics of normalization generate a new social world seemingly disconnected from politics whose standard-bearer could be termed *shengfeng* (生風), the life-style, in lieu of Mao's *zhengfeng* (政風, concentration on the political work-style).

Critics, writers, film-makers, artists, have demonized and satirized the end of politics and a submission to a new kind of tyranny driven by money and the vulgar consumer culture in terms reminiscent of late imperial condemnations of *si* attitudes in the name of *gong*. To be sure, middle-classing self-subjectivations are a far cry from the *ziwo-* (me-)generation's exaltation of the individual during the 1980s as an intellectual (and intellectuals') reaction against Mao's total despotism. Gao Xingjian's message of self-deliverance in *Yigeren de shengjing* (One Man's Bible) could not have been farther from self-fashioning. The book (1999), a splendid illustration of what I have commented as the afterworld effect of erecting the subjectivity against a history visited by Mao, appeared shortly after Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu's "farewell to the revolution" (1995) had delineated a responsible and fully creative individual light-years away from the "petty", ordinary, middle-classed subjects who (by then) were barely starting to peer out of the socialist cradle. Li Zehou still set his "subjectality" in the perspective of the subject's and the world's emancipation. Not so with Gao's One Man, although the complex fiction (as in *Soul Mountain*, published in 1990) refrained from blending crude realism and sheer fantasy with the slight nihilistic overtones many post-1978 writers expressed in satirical or ironical form. For many, it was not so much that the self would be one-sidedly exalted: it was exhausted exaltation, in a way reminiscent of the poet Bei Dao catching the puzzle of facing "five-thousand old Chinese characters". Since then, the tone has become harsher and crudely disruptive. Just one century ago, in 1918, Lu Xun's *Kuangren riji* (Diary of a Madman) had indicted the "cannibalism" of China's high culture, old and noble as it was. At the end of the century the feeling was that the Chinese had been devoured by the politics of emancipation. Not only was Lu Xun's plea to "save the children" a madman's delusion: there were no children to be saved. Writers, artists, film-makers, have found artistic matter in taking issue with the fascinating and repulsive bourgeois feeling of the epoch, a time after revolution when, finally, history is at rest and allows the common people to be at rest with it too. Some of these fictions picture a meaningless universe devoid of values and any sense of commitment. My contention is that these borderline creations replete with disruptive sex and violence are no longer trailing Mao's comet but intimations of the world to come. That artistic subjectivations antagonize social subjectivations is another element of banalization in the normalization process that gives it an air of déjà vu. Not that discontent with the present recalls the New Culture indictment of the past. The sui-generis nihilistic trend is reminiscent not of the Daoist or Chan sage cutting the world, but of the anti-bourgeois stance of bourgeois 19th century Europe. In the global world, it sides with the radical (more than critical) positions and postures that contradict the "normalized" pattern of subjectivation delivering subjects attuned (and hooked) to the world-trends. It is essential to include these forms of dissenting subjectivation in the global picture of incipient bourgeois China. But it would be an illusion to take them at face value and believe that the Chinese are more (or less) pessimistic or optimistic about their present conditions than other bourgeois-to be in the global world (just as it is misleading to believe that most are democrats prevented to be so by the fiat of power).

Mainstream subjects are subjects by being self-centered. Yet, self-subjectivation processes amounting to self-centering the world around life-styles, jobs, cellular families, etc., produce "privatized" subjects, not individualized ones. What we witness is the aggregation of individual social practices. If the individualization paradigm is used,[109] it must be qualified in view of the fact that the individuals still

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[109]   Yan, 2009.

belong to, participate in and identify with communal and collective structures (families, lineages, religious associations, networks of associates, etc.) weighing more on the "individuals" than is usual in individualized societies. In the process of change, and beyond the limits of the middle-classed axial mass, communal norms and structures have been reworked (restyled) more than they have been erased. Similarly, on the normative plane, the trend toward normalization that has allowed and legitimized the private subjects qua subjects with no activist-political strings attached, is (according to Isabelle Thireau's and her Chinese colleagues' research on the remaking of the normative order in the rural setting) inclusive, no longer divisive and exclusive. And while keeping the state in a central referential position, it has transformed it into the wished-for horizon and operator of the "common good" and the "sense of justice".[110] As we shall see, this is of paramount importance for understanding the subjects' political attitudes which often oscillate between acceptance of the existing order and more or less sharp and active contest. No social autonomy is in the making *socially*. Furthermore, in China as elsewhere, self-styled lives are socially standardized and shape the whole social array. "Self-centered" is therefore a better qualification than "individual" for stressing the individuals' agency in shaping the(ir) world(s). The self-subjectivation processes are *social* subjectivations and the subjects are social subjects. They are more privatized than individualized also in the sense that besides the individualizing patterns of their own that concern their private life, the patterns that are shaped and imposed by the state (such as the new workplace or collective landownership in the countryside) maintain a strong link with the collective. We do not witness an independent world of autonomous individuals stemming from the post-Mao withdrawal of the state. The state has not withdrawn at all and the paramount organizational and normative aspects structuring the middle-classing trend are the state's doing.

State Separation and the "Bourgeois" Society

In using the third lever of analysis – recognition – we encounter the political "niche" I have delineated in recalling the process of régime change *after* the post-Mao period. The rising middle class is precisely not the pivot of a revolutionary society, but of a new system of action whose practice of power is *social recognition* and *action for recognition* (from the part of the powerholders as well as from that of the social activists, as we shall see). The main index and outcome of change is a fact so massive and obvious, yet so decisively new, that it usually escapes notice: the dynamic reality we are analyzing is not creeping on a reverse side of the official order – it is *recognized*. Being recognized entails for the subjects a modicum of recognition of the power that recognizes. The clearest sign and outcome of régime change is the régime's expanding social basis in using the practice of power by recognition just as Mao's activist zealots were the political basis of his practice of power by action. As I remarked, recognition indicates a fundamental change from using power for changing the social reality and asserting a revolutionary power to asserting power by recognizing the social order – and governing the social subjects. In the scholarly literature, the process is often abbreviated (and misconstrued) as the "end of ideology". This can be misleading, especially in under- or over-rating the social result (inexistent because of the unchanged power structure, or tantamount to establishing full-fledged subjects). The nuanced outcome – even in trend – is not a society of subjects, politically, socially, and individually. It could be described as a social ordering of social subjects in flux. The crucial element is that the social subjects are *not* the (enlarged) outcome of subjectivation patterns based on distance and resistance vis-à-vis the régime's politics, as we saw them cropping up at the end of Maoism. And they are *not* the reverse of activist subjectivation in Mao's universe that worked by calling forth subjects resisting the institutionalizing trend in the revolution – and in the state. Today's mainstream subjects are the outcome of state building policies. They are still produced by political fiat, but by politics and policies that primarily "de-politicize" them. I should rather write: that normalize and de-revolutionize them, because their strong inclusion of the strong

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depoliticized state in their general outlook is (to them) political – in social terms. May Fourth subjects were social by default (due to the missing state). Mao's subjects were political by excess (because of his practice of power). Late-Maoism's subjects were interstitial thanks to the involution of the total state. The subjects after revolution are social subjects in full light. They need not enter the political sphere in order to gain public recognition. The subjects are legitimate in being those whom the party-state governs as social subjects. They are justified in doing so by themselves, by the social ordering of things, *and* by the state. The practice of power moving from revolution to recognition abolishes the idea that the *social* output of the revolutionary system is an underside. Under power by recognition, *there is no underside*. No area of social life goes unrecognized, there is no violence, no enmity built in the system against fractions of the society (as opposed to stigmatized "anti-patriotic" and "counter-revolutionary" democrats, Tibetan resisters, etc.). Power is not politically active on one side and "privatized" on the other: political action means social recognition. We should not take as a politically-determined underside the rampant privatization by means of networks illegally appropriating power and resources, including the upper strata of official corruption I am tempted to call the "deep state": straddling power networks securing a non-institutionalized form of control over the security, the economy, and the ideology, in the hands of interest groups and factions assembled around the familial and political clans of the former and present party-state pundits.[111] In axial-mass dynamics, Chinese subjects are first and foremost privatized subjects experiencing more or less individualized social practices, living in various sociological settings *and* in one overarching political environment whose defining feature is to recognize them as such – in spite of its authoritarian character.

Under power by recognition, the system of action is not inert, the party, the state, do conduct policies that impose a certain order on society, but the basic orientation is overturned and the social system changes accordingly: the subjects are "made" by the normalized state in ways that have gone far beyond the initial political "deactivation" of the post-Mao period. With this, we encounter the living historical experience of change that is also so obvious that it goes unnoticed, although subjectivation patterns do integrate the passage of time as the end of an ancient régime and the beginning of a new era – the subjects' time. The social dynamics of régime change cannot be explained without a close look at the historical record. After 1949 the revolutionary party in power created its working class, the privileged kernel of which (in privileged state-owned enterprises) functioned sociologically and symbolically as a "Maoist middle class" whose boundaries extended to white-collar employees and lower officials working in state and party offices.[112] This "class" of white and blue collars (*zhigong* 職工) retained its identity because it was the party's prime symbolical creation, complete with work heroes and Maoist activists, and a social world which sociologists like D. Davis,[113] A. Walder[114] and J.-L. Rocca[115] analyze as such before and after 1978 (it survived the first volley of reforms well into the 1990s). As we saw, Mao's radicalized social model did not eliminate hierarchy, privileges and inequalities while it froze social mobility. On the other hand, his activist practice of power created classes of zealot subjects who supported his radical moves (including against the established workers' class) to the point where he could organize China so that his practice of power as action would become an end in itself. The working class was thus symbolically reconstructed in the political movement as a catch-all "proletariat" identified as "the left" and comprised of "revolutionary rebels", revolutionary soldiers, cadres, officers, etc. rather than of Marx's, Lenin's and Stalin's industrial workers. It is essential for understanding the historical plane on which subjectivation patterns operate today to redress a frequent misinterpretation of the post-Mao reforms: the post-Mao

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[111]   Domenach, 2016.

[112]   Davis, 2000.

[113]   Davis, 2000.

[114]   Walder, 1986.

[115]   Rocca, 2006.

period did not abolish the ancient "middle class" in order to make room for the (present) middle-classing processes. It eliminated Mao's polity but *restored* the "old working class"[116] as the social middle pivot of the reestablished socialist order. *In social terms* the end of Maoism did not toll the end of the ancient communist régime. Middle-classing processes and self-subjectivation patterns stem from the following period which is linked to a more fundamental reorientation of the party than doing away with chaos.

The true historical divide – the fact that there is no social underside – is due to the disbandment of the ancient *social* model in the cities during the 1990s-2000s. The prime move was ending Mao's practice of power, but during the post-Mao years the political restoration was coupled with a social restoration of the model Mao had tilted and bent in the cities but not overturned. The ancient social régime throve while the new economy was "growing out of the plan"[117] and in the countryside. In order to understand the disjunction between rural and urban reforms, and why the precocious rural change did not alter the balance of society, one has to understand that the sociological-political pivot of socialist China had been relocated in the cities after 1949. The history of the reforms during the 1980s can be reconstructed as a suite of bypassing episodes the outcome of which was that the actual reforms took roots in avoiding the areas of greater *social* inertia and political resistance (in the cities) while economic change (in planning, prices, investment and credit) was under way.[118] It is only during the following decade, with the massive de-collectivization of state enterprises, that the social model was adjusted: the core economy became capitalist and the core society became bourgeois with the "Chinese characteristics" (crucial for our purpose of understanding subjectivation patterns, not just in terms of macroeconomic and social structures, microeconomic governance, etc.) that both still are under the aegis of a state capitalism.[119] While the political restoration of the eighties was a *social restoration*, the turn of the 1990s-2000s was exactly what the post-Mao restoration had not been: political turn *plus* social turn, both away from… the restoration in doing away with the revolution.

The end of the restoration is what ends the revolution: in the (plentiful) French sequence of after-revolutions, the one that *ends the revolution by ending a restoration* is the Juste Milieu of the 1830s-1840s.[120] The Juste Milieu paradigm[121] is especially helpful for reckoning and balancing the historical fact of restoration with that of revolution. Juste Milieu politics do not stand in the middle of ancient régime and revolution: they look forward between reaction and democracy. Restoration is the Ancien Régime, democracy is the revolution. The end of Maoism is the end of the ancient communist political régime; the end of the ancient communist social régime is the end of restoration. The highlight of the post-Mao period was political (in changing the practice of power) while the highlight of the post-revolution is social: the new practice of power recognizes a new society. The political continuity (of the monarchy in Juste Milieu France, of one-party rule in post-revolution China) is a social breakthrough. Under the French

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[116]   Rocca, 2006.

[117]   Naughton, 1995.

[118]   Chevrier, 1983.

[119]   Bergère, 2013.

[120]   After the July 1830 revolution ended the Bourbon Restoration, hopes for a republican government were foiled by the establishment of a constitutional monarchy under the cadet branch of the Orléans, which recognized the sovereign people (Louis-Philippe was King of the French, not of France) and the legacy of the (1789) Revolution, but barred republican radicalism as well as Restoration traditionalism. Governing "just in the middle" was not a matter of moral equilibrium or political opportunity. According to historian (and cabinet minister) François Guizot, the median formula finalized the historical rise of the bourgeoise (in a parallel with England's Glorious Revolution of 1688). Far from locking history's door, it planned on a new course of development pegged on unhindered industrial capitalism and relying on education, the selection of talents and a progressively shared upward social mobility for rebalancing a transformed society (Rosanvallon, 1985). Workers were to be bourgeois. Guizot's famous address to the popular classes ("get rich through working and saving") finds a fascinating echo in the "modest affluence" shared by all (*xiaokang*) that has gained recognition from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping. Contrary to these expectations, the initial restrictions on vote and rights had to become "resistance" against a radicalized opposition (the "movement") that toppled the conservative bourgeois monarchy and founded the 2nd Republic (with universal suffrage) in February 1848.

[121]   Jourda, 2012.

restoration, the bourgeoisie was ushered through a back door in the reconstructed aristocratic universe. Two lines in Balzac or in Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* expose the old world smacking of unrecognized new money, much like the enriched *getihu* were not recognized during the 1980s. Then the monarchy became bourgeois and the bourgeoisie was crowned… socially: just like Chinese communism has become a bourgeois communism socially crowning a bourgeois order.

Not just pitting in toto the new world against the old one is a sure guide in understanding the political twists of the "new course" and, above all, for not misreading them. The campaigns against "spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois liberalism" in the 1980s are thus shown to belong to the restoration of the ancient communist régime and were not the fatal turns (for the reforms) many thought they were at the time. The Juste Milieu paradigm is therefore useful for distinguishing between occasional twists and turns that would change the bourgeois texture of government: in other words, for assessing the durability of the end of revolution. We shall see that Xi Jinping's supposed neo-Maoist flirt is not a restoration: not a leap out of bourgeois communism, not the end of the world in which social subjects are expected to be plain social subjects.

All subjects, even those who benefit from the new order, are not complacent and many, while condoning the régime and the social transformation, criticize the government and, above all, bad governance at the lower levels of the party-state – which is what they "know" of power. Criticism and discontent nourish the social movement and the (low-keyed) power contests in the sphere of activism I examine below. But we should bear in mind that for the social mainstream, power is no longer the issue. Historicizing and marking the specific time of an after-revolution and the middle-class turn it entails as bourgeois – certainly an etic approach seemingly remote from the subject's outlook – indicates how the *history* of the political bears on the subjectivation patterns and the subjects. There is not one continuous flux of reforms. Restoring the ancient communist régime in the 1980s shaped a different world from the world of the middle class that emerged during the following decades. My (etic) remark concerning the pace of the reforms can be restated in the emic dimension: there was no middle class in the making in Shanghai at the end of the first decade – and none in the surrounding rural districts where the new economy was booming. The social subject (new-rich *getihu*, flamboyant Shenzhen businessmen sporting attaché-cases, lawyers, notaries…) was still a matter of astonishment and byzantine discussions. The mainstream belonged to collectives – even in rural areas where collective farming had been discontinued but where landownership was controlled by local governments as were most village enterprises. This is still the case and, as we shall see, a major problem. In axial mass, however, the world is no longer what it was. Whereas on the surface the turn appears modest (as I remarked, many observers have barely noticed it and have held measures such as the "Three Representations" as cosmetic), in social-*political* terms the advent of the bourgeois society is the real revolution of after-revolution. The régime has done more than using social change as a marker of its transformation.

Considering society alone, the banalized, normalized, standardized (not individualized) subjects who are the mainstream of the mainstream are hardly bourgeois. They are not primarily capital- or land-owners (although one dynamic feature of (upper) middle-classing is owning real property and capital), or entrepreneurs, but salaried workers and professionals who work for (mostly state-owned) enterprises (and for state and party organizations at all levels) and are consumers, no longer members of collective work units distributing housing, health care, welfare, etc. It would make more sociological sense to characterize them not as recognized social subjects, but as salaried ones (Ezra Vogel's analysis of Japan's middle class),[122] or as commodified subjects – in stressing the cooptation of economic-social-legal forms and norms belonging to the repertoire of fin-de-siècle neoliberalism and globalization in line with options on the "commodification" of society taken at the end of the eighties. While keeping

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[122]   Vogel, 1963.

its historical profile, China's (state) capitalism has integrated the world scene.[123] Jean-François Bayart[124] reads in a convergence between a turn to economic-social rationalization and a turn to government in the practice of power a paradigm of post-revolutionary politics that he calls the "Thermidorian condition" (in reference to one early episode (1794) in the sequence of French post-revolutionary régimes). Although the paradigm is enlightening for explaining the political economy of change, for instance in Taiwan,[125] it fails to characterize the successive historical worlds which a history of the political brings to light. The two worlds of post-Maoism and post-revolution that it is so important to separate for understanding the emergence of the social subjects seem to belong to the same trend of internationalization and rationalization. It seems taken for granted that change is economically rather than politically ordained. For all the distance taken with the transition-to-democracy paradigm, the perspective on the political is the conventional one: that the socially recognized society keeps being politically dominated. In qualifying as "bourgeois" the régime's social change in political scope, I characterize a mode of recognition in relation to subjectivation that points to another order of politics: an order in which the political dimension amounts to a process of mutual recognition (of state and subjects) superseding the subject's active participation and separating the political and social realms.

This is precisely what Hegel means with the concept of "bourgeois society" *(bürgerliche Gesellschaft)* elaborated in his philosophy of law (1820) against both the liberal conception of modern, post-revolutionary politics, and the total power enacted in ancient (pre-revolutionary) "absolutist" politics. *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is not civil society as we know it, nor does it designate the bourgeoisie as a social class. As a way for opening an equally living and durable alternative to liberalism and democracy, it separates the social scene from the political scene, thus protecting the state from social interferences, and the individuals from state encroachments (while the liberal-democratic civil society is supposed to shelter society from state interferences). It recognizes in this marriage-cum-separation the effect of the historical rise of the urban bourgeoisie and takes the parallel development of the legal apparatus as a counterweight (and partner) to a congenial political power (once the dialectics embedded in history make it that the partner becomes congenial). It thus anticipates the Juste Milieu frame of political authority and social progress. More importantly, it complements the Juste Milieu theory on the manifest bourgeois design of history (laid out by Guizot during the 1820s) by articulating the mutual recognition of state and society on what may be read as a theory of subjectivation. The bourgeois is final in that it is the subject who objectively achieves full historical consciousness. A rather narrow-minded property owner, or provincial notary, etc., on the subjective scale alone, it is elevated to historical consciousness by the bourgeois state. The richness of Marx's famous criticism of Hegel's theory of law, and of his early writings, is in fact his debt to Hegel in this respect (subjectivation as opposed to subjects) – and one source of inspiration for Li Zehou's theory of "subjectality". In both cases, the idea is to equate subjectivation and subjects *in the subjects*, while Hegel equates them only in the state.

In the "bourgeois society", the state is at once separated from and within the notary or the landlord, not through a system of political rights and representation (which would bring citizens so to speak into the political state while preventing the state from invading their civil life), but through a process of mutual recognition. The state alone embodies the "objective spirit" (the people-nation-history) and is legitimate in public action. Many social subjectivations and social recognitions are possible in society; higher recognition and higher subjectivation belong to the state as the one-subject in which all recognize themselves. Due to mutual recognition, the state is not a total one in that the *recognized* social sphere endures besides the political one. The state is no less bourgeois than the subjects are, and performs as the supreme recognizer only by being subjects-recognized as such. In Hegel's view, the universal

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[123]   Bergère, 2007.

[124]   Bayart, 2008.

[125]   Mengin, 2015.

recognition of the subjects between themselves requires that the subjects recognize a universal entity: the state is universally recognized as the universal recognizer by being the universal mediator. Durkheim's division of social labor is completed by the division of political labor and applied (as it were) to the Juste Milieu universe – a balanced world of recognition, not a domination (according to theory). Subjects are politically left alone if they politically leave the state alone, and are fully human as such, and full national citizens, because the functional separation is a political union. By joining the two aspects, the notion of mediation supersedes that of recognition and representation. It is essential for our purpose to understand that this theory is post-revolutionary: that it is an answer to the dramatic figures of excessive separation and union that Hegel sees tearing world history apart all the way to the supreme chaos of the Terror during the French revolution. For the mature as well as for the younger Hegel, subjects are constructed along the patterns of subjectivation he studies logically and historically under the heading of *Geist* (mind and "objective spirit"). But unlike his earlier idea of recognition as an intersubjective process (which inspired Axel Honneth in reverting to Kant's practical philosophy),[126] his mature conception rests on the triangle of recognition-subjectivation-mediation that singles out the state as a greater subject separated from society and only joined to it and accountable to it through the processes of recognition, so that the mediating function eliminates the twin excesses of ancient régime absolutism (no political participation: the state stifles the political) and revolutionary tyranny (overreached participation whereby the subjects ruin the political).The post-revolutionary universe is final (historically) in that it is the one in which the ancient régime of absolutist impositions on subjects and the revolutionary régime of subjects-based politics come to an end. The latter proceeds from the emancipation trend in the modern age (of Enlightenment) whose crowning achievement has to be political (subjects can't be fully subjected as subjects without becoming free citizens), and degenerate in terror because (as we saw in mentioning Hegel's theory of terror in *Phenomenology of Geist* for explaining Maoist subjectivation) subjects-based politics produce total political subjects who do not differentiate between the state and themselves and bring down public institutions (Michelet's tyrannical anarchy). Hegel's modern version of the classical criticism of mass tyranny certainly forewarns against the possible effects of subjects-based de-institutionalization processes that threaten established democracies, but it leaves no room for the liberal concept of liberty and for the politics of representation and institutionalization that have transformed the democratic conception. For him, the democratic society is not comprised of individuals able to balance several universes (along the Durkheimian model) by separating the public from the private, the private sphere from the state, and the state from subjects-based political action. Unlike the ancient régime, the democratic régime introduces power in the pattern of political subjectivation, which fosters the totalized subjects who ruin the political. As we saw, this is explaining the substance by the limit. Terrorism, not an accident, is a defining condition of the modern universe – a concept transposable to Mao's *bios politikos* (as we saw, while Liang Qichao's *xinmin* had to reckon with the institutionalized state). Revolution is therefore to be terminated (Napoleon's Civil Code) or avoided (Prussia's *Rechtsstaat,* state ordained by law and ordaining laws for the "bourgeois society") by recognizing the subjects as forming a society of subjects (bourgeois society as opposed to absolutist society), while separating the subjects from the practice of power in the state as mediator – in Juste Milieu more than in totalitarian fashion. In short, Hegel's alternative of recognition or revolution means modern as well as ancient total worlds leave no room for civilized subjects and civilized politics. Like Liang Qichao (as we have seen above) he conceived the divide of modern politics from the conservative, not liberal, standpoint.

In this system of withheld power by recognition, recognition and subjectivation patterns are not totalizing ones. The private citizen is an ordinary social subject attending his or her own private affairs and living in private social or individual world(s) while the state's mediation prevents them from being separated ("alienated") from the "objective" world – as is Gao Xingjian's "One Man" in the eyes of the

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[126]   Honneth, 1995.

mainstream, or Kant's moral subject in Hegel's critical eyes. Because authority functions as recognition, representing all by the CCP does not amount to totalizing power. A father, a teacher, an expert civil servant, a competitive manager, a landlord, a notary, a scholar, etc., have an authority of their own – not on a par with that of the state, but not challenged by it in their social realms. At this crucial juncture, it is essential to stress that (as for today's China, we may recall) representation means recognition. It is so, and recognition is representation in the patterns of subjectivation, only if the mediator differs from what is recognized-represented. Democracy is built on opposite premises and is supposed to develop means of deliberation and representation whereby the aggregated citizenry forms a whole able to speak to itself in spite of its divisions: the institutionalized mediations and the "democratic travail" that supplements them belong to society and form it, not to the state – in its capacity as political "institutionalizer" of liberties and rights, the state belongs to the democratic society.[127] Democratic politics hinge on the articulation of political representation and opposition, while recognition politics bar (in today's PRC) or underplay (in Juste Milieu France between 1830 and 1848) both. In recognition politics, the living historical experience allowing for comparisons of politics and ethos before and after revolution is what makes the state not limitless and lawless in practice: realized reason (in *Rechtsstaat*) has no use for the rule of law as a guarantee against tyranny. Besides the counter-history of terror, democracy is also rejected because it articulates the state on the massive divisions a modern society entails and makes it subservient to the particular interests that dominate it. The practice of power as recognition addresses the problem by separating the state from divisive interests as well as from divisive power. Xi Jinping's strong state complies with the blueprint in fighting corruption: it would no longer be the bourgeois society's bourgeois state if private interests were undermined. Such is the line we'll draw time and again in interpreting Xi's Maoist borrowings as deactivated imports into the world of recognition rather than as a resurgence of the world of revolution. *If* the line is not passed, social subjectivations will carry on as non-political ones, although, as we shall see, the social subjects are by construction, so to speak, political bourgeois by recognition.

This is the meaning I give to the word "bourgeois" in these pages: from middle-classed social subjects to recognized bourgeois, the crux in the Hegelian perspective is that *social subjectivations are state-determined but remain social self-subjectivations*. Marx's criticism was a pointed indictment of self-subjectivation by recognition, in which he saw a disguised domination cum alienation (later imputed to capitalism). Self-subjectivation by action was to take over in fostering free democratic subjects in what Marx called the civil society (encompassing the democratic state) – not far from the May Fourth activist ideal, and one of the sources of the modern conception of democracy as a political mirror-image of a society of subjects. For Hegel, being a bourgeois subject was not being a puppet of the state on the wrong side of history. It was the end of history, not of politics: the bourgeois world was to be constructed on its sound basis. For Marx, the pseudo-end was a new beginning because it left out those who did not belong to the recognizing compact and were socially (as well as politically) dominated. Action v. recognition: political dynamics in today's China (including Xi Jinping's pseudo-Maoist revival) do not replay Hegel's alternative of recognition or revolution, but they certainly underline that the world of recognition is not depoliticized. Before examining how the *patterns of recognition* work politically, we have to take a closer look at how they command the patterns of subjectivation.

Patterns of Differential Recognition

In today's China, as in Hegel's bourgeois society, patterns of subjectivation are patterns of recognition. For the mainstream, the patterns of recognition are mutual: they do acknowledge the social-political divide, that is *do not* produce subjects who question in a fundamental manner the authority of the state through

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[127]   Rosanvallon, 1998 and 2000.

which the subjects are publicly recognized. In the Chinese bourgeois setting, the public recognition of the private still holds the line and is bestowed by the state. In a further bias, the *public* lines of recognition are blurred. In Maoist China, official recognition was politically complex (because division inhered in the practice of power) and socially simple: it did not exist socially. In post-revolutionary China, the picture is inversed. Complexity is now on the social side – the side of society *and the social side of the state*. Instead of clear-cut lines, we witness interface dynamics illustrating the loose set of straddling social processes in the state and in the social spheres no one controls centrally that social scientists call *state formation* (*state building* differs in that it is in the hands and in the programs of central elites and powerholders).[128] Power by recognition interferes with state building in that it rests on the superiority of the recognizing power (the vertical party and, now, of the top leader over the party) over the state, law, and the various recognized social sectors, groups, fragments, as well as over the recognized social subjects. While they are no longer an underside, they are the objects of lesser forms of recognition and institutionalization. Although much field work has been done on state formation dynamics, especially at local levels where interface dynamics proliferate, the overall picture remains as blurred as the landscape – because the recognition process as such has not been identified as an object of investigation, and also because the "terrain" of state-social interfaces is in remarkable flux. In spite of the emergence in full light of the public-private divide, actual recognition patterns are often distorted. Unlike many analyses which look only at the social side, the best way to chart the complex map is to examine the lines of recognition through the *political* scope and reach of the state.

In this light, differential recognition translates as differential institutionalization. As we saw, the political scope of the state (qua party) has been changed from rallying and leading fighting classes to representing (by recognition) the people, the culture and the elites. Neither society, nor the middle class are represented as such. The political subject vis-à-vis the party is the people (now first in the list, as we noted). The political category is not more articulate than the social one: the self-styled subjects are the anonymous crowds who are supposed to partake of the "dream" myth and the "advanced elements" supporting the forward march. However, the political scope of normalization is more diversified in state-social terms. The emergence of the *minjian* (民間) world (usually translated as "sphere of the people" by contrast with that of the party-state) is the exact opposite of an underside, although it is not institutionalized as the party and state are. Once the régime broke with Maoism and revolution, the status, the legitimacy and the actual operation of the power structure could not have been conceivable and sustainable had it not been for the indirect political recognition bestowed on selected groups that took place under the politics of normalization. As I remarked in referring to E. Jourda's study, the United Front (politics and organization) has been crucial for widening and rearticulating the social scope of the state: nothing short of designing the new compact by mapping the social setting in the perspective of differential recognition, since it encompasses a web of self-organized non-official organizations whose proliferation in full light is one of the major signs of indirect (or "unrecognized") recognition attached to the new social-political balance. This is why I prefer seeing in the so-called "sphere of the people" not the space of society vis-à-vis the state, not even an unofficial sphere (since many segments are quasi-official, notably those in the normalized purview of United Front politics), but a continuum of lesser recognition – and paramount political importance – that does not entirely keep away from officialdom.

Minjian could not and did not exist in Mao's China. The privatization trend was carried by social dynamics whose implications were either distance or resistance because there were at the time no economic-social spheres where the subjects could have socially survived as politically disconnected social subjects (the urban margins of unemployed vagrants were… marginal). As we saw, the community-centered parallel world was a political horizon, if only because everyone and every structure had to function by

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[128]   On the crucial distinction between *state building* and *state formation*, see Berman and Lonsdale (1992) and Jean-François Bayart's review of their book (Bayart, 1994).

using the general political idiom and appropriating the prescriptive practices of power. The "sphere" is mainly comprised of non-state organizations, associations and groupings, performing quasi-official tasks (notably the religious ones) in lieu of mass organizations, or centered on private, communal, cultural or entertainment purposes and loosely attached to the administrative structure. The associative segments are for the most part politically indifferent, while the more sensitive organizations (like the religious ones and the United Front ones) are proactive and perform an essential role in providing relays. It has been seldom remarked that the very existence of the people "between themselves" (literal rendering of the Chinese expression) is in fact a political construct. This makes it the equivalent of what *min* ("people") was in late imperial bureaucratic parlance (when the word for the modern notion of "society" did not exist): it was not defined as the realm of the individuals, or of the communities, of local religions, let alone of the "minute people" (other expressions existed for this), but by the position of all these elements in toto vis-à-vis the state. The "total" included the local elites of non-degree holders who, as we saw, were of strategic importance locally for extending the reach of the state and for its social scope as a whole. Normalization politics recognize in the same way the social-political appendices of government. The *minjian* sphere, like the sphere of communal affairs in late Qing times, is anything but a unified and self-institutionalized space. As *min* was, *minjian* is *politically* specified as social (while *shehui* (社會), the modern Chinese word for "society", emerged as socially specified in a commending sense valuing the self-structuration potential of social subjects). In short, *minjian* is not society, it is *the state by default* – the power structure whose self-limitation (or organizational weaknesses) present interstitial "niches" of conditional and lesser recognition, not always tightly controlled but not established under rights of association guaranteed under the rule of law. As we shall see, political dynamics flourish at the interfaces in a continuum of public and private, pro-action and contest.

Recognition lines are also enmeshed and blurred in view of the poor differentiation between party and state. The post-revolutionary state keeps being the party's state, that is its arm in matters of governance, justice and police, not the politically institutionalized form of government overlooking the administrative, judicial and security structures. In terms of norms and administrative-legal practices, the change has been visible in many domains, from the day-to-day running of the civil administration and judicial matters to the constitutional order. The line has fluctuated between practices of power, practices of governance and legal practices, always to the advantage of the former – and always in increasing the dense administrative-bureaucratic mesh. Many monographs document what Vivienne Shue analyzes as "state sprawl" at the local-social level.[129] State densification does not necessarily entail dynamics of involution such as the ones Prasenjit Duara diagnoses in the very different context of rural North China in the 1930-1940s.[130] Far from retreating since the 1980s, the state has progressed. Analyzing the counterproductive effects in organizational terms (or as so many bureaucratic patterns) without differentiating between party and state does not help our purpose, which is to see the state as a horizon of recognition shaping subjectivation lines. The relative position of party and state is therefore not an epiphenomenon.

Albeit it has become "governmental" rather than revolutionary, the party keeps on with the de-institutionalized perspective on the political that places it above the state (above the nation was the phrase when the GMD was a dictatorial party). Moreover, the principle is minutely implemented in the double-helix structure that envelopes all state institutions and agencies, while the party creates cells in the new social entities (such as private enterprises) which the state is content to regulate from afar. The result is that "distant" or "indirect" regulation is never so distant and indirect, and that the lines of command an authority as well as the rules are confused. If anything, the substance of change is to be found more in the fact that the party and its branches do change (in terms of norms, practices, personnel) than in a

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[129]   Shue, 1995.

[130]   Duara, 1988.

decisive change in the dual structure. The nuance may seem thin and an unnecessary sinuosity in the analysis. Yes, it is of paramount importance for explaining how the subjects may be at the same time assertive and unsure of the context in which they live and work, which entails subjectivation patterns integrating the fact that power is always something to be mistrusted because it is never exactly located. Whatever progress is made, state governance remains constrained by the authority of party agents at all levels and by the party-tilted normative hierarchy. In sum, the intricate process of régime and state change has maintained the party-state entanglement. The state has changed the régime and the changed régime has changed the state, but régime change has been such that the changed state may not come to full fruition.

Nowhere is this constraint more visible than in the realm of law. Probably the most effective thrust of the state-building policies that have reoriented the new course from post-Mao political deactivation to post-revolutionary social recognition, the "legal system" is yet another (pliable) arm of the state – not rule of law in progress, not even Hegels' *Rechtsstaat*. Government by law is recognition-based, not rights-based (in the sense the rule of law entails rights-based patterns of recognition). For Hegel, historically realized reason is embodied in the conservative spirit of equilibrium that conserves the social-political divide. In "ordinary" practices, legal recognition is not a bulwark against political-bureaucratic-police fiat plus vested interests. Its actual operation amounts to another type of lesser recognition. Nonetheless, the "ordinary" use citizens make of the vast judicial system[131] shows that recognition politics plus legal state-building mean social subjects absorb the state in private interactions (as third party) more than they litigate against it. The state is far more present (and legitimate) in social life than along the activist fault-line. "Spontaneous" divisions in the depth of society leading to litigation more than compensate the state-society imbalance. Similar developments occurred in late late-imperial times, with historians debating on the very existence of a "civil justice" v. administrative-penal power and customs in the rise of private-matters litigation. Built upon the reformed-empire and republican basis (including the coded differentiation of civil, penal and administrative), today's legal construction preempts the debate in favor of the (legal) "privatization" of justice – and of the state. Social subjects are legal subjects, though law is less "objective" and productive of the (free) "bourgeois society" than in Hegel's model. Social appropriations question the society v. state paradigm in several important ways. The balance of social empowerment and state power (and hindrance) is not a fixed relation, nor a solid confrontation, and should not be viewed in the sole light of the activists making use of rights and laws to put pressure on state authorities (to which we turn below). The evolution of legal contents in relation to legal operations should be observed in the general case in order to assess how interfaces are moving contact areas of state and society, but also of society and society. Anyhow, the widespread legal practices do empower the law-professionals who promote the cause of independent law. Cause lawyering points to a blind spot in the agenda of May Fourth activists who did not single out (let alone merge) the issues of law, constitutional order and human rights (as we saw, the merging did not occur before the beginning of the GMD dictatorship). In using and defending rights stipulated under law, the law-militants designate the state dimension of the rights issue (the good state is not the one that governs by law but the one that is governed by it) within the permitted perimeter that separates activism from dissent.[132] The line, like all lines of lesser recognition, is conditional. Under Xi Jinping, those who do not conform narrowly to professional standards are threatened into silence.

While the equilibrium of politics and bourgeois society restricts the legal subject, social trends that empower social subjects as such are not restricted. The specialization and professionalization tuned to international education in personnel recruitment and management (in party, state organizations,

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[131]   Balme, 2016.

[132]   Bout, 2013.

publicly-owned enterprises, etc.) is a case in point. During the 1980s, the factory director responsibility system gave the first inkling of the trend that has centered managerial tasks and responsibilities on individuals not performing as officials and community leaders but hired on a contractual basis integrating their competitive capability as professional managers.[133] The (by then untouched) "web of factory interests"[134] was not torn apart in one stroke: it took the spectacular transformations in enterprise governance during the following decades to fully recognize managerial subjects. The "normal" (international) system of governance, formation, professionalization, selection and career advancement is no longer emergent, and subjectivation patterns are no longer extracted from the socialist-communal mold. Self-subjectivation and middle-classing processes have taken the upper hand. The professionals view themselves as subjects who happen to work for economic (enterprises), administrative (state), political (party) entities, not primarily as emanations of the entities (although group loyalty may be strong, as it was with Japan's "Salary man" and still runs high according to the most recent international norms). The more important part played by self-subjectivation does not produce social outcasts and rebels. As was the case with local community leaders in late imperial society, microsocial-individual subjectivation patterns are a legitimate practice of power in terms of career outlook, *guanxi*[135] network, social integration, etc., just as self-styled lives are legitimate in a standardized normative environment. The significant difference is that individually oriented subjectivations are not restricted to leadership profiles in communities. The historical breakthrough (not a complete obliteration of the older norms and mores) did not occur with the rise of late-imperial merchant communities but with the emergence of the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie (and the modern entrepreneurial subject) in Republican Shanghai.[136] In full alignment with the basic patterns of recognition, social practices empower self-engineered social individuals who are all the more social and individual in fitting the overall social arrangement at the proper place while promoting their private agenda. Thus, political participation through party membership and careers converges with competitive personal training and private advancement. Jerome Doyon's study of the China Youth League shows these practices at work. The processes of formation, recruitment, career management and social networking as well as the balancing acts between adhesion, compliance and privatization, can be depicted as depending on the individuals' agency in relation to the institutional setting and to the international environment.[137] This line of recognition is clear-cut and remains so. As I explain below, the process is not reversed by Xi Jinping's proclaimed neo-activism.

The dynamics of subjectivation by professionalization, competition and hierarchization may be analyzed as "social", including the international dimension, in the sense they do not have to be imposed from above but are socially coded into subject's agency. Such is the case, more generally, in the patterns of subjectivation as regards the processes of recognition by (and the recognition of) common norms and values. The line of recognition in selecting and promoting personnel is elitist and meritocratic. Juste Milieu society is not egalitarian, it is hierarchical and elitist. Rather than the supposedly ageless Confucian pattern, the Chinese counterpoint is (for us) clearly the nineteenth-century pre-reformers' idea of selecting (not electing) talents gathering around the emperor for strengthening the state's political authority. The middle class is therefore to be re-classed and better recognized from the top through positions and competitions for positions in officialdom as well as in the economic sector. Classification and recognition by the top resulting in individualized competition reinforce Janus-like patterns of subjectivation that on one side depend on strict social conformity and on the other promote singular qualities and characteristics. Such developments indicate that individual agency in the ("performing")

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[133]   Chevrier, 1990b.

[134]   Walder, 1987.

[135]   Personnal relationships (關系).

[136]   Bergère, 1989; Cochran, 1999; Cochran and Hsieh, 2013.

[137]   Doyon, 2016.

social subjects is not primarily constructed (and recognized) through life-styles but belongs to the same socially sanctioned (and state approved) choice of conducts that are socially sanctioned and state approved. Recognition by professionalization and elitist competition reinforces the agency of private subjects in ways that justify the general analysis (relative to the middle-classing subjectivation patterns) of individually distinguished subjects (and distinguishing patterns of subjectivation) not producing individuals, but social subjects. The superior, competitive agents are, in a way, activists of themselves for the common good. Xi Jinping's agenda would increase the visibility of the public side of the coin rather than debase the currency (as a genuine Maoist revival would). This is one important index we shall have to keep in mind in discussing (below) the difference between policies that are Maoist by inspiration but belong to another historical dimension, and Mao's politics which, under Xi, would be what Xi's politics are not: the bane of bourgeois China and of its bourgeois subjects.

In other words, Xi's ideological campaign aims at reinforcing the public dimension in the recognition of the social subjects by and in a collective ethos. The elitist-meritocratic values that characterize the ethical pattern of recognition could be Juste Milieu as well as Confucian, but the crux of the matter – the fact that subjects are legitimized as private subjects by their normalized private agency with no reference to rights but to socially prescribed attitudes (professional, social, political) – seems to point to the ritualistic environment that Confucianism exemplifies. This pattern does not exclude the legal formatting of the received social norms in civil and penal articles of laws (a significant part of the legislative activity is precisely devoted to this), but the legal aspects are subservient to the typically ritualistic ones. Social rituals base recognition not on rights but through the performance of preconstructed social conducts accompanied by conventional narratives. Control follows from the repetition of conducts and roles (like machine learning operates in order to generate artificial intelligence), not from the implementation of general-universal rules. Ritualization involves singular subjects being socially empowered by way of subjectivation patterns that are normalized but do not perform as standardized. It has been tempting (when the "Asian Tigers" were taking off and when Taiwan was not a democracy) to idealize[138] and even ideologize[139] a so-called Confucian-ritualistic-Chinese social model v. the supposedly individualistic-legalist-democratic Western one. The deep difference is that the ritualistic-elitist-meritocratic society is valued per se (as not mechanically driven), while the Western inclusion of debates on the social norms in the "mechanical" political space is depicted as resulting in a mechanical society. In such perspectives the legal system is a useful instrumental adjuvant (not even Hegel's principal factor in the making of the modern bourgeois society). We may recall that ritualism was also invoked for "explaining" Mao's techniques of power (as opposed to bureaucratic-police means), while other scholars found them disruptive. Such ahistorical reconstructions are of little use and are typically exposed to value-confrontations and political use and abuse, because they do not make use of the incomparable advantage of historical comprehension for entering emic worlds by using etic means. In looking at the subjectivation patterns in the Chinese bourgeois world as it stands, we may remark that D.A. Bell's "China model" of "political meritocracy" points to the distance between actual attitudes and the neat order dreamed by the régime. The further (unintended) result of Bell's ideological elaboration is to signal the deeply conservative orientation of the social processes involved in middle-classing subjectivations that leave political matters in the (trusted) hands of the political authority. Elitist professionalization belongs to the general trends of socially-ordained ethical recognition, the entirely new phenomenon in China (new in scale) of the self-centered (I do not write: individualized) private citizens who construct their self by choosing not to address the political world in which they wish to live (they take the extant one for granted), but their career and life-style which at once integrates the new deal's social norms and exemplifies their singular, unique, and carefully cultivated pursuit of happiness and fulfilment. In other worlds, Bell's ethos-based

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138   Vandermeersch, 1986.

139   Bell, 2015.

political model points to what mutual recognition politics could and would be if all subjects were in effect bourgeois and history was at an end: a de-institutionalized utopia. In actual practical terms, it arks back to the conservative-authoritarian cultural formatting of compliance and order under social and government authorities, the Chinese model of which was elaborated by Liang Qichao, as we saw, in his quest of a strong and stable post-revolutionary government. On the other hand, we may also recall that Liang Qichao laid the basis for conservatism in China by insisting that modern politics could not function just as an ethos and had to be institutionalized.

The ethical patterns of subjectivation enact the crucial emic-etic feature that *standardized social conducts do not imply standardized private subjects*. Public subjects, however, are to align on the ascriptive moral-national-political-social formatting implanted by party and state from cradle to grave in the subject's mind and behavior. State intervention plays a strategic part in translating roles into rules entailing administrative-social penalties and judicial punishment. "National studies" and the investigation of "national characteristics" have received official recognition, in line with the revival of Confucian ethics. Beyond the (modern) standard conservative model and Liang Qichao's blueprint, the ethical drive that builds on the ritualistic-normative pattern recalls the imperial tradition of *xinmin* and *jiaohua*. In fact, the party has not only ended Mao's cultural war but also transformed its tradition of rectification from revolutionary-political to post-revolutionary-ethical in seeding and cultivating a "spiritual civilization" encompassing party, state and society. We should remark, however, that the "civilization" is to be socialist and that ethical patterns per se belong to a lesser form of recognition since the party is officially Marxist, not nationalist, not Confucian, not moral – not even social – the officialized turn in this direction being the switch to government qua government and the recognition of the people in its cultural continuity. In representing the cultural continuity, the CCP maintains its technique of rectification at the same time as it loads the common ethos on board the after-revolution vessel. In this light, and in spite of the differential recognition, the technique appears as a tradition on a par with the embarked traditions, much as Liang Qichao's reworked tradition was supposed to express the "national characteristics" conforming to the "national character" of the Chinese people while allowing for modern transformations. In other words, the technique of political rectification is henceforth encompassed into a neo-tradition of cultural-ethical engineering capitalizing on the people's and the party's common roots. It is plain, therefore, that the building impetus in the conservative dynamics is not a revival of the past tradition, but of the past as tradition, which encompasses the revolutionary past (in typical Juste Milieu logics) and is the very montage signified by the second "representation".

Thus, conservatism finds in the politics of recognition a specific ecology that differentiates it from nationalism and culturalism while still relying on them. Whereas they can (and did) stress variants of the nation-state in stateless form (the patriotic-activist nation of May Fourth, the cultural nation of Westernizing and neo-traditionalist intellectuals), conservatism typically depends on and addresses the political nation. The difference is not in the ideological components. It inheres in the ethical turn of recognition politics, and, more fundamentally, in the fact that, unlike nationalism and culturalism which could thrive in the context of the missing state (as compensating assertions of the nation by non-state actors whose perspective did not primarily encompass the state as the vector of the national endeavor), conservatism (like liberalism) stuttered in this context and needed a strong state in order to thrive as a fully developed ideological alternative. From stateless to state conservatism (and state-led social-ethical conservatism), the difference is not in conservatism; it lies in the state of the state. The historical fate of ideologies (we may recall our remarks about anarchism and activism at the start of the twentieth century) is not determined (and explained) by ideological factors alone. As a result, conservatism is more secure as an ideology under the stable CCP in a stable after- revolution than it was under the weaker GMD régime of the 1930s during an after-revolution that turned out to be a pre-revolution. As the state is a conservative recognizer that does not institutionalize the political, liberals and democrats are still missing

a state in the liberal-democratic capacity, and the impaired ad hoc ideologies still show the biases of their earlier history, with liberals reckoning with the strong state and democrats making democracy depend on social transformations engineered by the authoritarian régime. This "conditional" conception of liberty and democracy[140] is in fact interstitial, and the intellectual equivalent of the interstitial condition of activism in the contexts of the missing state. The alternative can't be found in democratic Taiwan. The non-communist régime remains a missing state in Chinese and world geopolitics and, although economic and political ties with the PRC are numerous and weigh on Taiwanese politics as so many "fragments of an unfinished war",[141] the democratic life engages practices, addresses issues (notably of identity), and thrives on international references that belong to an entirely different historical continent. The insular political construction is for a sizable share of the citizenry a national establishment and no longer one of the "bifurcations" P. Duara[142] has diagnosed in the early making of the Chinese nation-state. While Taiwan drifts away, Hong Kong is caught and not available as a viable alternative, since the local government imports Beijing's state conservatism, while the impeached opposition is denationalized – as it is in the PRC. One way or the other, state conservatism has no real ideological challenger, except (to the left of the spectrum) the loose galaxy (at some point identified as "New Left") of anti-capitalists who cultivate the revolutionary nostalgia and the Maoist sense of social levelling while trading Mao's activism for a strong state whose "capacity" should be enhanced in order to better serve the people. We shall see Xi Jinping flirting with some of these themes without forsaking the conservative marriage of stable state and Juste Milieu politics that characterizes the after-revolution.

One consequence of this analysis is that social subjectivation patterns that seem to generate self-centered subjects do integrate the state dimension in the conservative perspective entailing the separation of the legitimate social sphere from the legitimate state. As we shall see, this is of paramount importance for explaining the politics in recognition politics that can be (and indeed are) misread as "depoliticization". Due to the (politically) strong state effect, being a conservative in today's China is not like what it was when the state was weak in addition to being missing, and is not just an assertion of nationalism, not just a relation to the past and to authority. It qualifies a vision of social action primarily founded in the state but not denying the social side in the name of voluntarism (as Mao's revolutionary vision did), while not allowing the social side to become the sole purview of individualized subjects. Subjects may be self-centered provided they belong to the community and exemplify its values, not to the point where their freedom would ruin the edifice. The further advantage of the ethical construction that underpins conservatism in today's China is that it welds the cultural-ethical nation to the political nation without the party having to acknowledge nationalism and culturalism. On the ethical-political front, the prime issue is therefore not that old-style rectifications and clean-ups could bring the ethical turn to an end. Like many other old-style techniques of power, they never were discontinued and belong to a habitus that has also become a neo-tradition. The anti-(official) corruption campaign belongs to this standard repertoire. The question we'll have to ask about Xi Jinping's politicization drive is whether the campaigns remain within the party (as the severe ones during the eighties) or overflow (like they did under Mao) – whether action replaces recognition, politics ethics, revolution neo-tradition and the political nation.

The purpose of ethical education is not to mobilize and not solely to control, but to normalize and recognize by normalization. Moral education, social education, national education and political education form a continuum of prescribed-received values through the exemplification and the performance of the ritualized public conducts. The popularization of Maoist heroes (like Lei Feng) has preceded Xi Jinping's much commented new wave of Mao's collective activism. The ethical aspect of recognition is less demanding on the individuals than Mao's invasive activism because it does not require them to

[140]   Frenkiel, 2014.

[141]   Mengin, 2015.

[142]   Duara, 1995.

perform politically. But as privatized subjects they are expected to perform socially according to the common norms and by public and private performances of the prescribed conducts. The self-fashioning freedom is to be understood as the addition of (harmless) idiosyncratic conducts and roles conform to the recognized repertoire. Conforming individualities patterned out according to a prescribed frame that, however, does not appear as an outside constraint on each subject's free judgment – such is the trick of the ritualistic ethos. The commonality of the norms excludes or disparages non-conforming roles with a remarkable span ranging from unauthorized politics to repressed gender and trans-gender identities. While the social movement is driven by subjects who risk violating the ethical compact by confronting the authorities and have to fight for obtaining a modicum of recognition for their cause, some criticize the ethical order as such rather than indicting the social order. The disruptive literature I alluded to is a case in point. Individuals who do not recognize themselves (for various reasons) in the recognized roles vent their uneasiness and their anger on the social networks too. In a not unexpected way, the common repertoire is questioned as an ethos (which it is for those who successfully style their life according to it) in the name of the "old" ethos, the moral one, the revolutionary one, the modern one, the individualistic one, the nihilistic one, etc. Writers, filmmakers, artists people, the artistic continuum stretching from mild criticism to utter disgust and dissent that is typical of bourgeois societies. For the mainstream, the conformation of subjectivation patterns allows the subjects to be with their self and with the social world. Activism is not on the agenda, except in the self-serving form I have called self-activism.

Exerting authority in such context seems normal, legitimate, necessary and not obtrusive provided the authority conforms to the context and, therefore, does not appear as abusive. The state is therefore legitimate in asserting public authority with authority. And in making ethical recognition clearer and sharper. Since visible roles, rather than abstract rules, are primarily to be watched and performed, automatized video-surveillance of public spaces seems well indicated for enhancing the system's capacity while not contradicting the principles. In other words, efficiency is to be added to efficacy. The enhanced surveillance does not address private conducts in making them public (which they are by construction) but in having them *evaluated, judged and retributed by the public*. It is supposed to better realize the spirit of mutual recognition by rendering it mechanical because (for the supporters, who are many), as with block-chained bitcoins, it automates away the individual fluctuations regarding the application of norms in appreciating misconducts and replaces the authorities in passing judgement. The pursuit of power would then embark the subjects to Big Brotherhood, realizing with their consent Mao's dream – and the reverse: not the completely politicized total state but the completely depoliticized total society. Would this chilling perspective succeed in making the ritualistic bourgeois utopia real, or would it, in Brave New World or 1984 fashion, realize *with the subjects' participation* the mechanism of total control that would destroy at once the basis of ritualized recognition and that of mutual post-revolutionary recognition thanks to which subjects exist in the first place? I am not judging subjects, nor condemning or approving the régime. As I did in entering Mao's activist zealots' world, I look into subjectivation patterns delivering *such* subjects. But are they what they seem destined to be – from a different world, which is also that of the critics and discontents who, however, in *that* world are the voice crying in the desert, *vox clamantis in deserto?* Can we judge there are or will be no subjects left – when the performing middle class is becoming more diversified, professionalized and stratified and, besides forming vocational elite groups recognizable in society if not (yet) organized as such, is comprised of social subjects – the very subjects who privately self-style their life and pursue their self-styled form of happiness? Received wisdom has it that subjects are where the state, officialdom, bourgeois ethics and the bourgeoisie are not: in the democratic opposition (mostly in jail and exiled), in the (still "interstitial") social movement(s) and in the activist parts of *minjian*. Religions, for instance, have for long seemed to be (and seem again) an excellent terrain for observing patterns of subjectivation in which neither the

state nor the social setting play the dominant part.[143] Yet, not unlike the dynamics observable from early modern to late imperial times, the overarching contextual (political) determinations are never far[144] and the religious revival does not contradict the massive mainstream social conservatism that tallies with the régime's conservatism. Interface dynamics that are active in the organizational web and normative ordering underpinning the Confucian revival[145] clearly work in the conservative sense. But conservative orientation and cybersurveillance notwithstanding, the de-subjecting future is not a foregone conclusion. Individuals do escape from the political-ethical trap.

The uses of the social networks are eloquent in this respect. The régime's heavy censure certainly alters what the contents would be if no censure occurred, but probably not the imbalance (in China as elsewhere) between the "opinion" posts and the other ones – mainly "subjective" gestures (not to say narcissistic) in origin, intent and content. To the in-built bias reflecting consumer attitudes (if one speaks of alienation, it is not specifically Chinese), the régime adds a deluge of ready-made political messages that leave only a tiny minority searching for more (and critical) information. The crux of the matter is to make access to other sources costly (in time and money) and to influence consumer behavior on a seemingly open market in addition to bluntly suppressing contents.[146] Yet, there is no reason to believe that politically free subjects would behave more politically on the web than they do in Europe or North America – and no reason to believe that the new ways for articulating the private and the public will not have effects more attuned to private singularities than to social standardization. There is more to individual agency in post-revolutionary China than the intellectual dissent and the social activism it has also revived. Self-fashioned subjects surfing on the (controlled) web are a massive social reality that eludes both the grip of the state and the democratic dream and yet produce and reproduce the common idiom. The myths of a democratic China by essence and of the subjects being political by essence were produced by the century-old history of the political which, together with the Maoist preemption of the myth, is over now. How, then, does a social ordering of the political taking the upper hand tally with the enhanced police state? The answer, troublesome as it is, lies perhaps in the agency of the subjects as they move across the new social classification, and in the fact that the ethic standardization receives a wide degree of acceptance from the subjects who owe their existence to the post-revolutionary normalization and recoup their difference in cultivating idiosyncratic styles. As a result, while automation gives normalization and recognition by normalization the chilling ring of standardization and seems to signal China's entry into a new (world) trend in establishing a new practice of power, my contention is that ethical standardization works over a society whose balanced foundations are not tilted in a fundamental way. The patterns of social recognition and subjectivation are not altered and, above all, are not standardized. One-dimensional subjectivations do not seem to be in the making. While typically middle-classing attitudes (consumer habits, etc.) depend notably on income levels and are not the general reality, they partake of the overall trend of eclectic experiences in the normalized context. Individuality in conformity could describe the ethical consensus that is emerging socially. There is not "one" typical subject – be it the dreamt "Chinese" of officialdom or the activist agent of counter-officialdom. There are many patterns of subjectivation associating the same basic elements in different orders. The resulting multiplicity (without rights and political pluralism) is part of the after-revolution political balance and does not fundamentally trouble it, although the task of the state (viewed as legitimate) is to unify and even standardize a collective ethos.

As a (mixed) result, the subjects in the political-ethical universe of middle-classed China are at once unidimensional and not, nuanced, mixed, sometimes confused, broken. Their life-styles exhibit this

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[143]   Johnson, 2017.

[144]   Goossaert and Palmer, 2011.

[145]   Billioud and Thoraval, 2014.

[146]   Roberts, 2018.

dual nature, and perhaps, also, their "basic" politics in that they condone the authority and may criticize and even take issue with the government (at lower levels) on particular issues. Styling up one's life in many singular (and yet standardized) ways results from (and in) individual self and family histories and memories which come to the fore in the private and public spaces. As our own environment makes clear, these variations on standards escape from banalization by the exaltation of the subjects' identities. They underline the fact that we witness individual practices rather than individuals. The social nature of these individuals is also enlivened by the vivid associative life (and the networked hubris) that ostensibly keeps away from politics but in many cases can be analyzed along the ambivalent lines of "avoiding politics" I analyze below. It is difficult, indeed, to draw a clear line between the various universes which form an individual's subjective existence. But subjectivation patterns are clear enough: they are clearly mixed, and recognition patterns are mixed as well, personal and collective, social and political. By focusing on personal experiences, individual memories and the private shaping of identities, historians have uncovered the face of the 20th century that is not political, even in the worlds of politics, even under Mao. But they have also lost track of the political in the seemingly non-political micro-social and subjective worlds taken as objects. Under the proper lens, personal, cut-off experiences, far from Liang Qichao's New Citizen, appear suffused with political overtones and implications – I am tempted to write: replete with political intention not manifested in an ideology, a program, a denomination, an agenda. Let us reread in this light Bryna Goodman's analysis of unmet expected commitment in "The Crime of Economics: Suicide and the Early Shanghai Stock Market".[147]

Conservative recognition patterns and the conservative mode of subjectivation are the ones that recognize the mixed aspects as an essential quality of the private and social life while drawing the political consequences in the authoritarian, non-pluralistic, direction. We should add to this observation the all-important fact that not institutionalizing the political in the state in favor of moral, ritualized, activist means, has for long been China's way (with the exception of the nascent period of modern politics between 1895 and 1915 – and Taiwan). Now the main means are social. Besides Hegel's Juste Milieu "avant la lettre", Liang Qichao, as we saw, admitted (a little more than one century ago) that the social sphere retained a legitimacy of its own (the virtue of the private ethos, *si de*) in the face of the public ethos (*gong de*) necessary for achieving the high goals of nation building. His thought took a conservative turn when he moved from acknowledging the legitimacy of the not-being-political attitude to legitimizing the authoritarian state (over his former belief in freedom and activism) as the one instance capable of bridging the gap – with the support of the public. The subjects could be social subjects under the undemocratic state. The authoritarian setting, coupled with a modicum of (elite) activism and, more importantly, supported by the ad hoc ethos based on the revamped tradition, was supposed to make them into proactive social subjects while the politically institutionalized political would be subjected to the superior authority of a strong leader presiding over a strong state. This is the conservative social and political span of post-revolutionary China and, still, the basis of Xi Jinping's politics. Conservative recognition patterns suppose a clear demarcation between social and political subjects, and between political and total subjects. As in Hegel's and Liang's blueprints, the de-totalized communist régime recognizes de-totalized, socially-accomplished subjects who are private self-centered subjects while its goal is to have the party-state embody the one and only political subject (as Hegel's state, Liang's strongman) in a more-than-ethical dimension. From social to total, the trespassing line is clear. As is the flaw in a construction of the political that does not work politically. We noticed that Hegel thought it as a strength because, in his view, the historical "spirit" embodied in the "rational state" (the one that implements the non-revolutionary social-political divide) prevented any trespassing. Liang trusted the leader's moral qualities (and his loyalty to the republican "form of the state"). We saw on the example of law how flimsy in the "real" world the historically "rationalized reason" can be. The incumbent régime is

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[147]   Goodman, 2010.

not terror-driven and not a "total state" any more but is no bulwark against such developments – nor is the ethical bondage. For the time being, the "total" move to Brave New World is for all practical purposes a social move in line with the balanced conservative politics of an after-revolution. This is how the subjects are more socialized than individualized, and the social aggregate more privatized than massified.

From End to Beginning: Politics in Recognition Politics

From this analysis it appears that in spite of the differential character of recognition, and of the classing of China on an unequal basis, the ethical ordering reaches society in the universal dimension while the scope of the party falls short of the proclaimed goal (of universal representation), thus bridging the gaps between the mutually recognized and recognizing bourgeois state and bourgeois subjects and the numerous planes of reality (in the power apparatus and in society) that are not bourgeois, do not implement the mutual character of recognition or contest that it can be mutual and universal under the present state of things. To the question: how the massive emergence of the "privatized" subjects – subjects qua subjects who are not supposed to be political – bears on the construction of the political, the answer is: social conservatism as the pivot of political authoritarianism. Thus, the ethical ordering of society complements the social ordering of recognition politics. Yet the politics of mutual recognition cannot be said to congeal a frozen world. As we just saw, they are embedded in state building policies that reach deep in society's dynamics, in living ethical patterns that are primarily reproduced by the social subjects, and by the socially mobile subjects. However, mutual recognition is a political construction determined by the end of revolution. What happens when the end becomes a beginning? The formula still operates at the level (I) where social subjects and governing authorities are bound by the mutual character of recognition and where the basic bondage goes on unchallenged – on both sides. But not unquestioned. Level II is precisely that of diffuse discontent, and of pointed action: not only dissent (not to be confused with an intellectual political-democratic opposition) expressed in various forms of contest tantamount to social activism, but also the action of government – tempted as it is to complement the post-revolutionary state-building policies by a return to state activism. Hence the parallel questions that inform the final part of this panorama: will the social subjects remain social, and action at level II remain within the bounds – the interstices – of the post-revolutionary political construction? Will the leadership's search for a new élan impair level I by reinstating Mao's politics? Be the outcome as it may, it is clear that the end-of-revolution settlement is in political travail – which I now examine.

The conservative compact, like all compacts, is strained and generates tensions, as the ones I already mentioned that disturb the social and ethical life (let us recall that the authoritarian setting does not allow for political disturbances). My view of Xi Jinping's emphasis on action is that it does not resurrect Maoism against the practice of power by recognition, and against the social subjects, but pulls on the activist string in order to better play the non-activist music. Suffice is to stress here (I return to the issue) that the priority-switch in the party's software giving pride of place to the representation of the people as a whole over the elitist-bourgeois "advanced elements" does not alter the basic principle of representation by recognition, but adds a "social" tinge to the overall equilibrium, as does the *xiaokang* promise (the modicum of middle-classed affluence now scheduled to become accessible to all by mid-century). As I remarked, unifying and even standardizing a collective ethos (on the party-state's agenda) does not mean that the party, being society's unique political representative as the unique political subject, becomes total again – because the society endures with the social subjects. Even though the social-ethical dynamics may not work as Hegel thought they would (i.e. refrain the state from reverting to total power), while assertive oneness and standardizing ambitions point to the total state, the texture of post-revolution politics points in the opposite direction. Standardization and oneness belong to the classic ambition of an assertive (central) state-building, not to total politics. Xi Jinping is adding political politics to the conservative package – much like a vote-seeking politician in an authoritarian democracy would. Some would call

the twist populist, or social, etc. Social conservatism, populist conservatism, Confucian conservatism, even neo-revolutionary conservatism – but conservatism – would be less misleading qualifications.

In a non-democratic context, offering no legitimate political alternatives in opposition parties, conservatism appears as the non-political mode of political subjectivation: as Hegel theorized, the régime is politically recognized by the subjects it recognizes socially. In after-after-revolution dynamics, it expresses the stand of the "ins" v. the "outs" (including many "in" subjects who are discontent and may move to social activism). The pressure (together with other aspects of social unrest, crime levels, etc.) cements the conservative compact it disproves, as it did in Juste Milieu France for the "résistance" against the "mouvement" (the fledging social-political tide comprised of bourgeois elements as well as intellectual and popular ones that ended the July Monarchy in 1848). Before looking at the "other side" (the side of social action), let us face, on the side of recognition, the problem of differentiating conservatism and "depoliticization".

In practicing power by recognition, the power system relies on the efficacy of old- and new-style techniques (police, security, electronic surveillance), but it also derives its power from being recognized by the recognized. This unwritten constraint is not to be ignored, even by Xi Jinping. As regards the subjects, in analyzing the recognition processes that bear on the subjectivation patterns, I have emphasized the political dimension of the prevalent social-ethical conservatism and the mixed aspects of the processes. Are they the forerunners of individualistic patterns in the making, or activists of themselves who will provide the régime with a lasting non-political political support? Liang Qichao's missing middle class (*zhondeng jieji*) does not seem to be missing any more. But the "political capacity" (*zhengzhi nengli*) of the people does not seem to increase in proportion. What, then, are we to make of the distance with politics mainstream middle-classed subjects maintain in spite of the fact (or because) they are close to a state that comes closer to them in many ways? Conservative middle-classing subjection is a social practice cut off from the practices of power. Social empowerment takes over after self-empowerment (May Fourth activism) and political empowerment (Mao). The contrast could not be sharper. The subjectivation patterns that integrate the distance do not produce anarchists or stateless activists in the sense of May Fourth – or of Gao Xingjian's "One Man" – but standardized bourgeois of sorts (most of them are salaried men and women) who seem to "avoid politics".

Can we, however, apply Nina Eliasoph's characterization of "avoiding politics" generating "apathy" among US citizens?[148] In China, the "avoiding politics" perspective on subjectivation would converge with (and result from) the social-ethical bend of the politics of de-revolution, that is with and from the typically conservative separation of the political sphere from the social sphere, and the prevalence of the latter in politics and in subjectivation processes. Yet, for such separation to exist, together with the ad-hoc ethos and a social sphere, de-revolution politics were needed – just as democracy, liberty and rights are taken for granted by Eliasoph's "apathic Americans" who may not remain so if they consider that they are threatened. In other words, avoiding politics works because the state is extant in the form and with the politics that have taken shape during the 1990s. My contention is that this feature does not just characterize the practice of power on the party-state's side. It also shapes the patterns of subjectivation as it does in Hegel's model of recognition politics. The politics in recognition politics are such that they may be construed as a massive wave of depoliticization when, in fact, they are nothing of the sort. For all the historical amnesia and political indifference they are credited with (and criticized for), social subjects know their very existence was impossible under Mao and know today's régime is the one that has brought about *their* world. Mao's post-mortem transmogrification is the key index. Xi Jinping's borrowings to the *former* Mao as well as ambivalences in the popular "Mao fevers" play on the rim of two historical worlds – the one of Mao's politics and the one of after-revolution politics in which Maoist

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[148]   Eliasoph, 1998.

politics are neither Maoist nor politics, but conservative policies in quest of a second souffle. The line gets complicated as it is politically and socially reworked, but the end of the ancient régime (both Mao's disruptive chaos and socialist collectivism) still is the threshold to the new way of life. The political-social divide central to recognition politics should not, therefore, be misconstrued as the structural opposition of power and society in the transition-to-democracy paradigm (which presupposes power and society are not linked politically).

A further argument that belies this myth is the multiplication of contact surfaces and of interface dynamics entailed by the wave of after-revolution state building and by the social development it encompasses. I remarked (in examining law and justice) that the state is mistrusted and feared as the locus of power. But it is also trusted and relied upon as the paramount mediator. "Good" central state v. "bad" local authorities (the ones the people are in close contact with) is therefore one of the topoi we see unfolding – in the classic opposition of monarch and minister, or good minister (Zhou Enlai) and bad tyrant (Mao). But there is more to it than the classic ambivalence in power (and in the perception of state power). The ubiquitous state makes us think that tensions and conflicts develop within its folds or between them and the enfolded subjects – thus forgetting that they also develop between the subjects as social groups and private interests. A good part of the protest dynamics that target the (local) state (examined below) denounce measures that do not benefit individuals or (local) power networks only, but groups or sectors of society while the other ones feel abused, neglected, disadvantaged. As we saw with litigation, the social question and the social movement(s) directed against the state engage a society that is getting at once thicker, more mobile and more divided. From every corner non-state dynamics evolve in interface dynamics that involve the state and signal a divided society as well. Those who view a mounting democratic trend fail to realize that in an open society a good share of these dynamics would pit social groups and interests against one another, and mistake the catch-all presence of the state (the multiplied contact surface of interactions) for a civil society rising against the state. The state appears double-faced: as universal mediator, the legitimate public horizon of a normalized society; and biased, corrupt, dominated by particular interests, a dominant power at pains for governing mounting contradictions in society that involve its branches and undermine its overall unity, taking sides in defending the interests of dominant social groups and even individuals (at the local level). No longer a disruptive factor, it can be again viewed as an object of contention and as exerting its power against the subjects' social development: Marx's side – and level II of the present political dynamics.

As I remarked, recognition does not preclude discontent, contesting opinions and even action aimed at the state's performance in terms of governance, but also in terms of justice and transparency. But social division does not translate as political division. The legitimacy of the criticized and contested de-revolutionized and de-collectivized state is another sign of its "normalization" and "banalization", from seemingly depoliticized middle-classing subjectivations, social activist subjectivations (no longer stateless, as we shall see), career-minded officials… to Xi Jinping (who is a state-builder and conservative guardian of stable authority more than a neo-Maoist rebel activist, as I explain below). If inclusion of several historical sources, rather than division and exclusion, is the trend in the making of the (mixed) normative order, the "normalized" state must be included in the inclusion. Just as Mao's activist terror was not the sole effect of coercion and alienation, the politics of recognition and the fact that most social subjects, if not entirely content, remain at level I instead of moving to level II, are not the sole effect of the suppression of dissent, of police repression of the social activists, and of a state-enforced conservatism. The middle-classing preference for stability and strong government is defensive in the classic bourgeois sense of resisting the tides of history – in the Chinese case, at the time of globalization, the feared danger would still come from inside (levelers launching a neo-leftist onslaught). In the wake of devastating civil strife, political abstainers need not be political-less subjects. They tend to be conservative. After the French religion wars at the start of the 17th century the "politiques" were those who abstained from

politics – with the overwhelming support of the public for the "strong" reign of Henri IV – a triumph in conservative politics. In sum, mainstream social subjects are not avoiding politics when they adhere to the politics of recognition – politics that differ from Maoist communism and from communism without Mao. That a seemingly non-political phenomenon (a "de-politicized" society) can be of such paramount political implication defines a Hegelian moment in Chinese post-revolutionary recognition and subjectivation patterns: the balance of a régime relying on the rise of subjects gaining a recognized status from themselves and from society and recognizing the state as private persons not compelled to enter the political sphere and as socially integrated subjects not "just being there".

I would therefore qualify my previous statement that the strong inclusion of the strong state in the general outlook is political in *social* terms. It is social in *political* terms as well: not in the sense the political dimension is absorbed in the ethos. It is political in viewing politics as a social practice. As I underlined, for mainstream subjects, power is not the issue. This explains how some vent anger at the (local) authorities and engage in activism without confronting the régime. The officials who interact in disputes and confrontations also see the social practice as a practice of power, but within the world created by the politics of recognition. The difference between power and politics not only seals the mainstream recognition compact but allows for activist contest (not viewed and suppressed as "counter-revolutionary"). The main axis in the construction of the political has moved from the activist political subjects' relation to power to the state and its social subjects in a relation of recognition that does not put power in the first place. The new era looks new inasmuch as such subjects steal the show from the activists who take issues with the authorities. However, as *this* side reminds us, the political dynamics of Juste Milieu China are not limited to the relation of the régime and the bourgeoisie. That of the bourgeoisie and the social movement is another major unknown. For the time being, the pressure is divided, localized and multifarious – socially dissolved – rather than centralized and unified – politically constructed. However, as *this* side reminds us, the political dynamics of Juste Milieu China are not limited to the relation of the régime and the bourgeoisie. That of the bourgeoisie and the social movement, and of the bourgeoisie to itself through the social movement, are other major unknowns. For the time being, the pressure is divided, localized and multifarious – socially dissolved – rather than centralized and unified – politically constructed. As a global assessment of the dynamics I examine below, it can be said that these dynamics do not reach a level III, amounting to the "movement" that grew against the conservative "résistance" and toppled the French bourgeois monarchy in 1848. But they surely indicate that the time of recognition politics as recognition is over, as does Xi Jinping's renewed élan. Although the end of ancient-régime communism and of Mao's revolution remains *the* landmark – the turn in subjects' lives and memories that gives a historical world its bounds, its depth and special "feel" (much as World War II did for successive generations in the West until the line of historical descent was severed at the turn of the twenty-first century) – it is not the final world. As the political dynamics of after-revolution unfold, the threshold is passed over, the inaugural event is no longer what shapes the present and the subjects' consciousness in the first place. Politics take over. How far back to Maoism will Xi's twist reach? If, as I argue, politics – Maoist politics – are not coming back in command, and if, as I believe too, the social movement will continue its interstitial existence, so that no activists turned into revolutionary democrats will end the status quo more than Lei Feng will outshine the *xiaokang* salaryman (and woman) on the rise, the political dynamics in the state and in the new society still have to be analyzed in the envelope of the post-revolutionary régime. The after-after-revolution is subject to dynamics in ways that strain and challenge the conservative compact while not confirming the transition-to-democracy paradigm.

The following pages relate this course to the subjectivation patterns. As I made clear, my view is that for all the extant standardization and cyber nightmare in the making, conditions are such that subjects' agency is not impaired – which does not necessarily translate in democratic prospects. I explain this seemingly paradoxical orientation by examining the conditions in the construction of the political, rather

than taking the view that the explanation is the massive presence of apathic subjects (the vast majority in the axial mass) experiencing the "withdrawal" that is so visible in the old democracies, crippling them, if not damaging their prospect as a sustainable form of government and at the very least demanding new political practices from those who do not despair. With or without democracy, with or without artificially "intelligent" Big Brotherhood, the gloomy vision, belying Tocqueville's, is that the more the subjects are constructed as individual social subjects, the more they deconstruct the political. Or is it that the subjective experience of institutional politics is never quite a match vis-à-vis the subject's personal expectations – without the subject forsaking democracy when it is there, and without actively compelling him/her to work for it when it is not – but when the subject is? Mao's Brave Old World involved the total subject in a total political world realizing total democracy. Rather than stating Mao politicized *tianxia*, we viewed his politics from the angle of subjectivation as not differentiating between the reach and the scope of the political as regards the subjects. Brave New World extends the reach of the political while reducing the scope to nought: we thus may rest assured that it will not be Mao's world in twenty-first century garb. Leaving the dismal perspective to a global questioning, the next pages examine the world of action – social action with the activists who drive the social movement, then political (re)-action with Xi Jinping's new politics.

Avoiding Power Politics: Social Activism and Interface Dynamics

Social activism is neither a rim world cut off from the values and concerns of the mainstream and tolerable as long as level II does not spill over into level III (political opposition), nor the voice of a muffled democratic society. It is not the world of (valuable) politics v. a world of non-politics (the supposedly immobile régime). It is primarily a world of social action in a context where the state occupies the legitimate central locus of the political. We may recall I drew lines between social and political activism (Mao's), and, concerning the former, between (social) activism with and without the state. Today's social activism in the PRC is neither May Fourth stateless social activism, nor Mao's state-led political activism. May Fourth activism, we may also recall, while embedded in social action, was political for being stateless: the activists invested the central locus of the political (albeit in non-state, decentralized – social – ways), and their action was meant to make itself legitimate as such. This is not the case of today's activists. They perform as political subjects in their own social spheres within the dominant state. As I suggested, such profile delineates para-political politics. In other words, they do not avoid politics; they avoid the power of the political center which enforces its domination and is deemed legitimate by the vast majority of Chinese, including the ones who voice discontent and may share some of the activists' views, and even join in some protest mobilizations.

The political dimensions we are dealing with require such qualifications. As for the subjects, a tempting and frequent overview of the present period is that there are now subjects in China while there were none under Mao. Leaving aside the manifest error, what would today's subjects be if not those who engage in social action and contest the existing order? The social activists would be the political subjects in an ocean of de-politicization. Furthermore, activism and *minjian* would more or less coincide. We just saw how misleading the confusion and the black-and-white view can be. In looking into the activist sphere, we also need nuances. While it is assuredly on the *other* side, it certainly is not an underside and absolutely not today's equivalence of the late-imperial world of secret societies and sects. The historical illusion (popular associations and movements rising against the authorities in "justified uprisings" (*qiyi* 起義) according to communist historiography) stops the second the state is considered: the contact surface, the interactions and the dynamics they entail are worlds apart, separated by the dense, systematic communist state building. Moreover, some of the social actions that contest the authorities (local ones most of the time) take advantage of legal channels and procedures. Some even meet (central) state goals in redressing abuses from lower levels. They do not question the social order as such more than they

question (or are permitted to question) the régime as such. That many middle-classed subjects participate in these movements is therefore not the sign of a Chinese 1848 in the making. Whatever the political intent of their action, social activists may therefore be defined in general from the state's perspective: subjects who avoid politics in politics.

From the angle of the activists it can be said that activist politics are a social practice lodged in the world of recognition that looks for recognition by action – not for power. Social subjectivations are de-revolutionized in the activists' perspective too. The activists avoid power politics by engaging the state in sectoral and localized power contests that allow their action to remain in the social sphere. The missing political construction of social activism prevents them from forming an "opposition party" as Jean Chesneaux thought was the case for secret societies in a "pre-Maoist" perspective of de-institutionalized politics conducive to power politics as the "normal" expression of social movements.[149] Normalization is not institutionalization, and the missing state still takes its toll. The activist social subjects pay the price of domination and de-institutionalization but have managed so far to perform as social subjects in social movements. They provide an essential dimension in disclaiming the conservative political-ethical compact. Protest mobilizations are popularized as they receive an echo in the media and on the web. They are relayed in courts and are widely discussed. They are the signs of a growing pressure on the state through mounting waves of discontent. They certainly provide social-local-sectorial actors with agency and a modicum of limited empowerment. They do widen the span of subjectivation patterns. And they do engage the state in actions that qualify, even modify, the authoritarian architectonics. The world of recognition and the world of action overlap in ways that engage the state in social-political dynamics that the society v. state (as well as transition-to- democracy or rising civil society) paradigm does not explain. We are not witnessing a democratic travail per se, but interstitial dynamics in line with the de-institutionalized construction of the political (and of democracy) that has marked a century of Chinese post-institutional politics.[150] In rekindling the flame of social activism, today's contesters are the followers of the obliged-to-be "interstitial" activist democrats who have characterized China's history of democracy in the "missing state" context. We shall see that the political state (not the police state) is certainly not missing as the paramount political actor, yet the missing state still prevails in the sense that the political travail does not get politically institutionalized.

It is institutionalized, in the lesser way I examined, in the *minjian* sphere. Besides the numerous cases that engage *minjian* associations and groups in proactive forms of action, the instances (also numerous) of resistance and contestation inducing power contests show discontent and angered citizens moving on their own in order to organize and protest and censure the authorities. Skirting the sphere of the party's political monopoly, the contests are low-keyed on the overall scale of power, but of high intensity on local scenes. In this sense, the social practice that seeks recognition by action is a practice of power – even a disruptive one. But in sharp contrast with the dissidents who politically confront the system at the top, these actions address lower and local officials rather than the state qua state. Many start, end or go through episodes of mass violence as local authorities use arbitrary and brutal means to contain them, jail demonstrators and leaders, and often do not implement the arbitral decisions imposed by higher authorities (including courts). The escalation of violence is especially noticeable in rural China where Lucien Bianco sees continuities in a long history of short-lived and often brutal outbursts.[151] The reminiscence of the pre-institutionalized conflicts analyzed by Charles Tilly in his historical repertoire of contentious movements[152] is another sign of the "missing state". Yet, these conflicts qualify as social movements in that they make collective claims on the authorities. Misappropriation of collective

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[149]   Chesneaux, 1972.

[150]   Chevrier, 2010.

[151]   Bianco, 2001.

[152]   Tilly, 1984.

ownership in the villages where officials are legitimate in mounting and privatizing public enterprises that benefit to all, but less so when they are reproached with "illegitimate enrichment",[153] land ownership, etc., trigger contests, induce organizations, and call for answers from the authorities in the same way as urban property, environmental concerns, health and quality of food, cause lawyering, transparency, official corruption, abuses of power and arbitrary decisions, investigation journalism, social networks, etc. Rural collective violence is therefore not the sign of an archaic reality. It often goes hand in hand with procedures involving negotiations with the authorities and litigation that seem to belong to another era – on Tilly's scale, the era when the state becomes an essential third party in social movements and conflicts. Village elections would confirm this analysis by linking the shape of the social dynamics to that of state building (see below). Similarly, many movements and activists make use of the legal framework enacted by the state. Yet, these movements (including local elections, as we see below) exemplify those analyzed by Tilly[154] as not conducive to democracy.

As with the "bourgeois society" and *minjian* sphere, the sphere of social action is the outcome of the politics of normalization – induced by régime change. The self-limitation of power is what makes room for social contests while suppressing the most troublesome elements. Such "imperial" logics of power contrasted with the Maoist practice during the 1980s. Before the crushing blow of June 4, 1989, while the open advocates of democracy like Wei Jingsheng were jailed, a flourishing intellectual activism took place thanks to the use of the new social-economic opportunities and to various forms of interaction between the activists' social practices and the state's practices of power resulting in various levels of tolerance or repression, benign neglect or protection.[155] Since then, social activism ("social" for the political reasons I just recalled) has fleshed up and become more overtly social (in the social dimension) while a legal framework has been built. The legal construction has empowered the citizens in numerous domains so that they may legally challenge the authorities. Yet, challenging the power that be by exerting rights is not recognized and established as a normal practice: we verify in this (as with the building of legal norms and institutions) the limited fruition of state building policies entailed by the nature of the after-revolution régime-change, and by the principle of differential recognition it involves. As a result, the confrontations remain primarily unregulated and un-institutionalized power contests, thus manifesting that both society *and* the state (in its regulatory and legal capacity) are subordinate. Rather than speaking of "spaces of freedom" (as was the case in Europe's communist régimes), I see no freedom at all and conclude that the political travail induced by this configuration of power and social dynamics is interstitial in that the effects, mostly local (lodged and treated at the lower levels where the vertical party-state system becomes territorialized), are fragmented and reflect the system's own fragmentation.

It would seem, then, that the geometry we saw emerging in late-Maoist China still holds. However, the "contentious Chinese" – the peasant leaders, workers, intellectuals, journalists, lawyers, property owners, environmentalists, etc. – who mobilize, invest the public space, make the news and address the authorities, are not the (reversed) political-to-social subjects we saw showing up during the late Mao years. They are not "exiters" and what they voice is not the régime's language learned and practiced by rote, but their own – even though it carries elements that come from the régime's side. They rather exemplify the politically constrained social construction of the political typical of activism, but in a state-dominated context (which was not the case during the May Fourth era) reminiscent of the one prevailing under the GMD dictatorship. The reason for depicting them as social activists rather than political operatives, militants, defenders of causes, is the overwhelming reach of the party-state. In a free and pluralistic setting, some would "work" for their cause outside the "system", but some would be attached to recognized associations (such as unions), if not to political parties, and some would run

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[153] Thireau, 1991.

[154] Tilly, 1986.

[155] Bonnin and Chevrier, 1991.

for elections – some do, in fact, in the village elections. While they go on spinning the activist strand of Chinese democracy, they are not the May Fourth "self-fashioning" activists (in life and political styles), and do not harbor a social illusion of the political. They are fully aware they operate in Leviathan's jaws and have to reckon with him. More significantly for our purpose than the cat-and-mouse game, their agenda demonstrates that while they do not frontally struggle for power, as Mao's activists were supposed to do, they engage the powerholders in ways that show them looking for forms of negotiation and interaction with the authorities. This is all the more so as the state (central and local state) does not just ignore or crush these movements (although many are severely suppressed and many activists are badly treated). This means we should not just examine how the political is constructed by the social subjects in their sphere (a frequent bias in the literature), *but also and primarily* how the state, in its own sphere, reckons with the subjects. Interface dynamics result in political scenes, fragmented and tilted by the authorities' practices of power, which are nonetheless more constructed and less unrecognized than was the case under Mao at the time of the waning Cultural Revolution.

The significant index is therefore the main locus of interaction: state building and its effects. Which is why the comparison with the "civil opposition in Nationalist China"[156] and with social movements (mainly peasant ones) under the GMD dictatorship between 1927 and 1937 is at once illuminating and misleading. It shows a stronger political construction at the top during the Nanjing Decade (with a real opposition taking shape and momentum), due to a weaker régime, and, in today's PRC, more widespread eruptions of anger and violence confronting state authorities at the grass-roots, due to the wider scope and deeper reach of the fragmented communist state. The undermining effect of the power apparatus on the political construction of these dynamics is not to be underestimated. This being said, the real difference in the state (between the two dictatorships) must be stressed in another way. Recalling Eastman's claim that the Nationalist dictatorship before 1937 was an abortive revolution,[157] I would add that it was an abortive post-revolutionary state for failing to devise and institutionalize a durable social-political compact (besides failing to politically institutionalize the régime). While not passing the line of institutionalization, the post-revolutionary communist régime has taken more significant steps in building the state, if only because the reach of the state is wider and denser – a case in point being the vast overhaul of the judiciary apparatus underlined by S. Balme.[158] The (often misread) village elections that have been extended since the 1990s are to be viewed in this context of troubled state building and mixed political dynamics. Whereas they have been construed as stepping stones for democratization, more astute observers have concluded that the elections work against it by helping central authorities to reassert some control over the rural areas while polarizing anger on discredited local leaders.[159] In other words, the political lever looks more like a technique of power reminiscent in the post-revolutionary idiom of Mao's practice of mass line and rectification. Nevertheless, as Paul Charon remarks, the political-formative effect should not be underestimated – which is why, after all, the "practice" has been contained at the lower rural level in spite of numerous plans for raising it to district-urban level. This example shows that the repressive practices are not phased out but are supplemented by new practices of governance which, in turn, induce new social practices. In the (often) fierce (and sometimes violent) electoral contests, subjects do emerge as opinion and (local) movements leaders. They are subjected not by the state, nor by its default, but by the political in the making.

The format of these subjectivations illustrate what I call interface dynamics: action is a social practice of politics while the contact-surface in the state is socially (re-)profiled. The same remark applies to other social-political practices – like appealing to the higher authorities for redressing wrongdoings –,

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[156]   Fung, 2009.

[157]   Eastman, 1974.

[158]   Balme, 2016.

[159]   Charon, 2012.

and to the widening practice of claiming rights-abuses by invoking the legitimate order instituted by law. As I remarked, especially when they involve activist journalists and daring law professionals, these practices engage the state qua state on grounds that are legitimate not only because they are not directly political but also, and more importantly, because they entail a specific kind of double-sided recognition: recognized action and action for recognition – recognition of causes and practices that may not be officially recognized as the social subjects would want them to be recognized. Such is the case of the law professionals we have seen promoting the superiority of law while defending specific causes. Although the limited empowerment these dynamics entail contains them in the "interstitial" dimension I explained, they amount to transforming social action into a practice of power transforming the habitual practices on both sides. Such developments are therefore not to be viewed in the sole perspective of the social movement, as do those who view the "politics of lodging complaints" and the right-based practices as instances of "rightful resistance" whereby the weak and poor appropriate state policies and turn them into autonomous politics.[160] It seems to me that the actions of the professional rights-advocates are rightful precisely not in this sense because they are by construction embedded in the state's legal texture and aim at transforming the state. The politics that emerge at the interfaces are neither distant, nor resistant only. Jean-Louis Rocca has analyzed similar patterns in the urban protests, notably in the "old working class" (embedded in the old socialist state's social texture) that followed the de-collectivization of the large state industrial enterprises.[161]

Mao's practice of power evolved from activism within the state to rebels without. The normalized practices after revolution make activism move from "out" to "in" while it retains its character as an expression of social discontent and criticism. The laws and rights that are now extant do not transform the practices of power (on the social agents' side as well) into regulated practices of participation and redistribution. The social compact has to be reworked and mended on each occasion. Many studies of these phenomena can be read in two ways. One is that the end-result is a zero-sum game. The other reading is that such dynamics point not only to a political dimension in the social movements, but also to the "social" dynamics in the state – social in the sense of state formation. The multiple-entry political construction is also to be seen in the subjectivation processes entailing the articulation of social universes tantamount to constructing the political by skirting the political.[162] As I remarked, fathoming and mapping the subjects' consciousness in order to define subjectivation patterns would be like squaring circles. The reverse approach is more rewarding. The salient feature is that political and social interactions are far more complex than it seems at first sight and according to the society v. state paradigm. One common characteristic of these dynamics is that they redefine the political as a search for the common good through tensions, disputes and conflicts in society that are far from Mao's violent conflictual vision of politics, but also far from the (conservative) official option (and from the conservative inclination in the social mainstream) for a stable and closed order. It needs not saying that the social construction of the political occurs within the enlarged scope of the authoritarian-police state and is in many ways constrained by it. Yet, the state dimension cannot be reduced to the repressive side, much as the social dimension cannot be reduced to the activist side. To be sure, containing the feared addition of contest, dissent, and criticism that could lead to a political transformation of these movements is an enduring and efficient practice of power. My contention, unlike the received wisdom, is nonetheless that the régime derives strength from the social dynamics it contains (in spite of the erosion it suffers in the process, as we shall see), and that political subjects are in the making. The important qualification is that "normalized" social subjectivation does not construct democratic subjects. The overall dynamics of change may be described as "loosening" the state rather than democratizing society. We therefore

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[160]   O'Brien and Li, 1995 and 2006.

[161]   Rocca, 2006.

[162]   Thireau and Hua, 2010.

should quit the idea that the fledging social movement is a sign of coming régime change (or collapse) and take it as an index and a factor of the normalized state responding to social pressure. Similarly, in assessing the relation of the middle class and the social movement, we should avoid the one-way cliché of an entrenched bourgeoisie defending its class privileges by supporting the undemocratic state. Middle-classed subjects are moving socially, too, and politically, too. Such dynamics should not be overlooked, although, as I remarked, 1) they do not target the régime; 2) the main social flux still is the surge of the recognized middle-class, not the social movement, with the result (analyzed above) that the political outcome for the mainstream comes as distance rather than as resistance *on the basis of the present equilibrium*, which (for the mainstream) is not contradicted (and is perhaps reinforced) by the present political tilt in favor of one-party-rule becoming a one-man-show. The key in the construction of the political at the present remains social recognition without activism, as with the social reframing of subjectivations. Social distribution, social equity, political accountability and transparency, the relation of particular interests to the general interest – the overall issues a constitutional government would politicize are disentangled from the issues of rights and freedom; are not articulated in the practice of the social activists; and surface in the common discourse as issues of common good, fairness and justice, with the central state in possession of the general interest. As I suggested, the compact is strained and asks for political action. Is Xi's re-politicization a politician's move building on Mao's *transfigured* image for scouring the embattled state? Is the practice of power concerned? Will neo-activist *political* subjects surge – instead of democratic subjectivations?

Avoiding Political Institutionalization: Dynamics of Authority

My contention is that Xi Jinping's neo-activist act, which I think serves the conservative purpose and is mistakenly viewed as a near neo-revolutionary challenge, amounts to not avoiding politics in avoiding politics. His move is a politician's twist within the world of after-revolution, not a Maoist turn (back to revolution): not the typical Maoist *recognition by action* (which, as I remarked, following Hegel's first step in his famous analysis of the struggle for recognition, actually dispenses with recognition) but *action for recognition* – as with social activism, but in variations on the conservative theme with a shift in key. Far from changing the political geometry, reaching for the Maoist repertoire from before the time Mao was morphed into post-revolutionary icon traditionalizes the borrowings, as we shall see. The brunt of Xi's move is that it signals (more than the crackdown on official corruption did, and together with his ascent to personal power) that politics are back and the world of action is made official too. If Xi's move is more propaganda than agenda, it is nonetheless highly political in acknowledging that the régime has to move politically in order not to be faced with the challenge of political institutionalization. My further contention is that by not shying away from politics, and by moving in order to conserve the world of after-revolution, Xi's proactive stance parallels the dynamics of discontent and even of disclaim and contention that develop in the same world on the "movement" side. The end of this world is therefore not for soon. In practical terms, the actions that are taken are likely to melt down into interfaces dynamics converting the radical elements into conservative politics.

In the eighteenth century, when the Philosophes did not have to be politically correct, the government of Ottoman Turkey was often presented as an absolute despotism moderated by murder. Mao's tyranny was enhanced rather than moderated by his activism. His successors have developed a strong authoritarian rule moderated by a system of non-institutionalized social cooptation amounting to indirect political recognition and (I return to this below) by a weak and still inadequate governance – not as weak, however, as that of the imperial state at its nineteenth century nadir. The tempting idea that the glorious empire at its eighteenth-century apex is back with a vengeance seems all the more irresistible as the Chinese evolution has skirted the Russian or Turkish association of authoritarian power and authoritarian democracy. Pervasive as it is in the discourses on and in the popular images of present-day China, the

comparison with the high-imperial past is empty if it is not set in the perspective of the political twentieth century. The more adequate historical counterpoint shows Xi Jinping's power having to and able to rely on means other than plebiscitary elections in order to revitalize and widen its legitimacy. Some of these means, recalling Mao's ideological themes and mobilization techniques, seem to go as far are reinstating activist political subjects in the de-politicized polity Xi inherited. Yet, the journalistic presentation of Xi Jinping as a Maoist revivalist is a gross misunderstanding. There is no residual activism in Xi's politics that he would by force introduce in a pacified landscape. He is a conservative one-party state-builder for the sake of the nation-state no less than Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao have been. The references to Mao's style of action, the resurrection of activist heroes and of some of his standard techniques are not meant to destabilize the established state but to cement a divided party and divided society by rekindling the public spirit and promoting the dedication to collective goals in a context of self-promotion and enrichment. They are taken out of the Maoist burner and are not to disseminate strife and disorder as metastases proliferating in a hyper-factionalized body politic. The Maoist themes are meant to appeal to the wage-earners, property-owners and social subjects of the new social *and* political deal who look for political reassurance, not to launch a class war against them. The borrowed elements are the political appendices of a government that finds itself under strains for being just a system of governance qua governance when reasons exist to doubt that governance is as good as it should be. The paradoxical purpose of the neo-activist props is to restore the state's authority; to reinforce and legitimize the vertical lines of command in the more professionalized and decentralized bureaucracy; and to optimize an image of leadership, authority, justice and action embodied in the new chairman. Xi's *political* politics keep on being state-centered. While signaling to more activist subjects, they do not call for their appropriating the thrust of action. Rather than resurrecting Mao's zealots and tearing apart the post-Mao normalization, Xi is adding to it, not subtracting. The effect is that the renewed political building moves one step ahead, from governing social subjects socially to governing politically.

In order to return the twist of political politics to its right place on the historical ladder and on the Richter scale of activist tremors in twentieth century China, one paramount feature in the making of the paramount leader is to be observed. Xi's one-man leadership is in line with what strong post-imperial leaders (Yuan Shikai, Jiang Jieshi, Mao) have attempted to realize in lieu of the missing state. We may recall Liang Qichao theorizing such "trespassing" at the start of the twentieth century. In Liang's idea, social-mental-moral conditions in China required that the level of sovereign authority and the actual authority of government be compacted in one leader and moved to the superlative. A necessary complement was boosting the "public spirit" over the citizen's private concerns not in the individual-heroic fashion of *xinmin* in *Xinmin shuo*, but in the imperial tradition of *xinmin*, that is "renovating the people" thanks to sessions of social education through moral means (*jiaohua*). The rationale was that the social body and the body politic would not suffer the leader's authority in a mechanical way but would respond to it like a living *political* body. Liang remained true to his idea of politicizing the imperial tradition of government, and to his objective of obtaining a people driven forward by its mental-political-moral unity. As we saw, a further observation is that the conservative compact gained autonomy from the political assertion of a national ideology (Liang's prime move) by embodying the nation's social-cultural-moral dynamics in non-political terms that limited the scope of national politics as well as they directed the action of the government. Liang's conservative blueprint converges with Hegel's in that political authority is built on the requisite that it be shared – in non-political ways. His social-moral mobilization (a task the elites were called to perform) was to be based on traditional-national-sociological elements (such as the familial pattern) contained in the "national character". It was designed to reinforce the political monopoly and to be controlled from the top and in each citizen, not to radically disintegrate the polity in order to govern. As I remarked, Liang's subjects could fully be social subjects under the authoritarian rule of the leader. Mao, too, abhorred the mechanical side of government and wanted an animated, politically intelligent polity. But, as we saw, he counted on each subject passing the line of (political) "singularity" through

activist patterns of political subjectivation. With hindsight, we might consider (mutatis mutandis) that in moving from activist to conservative, Liang Qichao moved from Mao's decentralized and bottom-up activist system of action to the top-down practice of rectification that was standard in the party before Mao contested it in the mid-fifties. The difference between Liang and Mao is clearly the monopoly on legitimate political violence, with conservative patterns of subjectivation in one case, radical ones in the other. Contrary to the standard account (which views the post-revolutionary party-state relinquishing its monopolies except the political one), the régime has regained its lost monopoly as the unique political subject (the one it had lost for all practical purposes in the chaos of dead-end Maoism) in the very process of de-totalizing the system of government. It is doubtful that Xi would put it in jeopardy.

We should therefore know what apparent continuities and flash-backs mean historically – how worlds that seem convergent are different. The issue behind Xi's re-politicization is not power, the practice of power is not decentralized violent political action at the expense of the legitimate monopoly on political violence. Xi's ascent to supreme leader was obtained by institutional means coupled with bureaucratic-factional infighting, and by directing the anti-corruption campaign against his rivals and their "clans". As I remarked, the campaign is in line with the top-down ("closed") rectification Mao's colleagues (then opponents and victims) favored and failed to maintain against his activist offensive from the mid-fifties to their downfall. Yet, the (popular) clean-up is not even a restoration of the "old" (communist) régime (as opposed to high-Maoism). It belongs to the habitus of governance. So are designed and destined the activist props. The recognized social subjects are unlikely to perish under the blows of renascent political subjects waging a protracted war against the (in their eyes) de-politicized state. Reintroducing a modicum of political action in a system of action that is not driven by it means the pointed action is not what it looks like. The Mao-reference indicates the devitalization of Maoism and its transformation into a repertoire of techniques and symbols, not a reorientation in line with historical Maoism. They have become a tradition that it is politically significant (and that seems politically profitable) to revive in order to revamp the ethical side of the conservative régime while not reviving the revolutionary politics they used to embody. In a word, the goal is more authority, not revolution; the move from ethics to politics is not the effect of revolution invading the realm of tradition, but the reverse: signaled action for better recognition (especially of public authority over private interests) operating in the extant ethical-ritualistic context I analyzed, not disrupting it. We therefore can qualify the Maoist style of Xi's politicized politics as neo-traditionalist, just as A. Walder analyzed the social-symbolic dynamics of communal patterns and values in Maoist factories, in remarking that, this time, Maoism is the tradition – the tradition that is reworked, though not in the sense that Mao was "nationalized" in being de-revolutionized, but in that he is now re-nationalized in being re-revolutionized… in the conservative sense. The operation does not undermine the vindication of the ethical nation in parallel with the political one: the former Helmsman's transfiguration from divisive revolutionary leader to all-encompassing nation-builder endures, while the national consensus is politically as well as ethically and symbolically materialized. Fishing for political elements in the historical flux that reputedly belongs to a national consensus reframed by revolution but free from it is a sure sign of Juste Milieu continuity. The state-building orientation of after-revolution politics is not challenged. Xi's impersonation is meant to elevate him (and the "people's spirit") in order to give more efficacy to the practice of government. The unchanged strategy is enhancing the "state's capacity" for governing the country by redressing local governance and the social balance. One telling sign was the cooptation as politburo permanent committee junior member of Wang Huning, who has been known as a fervent critic (in the name of the "state's capacity") of the "feudal" involution due to Mao's legacy and to the early reforms' insufficient care for the issue.

More efficiency for better efficacy is not revolution. Xi would implement Liang's conservative template for *guoquan*, complete with the (neo)-activist (marginal) means and the crowning uncrowned monarch, were it not for the lacking institutionalization of the body politic that was central to Liang's thought (in

spite of his avowed authoritarianism: his *minquan* foundation of *guoquan*, as we saw). Final power was to be in the people – not as it is now, in the party (*dangquan* 黨權). Institutional accommodation (such as Putin's moving between President and Premier and the one that seems to be in store for prolonging Xi's mandate) would bring Xi closer to the Chairman but would not necessarily prepare a Maoist restoration. Politician re-politicization is not the end of normalization. The comparison with Liang holds better where Xi's one-man power act seems to break the equilibrium. In elevating the leader above the state in order to save the republican institutions, Liang Qichao elaborated a Juste Milieu of sorts accepting the necessity for a supreme authority to tower above the political and social divisions (the monarchy in 1830 France, Yuan Shikai in post-anti-Qing-revolution China) without altering the "form of the state" (republican for Liang, bourgeois in 1830 France and in today's China). His *guoquan* scheme owed much to Japan's "imperial system" under the Meiji constitution, and to the mid-nineteenth century restorers of the state whom, with hindsight, we may not qualify as the "last stand of Chinese conservatism" viewed by Mary C. Wright in the revolutionary perspective.[163] Yet, crowning a strongman was all but a restoration: Liang broke over the issue not only with Yuan (in 1915-16) but also with civil and military leaders who made another try in 1917. The precedent, of course, has no influence on the present political evolution. It helps us measure its historical significance and, therefore, the possible prospects. Xi's action will not construct an activist polity and will not alter the organizational and legal reconstruction that has been under way since the 1990s in the sense Mao's activism bent the revolutionary organization. Liang's strong leader was the price to pay for maintaining a failed régime and preparing an institutionalized future. For Xi the régime is not a failure calling for disruptive actions. His politicizing the politics of recognition signals that in the very perspective of conservatism (as I remarked concerning Liang Qichao's), the tamed post-revolutionary political action cannot just be an ethical repository. Xi's exalted position (emperor like) has the superior advantage of incarnating at the apex of the post-revolutionary polity the union of the modern communist nation with the past. Let us recall in this respect our remark on Liang's conservative blueprint (1) relying more on a carefully selected and modernized tradition than on political activism per se, and (2) barring changes politically enforced in social mores as well as in the social and political organization. In sum: Xi's deactivated use of Maoism for the purpose of state and nation building is part of his selection, which also includes the fabrication of a national-modern ethos based on assembled traditional bits (including the Maoist neo-tradition). This is where conservatism started in modern Chinese politics, and where the post-Mao régime stands after revolution. As we saw, the (immense) difference between the beginning and now is that the state which the modern ideologies (including liberalism) have missed in their political ecology, is now extant and at work.

Dwelling at some length on Xi's political positioning does not mean I think commentators who invoke Mao in Xi's politics mean Xi is going back to Maoism at it was under Mao. But we should be careful not to erase the intermediate historical stages and not to underestimate or overestimate the more remote historical links. The minute analysis is essential for positioning the subjectivation patterns, if not the subjects as they subjectively apprehend the current context and react to it. As we saw, the "avoiding politics" context does not imply subjectivation patterns avoid politics. Subjects who live in *their* world(s) do pay attention to the world which happens to contain theirs. While their positioning is reflective, the perspectives that are reflexive and articulate belong to subjects in narrower social segments. If we move in this direction, on the current spectrum of political trends and ideological denominations Xi's political politics are not original in being state-centered, and are more conservative than New Left in spite of his Maoist winks. Reinforcing the state's capacity, levelling and re-cementing society are cross-current mantras,[164] but none of the New Left's anti-capitalist strictures are present. The anti-corruption campaign has none of the neo-revolutionary overtones that New Left thinkers would associate with Mao's political

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163   Wright, 1957.

164   Frenkiel, 2014.

purity. As I remarked, Xi adds political politics to the conservative package that underplays politics in favor of social-ethical markers and state-building agendas. If he does not avoid politics, he does so in keeping away from radical politics – democracy and restoration, in the typical Juste Milieu balancing act. What, then, of his steering to the "social" left? Xi's social policies are designed according to his political needs: not in a radical way. The middle class is not easy game – less so than Mao's "new bourgeoisie" whose leaders (as were Stalin's opponents) were disempowered by "party patriotism". Xi's elevation does not free the leader from the bondage of recognition politics (the recognizer is only so by being recognized) – unless he turns against them in a destructive move that would have to insulate China and break the economic engine – something that could be done in 1949, or 1958, when it was not working so well and not delivering the goods it delivers today. In contrast with New Left thinking (and with "left-left" programs in democracies), the actual bending is therefore balanced and moderate. Levelling is pegged on economic expansion and redistribution, not on re-collectivizing the privatized-public sector and not on suppressing inequalities due to legitimate differentials in the income- and capital-effects of growth. *Xiaokang* may help deliver a social message reminiscent of the socialist past (which the "outs" say they regret, as Mao's time is regretted in terms of moral purity), Guizot's "get rich" logics are still at work. Elitism in the formation and allocation of manpower is not targeted. As I had occasion already to remark, the "serving the people" twist in placing the representation of the "whole people" first indicates the politician's care for equilibrium: it is not a left-populist tilt, and certainly not the end of bourgeois China at the hands of Mao's resurrected practice of power. Xi's course is not playing the people against the bourgeoisie: it is setting the state (and himself who embodies the state) above the growing social divisions growth and social development entail. If the Juste Milieu paradigm and the political justification by the end of revolution seem too narrow (as they proved to be in 1848 France), France's imperial-authoritarian régime with social concerns under Napoléon III (in the 1850s) offers an adequate parallel joining an *authoritarian* conservatism to the idea that the justification of the state is to prevent divisions from widening. Also included in the package was the nationalist stress which Xi Jinping, so far, has not emphasized as much as Putin does. All in all, equilibrium and stability separate Xi from Mao in absolute terms. We should view him as the one who, one century after Liang Qichao's failure, installs conservatism in the strong-stable state that has been missing over the century as a *dynamic* alternative to liberal democracy. Just as the "avoiding politics" effect in the "bourgeois" subjects must be understood in the context of a strong state invested with the tasks of politics, Xi's exercise in political dynamics depends on the very strong-stable state that founds the conservative compact: it does not ruin it, not even challenge it.

If Xi's deactivated re-politicization is not unhinging the politics of normalization, what of the practice of power? Will action replace recognition, struggle and violence balance and competition? We may simply continue our observation of the "rapport de force". The crackdown on the intellectuals' practices of discussion and criticism – on conditioned intellectual liberties – does not antagonize a considerable social or political *power in recognition politics*. The freeze does not ark back to Mao's genuine activism but to the régime's habitual repertoire of top-down controlled rectification, as one (markedly generalized) episode of constraint to be followed (perhaps) by the expected episode of relaxed controls and (conditional) tolerance. Similarly, rather than dethroning vast interest groups in the power structure, the use of anti-corruption politics has eliminated selected (rival) targets without antagonizing the "deep state" (the political bourgeoisie) and the social bourgeoisie. Besides the economic interests and the repartition of power at the top level, a Maoist backlash would smash the dense array of legal institutions, norms, and authority – a modified habitus, but a habitus – through which government and governance are conducted at all levels in the party, the state, and in the social worlds. Besides the normative war, the backlash would not only resurrect enmity and violence in discourses and images but would have to use them – notably against the new middle class, as they had been used against the landlords and rural elites. Again, political symbols notwithstanding, *xiaokang* subjects will look like Shanghai's salaried

men and women, not like Lei Feng redivivus. The Maoist overtone in Xi's conservative politics is to restore a balance – a social and political consensus – by stressing redistribution and action in the line of recognition. As I remarked, the (recognized) professionals (notably in the party) who enter into competitive careers deploy a self-oriented kind of activism for the common good (hence the ethical recognition): Xi's neo-revolutionary propaganda (more than agenda, I insist) is an attempt at boosting the "people's spirit" at the level of the specialized elites. The vindication of *gong* against *si* is not aimed at apathy but would reframe elitist upward mobility and revamp cadres' sagging spirits. In reasserting the public dimension of recognition in the collective ethos, the *strategic* goal, indeed political more than ethical, is D. Bell's "meritocracy".[165] Priority-switch in the "Three Representations" notwithstanding, the bourgeois-elitist "advanced elements" will not go unrepresented and unrecognized (as would be the case in a restored Maoist perspective), and this even less so as they are scheduled for being of more social and political use. The dreaded work-style does not strike back, life-styles and the elitist ethos need not fear for their life. Xi is not replacing recognition by action and not displacing the pivot of recognition politics. The agenda is political propaganda serving the conservative purpose.

It is plain to see that Xi's "dream" is no *Mein Kampf* or *Red Book*. The citizens are not mobilized against selected social enemies but are expected to respond to prescribed conducts informed by standard stories: to rituals, thus showing how far and deep revolution has become a tradition. Nothing could be more conservative, and the effect, if any subjectivation process ensues, will be conservative, not revolutionary subjects. Similarly, the Brave New World addition of cyber- surveillance aims at encrypting the normalized ethos in everyone's private-social conducts but will not alter the practice of power by recognition. Normalizing the subjects after normalizing the polity and the society is not the Maoist practice of power because it aims at normalizing in the sense I have explained (that is, basing recognition and social subjectivation patterns on the interdependence of the régime and the social order) instead of revolutionizing (the former absorbs the latter). For all the dreadful implications of a "soft" totalitarian Brave-New-World, this is still, in China's recent history, the not inconsiderable difference between authoritarianism and total state. The mainstream subjectivation patterns in the two worlds are diametrically opposed. For the subjects, too, the difference is immense. Beyond the repressive nature of the régime – and the Brave New World global syndrome – the Chinese have reasons in *their* historical flux to shy away from politics. While softly building a total ethos is entirely compatible with the conservative practice of power, and the middle-class' thirst for security and stability, politically reactivating the state would be entirely incompatible.

Rather than the chilling prospect of Brave New China, or the implausible perspective of a popular-populist tidal wave enforced in Mao's name rather than in that of democracy, the best assessment is to realize that the would-be Maoist addition underlines constraints and requirements in governance that the process of state building during the 1990s and 2000s was designed to address. In view of the standard image of a repressive authoritarian government, many would be surprised in discovering how the government actually works on a transactional habitus, with unceasing discussions, negotiations, bargains and trade-offs that are not identical with the corruption rings (and the deep state at the top level) but indicate how the bureaucratic structure and the transactional habitus can generate such levels of in-built corruption. The result is not an underside ("parallel", "informal" are the usual descriptions) but a weak state in a strong régime.[166] I already mentioned Vivienne Shue's diagnosis of "state sprawl" at the local level.[167] As in imperial China, the main scene and cause of weakness is at the territorial and social interfaces, i.e. in the local state(s). Central state authorities have to vie with local powerholders who complicate the task of state building (and on some important points, like financial and investment

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[165]   Bell, 2015.

[166]   Charon, 2012.

[167]   Shue, 1995.

fluxes, render it partly ineffective) by advancing their counter-policies and the pursuit of their and their community's interests. Recognition politics would have it that state building replace political politics, while in the real world (of state formation and social pressure) poor governance replaces state building. The difference is not just that of state building and state formation. It amounts to generating spaces for un-institutionalized politics on the state's backbone all the way to the branches and twigs and down to roots. The local state is the (segmented) contact surface where social interactions take place in institutionalized and non-institutionalized ways (including the power contests I have analyzed). On the state side, while the officials who are involved do not contest the régime, they express different views on the questions of government. Parallel official unofficial politics develop along institutionalized and non-institutionalized channels, making the state more diverse politically, and, we might say, "politically social" – all the more so as these facets are the public power which protesters and activists confront and negotiate with. They become more "political" in the process, as we saw, as the received social practice of activism becomes a practice of power – within the world of recognition where the contact-state is at once tilted, unfair, as well as "socialized" and a part of the overall pubic instance in charge of the general interest. Government is not less authoritarian and repressive, but governance (besides trading money and influence) becomes the channel of dynamics that engage divisions and movements in the power apparatus as well as in the depth of society. As I remarked, the social protests do not evolve into a unified space. This is in accordance with state fragmentation. Whether Xi's vertical lines of control will freeze such lateral developments – for how long, if they do – remains to be seen. The least one can say is that protest movements are not the sole fountainhead of the *straddling* political dynamics, and that the standard issues that are quoted for bearing on the construction of the political in the future (the social question, economic and demographic constraints) are to be viewed through the prism of the state of the state qua governance.

Politics as governance (instead of governance as politics as some would have it after the neo-authoritarians of the eighties and the advocates of the experts in the thirties) are a source of strength (as I remarked), of erosion – and a signal. They are the sign that the (politically) non-representative state reaches a limit in absorbing and resorbing the shocks and tensions generated by its own (unofficial) political development and by the developing society's unofficial and constrained would-be political evolution. Power as recognition means the political scope of government becomes social. The effect of such government on the state and on the subjects (as subjects and as a diversified and divided society) is that the social scope begs for more politics (which does not mean, for all: to become democratic). The universal recognizer cannot but fail to perform as the unique political representative. At this juncture where they meet with diminishing returns, recognition politics have to be politically represented and politically articulated. Non-representative states do encounter circumstances of strained governance under which the complication of social and political divisions raises such alternative by making "neutral" government more difficult, if not impossible. Either the leader's authority is raised above the political-social divisions, or representation politics take place (peacefully or forcefully) that institutionalize the unrecognized political dynamics. As we saw, such situation evolved in the imperial state after a century of crises. Liang Qichao moved (backward) from one formula to the other because of the Republic's failure to sustain representative institutions. What kind of politics could *now* break the circle? Institutionalized politics articulated on social divisions or radicalized politics boosting the power system? To what extent? In Juste Milieu fashion, Xi Jinping choses neither, but moderate re-politicization over moderate institutionalization.

Xi Jinping is not looking for a better government, he is reaching for better governance. His re-politicization move should be seen in the perspective where state building policies are still the core and have to be revamped as such. From the level of Xi's outstanding personal power to the lower levels of party and state cadres and officials, the further step is not differentiating the state from the party

but reinforcing the vertical lines of command and boosting the "public spirit". Contrary to what Mao redivivus would do, recognition by action is not to work against but for state-normalization and cadres-professionalization. Verticalization in the lines of command and personalization of cadre selection are not to disempower the managers and professionals in favor of some new-red ideologists – or personal cronies. Chosen deputies and personal ties are nothing new in China's bureaucratic history. Zeng Guofan, one of the arch-conservative restorers of the state in the mid-nineteenth century, typically pulled these strings (together with a reassertion of moral orthodoxy) in the hope of reshuffling a crumbling bureaucratic model. Xi does not call for politically disruptive activists but for *subjects* who will professionalize and enhance governance as their own personal charge and not just as a job. In the party's repertoire the verticalization move recalls similar cycles of vertical command v. horizontal organization (Mao's favorite) that took place during the 1950s. The spirit is reminiscent of the rational, tight and politically-inspired (but not stifled) vertical model advocated by Chen Yun, Mao's arch-critic in these matters who was also one major "conservative" proponent of the "socialist spiritual civilization" in the eighties in denouncing the pernicious effects of the "deviated" course taken by the reforms. Another reference in party history is the dismantling of the People's Communes coupled with the reorganization of the local governments that took place in the mid-eighties. In addition to installing the local cadres as leaders and brokers on the communal horizon, one of the effects of the degradation by fragmentation of Mao's system had been to transform political activism into communal competition. In the early 1980s, Deng Xiaoping knowingly and explicitly called on the competitive spirit of the local cadres in favor of economic growth. The transformation of political activism into communal and economic competition, and of the local leaders into "competitive comrades" – to borrow Susan Shirk's analysis of students and cadre attitudes in the urban areas[168] – is one of the major "ironies of Mao's legacy" (to quote A. Walder[169] about "parallel" patterns and attitude conducive to reform in the industrial world). By re-empowering the local leaders in a renewed normative environment, Deng did not have to face the impossible task of replacing them and successfully promoted local entrepreneurship.[170] During the first decade of reform, public firms managed by local government officials mushroomed,[171] while private households were the champions of privatization – which lagged behind. During the second decade, when local governments privatized the public firms, "the managers of public enterprises and the relatives of cadres moved into private enterprise at rates higher than all others".[172] Rekindling this spirit is not going back to Mao but to Deng. Going further would involve separating local authorities from overseeing land ownership and leading the local economy. The issue raised by Xi's political move is not that of the "political capacity" of the Chinese people (in Liang Qichao's words), but that of the "capacity of the state". The question, then, is whether the politics of state building will allow for more resolute state building policies without a margin of régime change.

As Xi Jinping's Maoist *policies* are not Mao's politics, state building remains the key: politics are for more efficiency – old (if modernized) statecraft rather than new politics. But the two aspects merge even in the moderate perspective. Moving from recognition to actual representation requires a modicum of political institutionalization: a formalized political space, a legitimate opposition. Even in the perspective of state conservatism, the state is missing in this respect. France's Juste Milieu politics were politically institutionalized. Elections were designed for selecting a meritocratic elite (as the Chinese imperial exams were supposed to select "talents", and the pre-reformers in the nineteenth century suggested to regroup moral talents around the emperor). The parliamentary system was nonetheless

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[168]   Shirk, 1982.

[169]   Walder, 1981.

[170]   Oi, 1999.

[171]   Walder, 1995.

[172]   Walder, 2002, p. 22.

expected to provide the checks and balances necessary for enforcing rights and laws as well as public accountability and transparency, in addition to devising through processes of deliberation the compromises on the policy issues of general interest that top-down decisions fail to legitimize in complex, divided societies. This is what eludes the best of governance – which, in complex systems, can never be the best. Whatever the merits and the improvements, spring waters get wasted in downstream marshes. Pending a re-connection of governance to another type of social structuring – which cannot but question the order of government (the double-helix of party and state even more than one-party rule) – the best one can expect of bettering agents, services and output (Xi's measures!) will maintain the low quality of the system. In order to break through, legal and bureaucratic counterweights have to be articulated on political counterforces – not on political divisions if social elites are the political social body. The Juste Milieu formula stops short of democracy by politically institutionalizing the state through politically organizing the social elites as political intermediaries: government, governance and politics meet at elite level. Liberties are "necessary", as was claimed in 1864 against Napoleon III's authoritarian government before it was liberalized in a perspective of progressive conservatism: they are necessary as an ideal, for civilizing politics, civilizations, religions, subjects; but also for doing in governance what governance alone can't do. In this crucial respect, Xi's conservative politics aim at developing a dynamic alternative to democracy – and to stagnation –, but elude the progressive conservatism that would enfranchise the bourgeois elites so that the no longer missing *zhongdeng jieji* would get organized in ways that would enhance the government's "state's capacity". Above the wealth of cultural (and religious) associations that innerve the social life, the United Front framework still delineates communities based on ethnicity, creeds, interests – even (properly laundered) secret societies, as E. Jourda remarks.[173] The crucial dilemma is not social recognition or political action but bureaucratic organization or elite institutionalization. In late imperial times, local elites could be autonomous and an effective prolongation of the bureaucracy because they were territorialized and *not* institutionalized. They had become strong as power brokers and masters of the "cultural nexus of power"[174] in the empire's territories. Compared to them, middle-class elites are under-structured and not even territorialized. They are weak, not because they are not politically empowered, but because they do not invest such functions, and their weakness is also the strong state's weakness. Institutionalizing them in a political capacity (not ethically and meritocratically) would make up for the double deficiency. As was the case at the end of the nineteenth century, dynamics of social structuring through state dynamics do not tally with the dynamics of social classification. After the extreme (and finally eroded) political tension of Maoism, China finds itself in the "loosened" situation of an under-institutionalized state.

The "median" political institutionalization (not democratization) is denied, for reasons belonging in large part to path-dependency (loaded with vested interests) more than to ideology. The whole historical and social mass of the party as a system of action weighs against formally limiting its power and giving rights to an opposition. Yet, the "impossibility to do otherwise" syndrome is veiled behind the risk of adding divisive politics (the usual indictment of democracy) to an already too "socialized" and "localized" state (the fear of chaos). The elite-institutionalization system in Hong Kong cannot serve as a model… because strong democratic forces are contesting it, as I remarked, in observing that state conservatism does not meet on the ideological front with a real challenge on the liberal-democratic side. The real challenger is no longer the crypto-revolutionary nostalgia embodied in the New Left, but, within conservatism itself, a galaxy of ideas, thinkers, networks, and officials articulating proposals amounting to what I have called a progressive conservatism including processes of limited political institutionalization. The typical Juste Milieu positioning away from democracy and "stationary government" (Guizot's depiction of the Restoration) is now a question in Juste Milieu itself: is it a sustainable formula between democratization and stagnation?

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[173] Jourda, forthcoming.

[174] Duara, 1988.

In choosing the moderate option on the state side, Xi and his supporters consider elite institutionalization could have positive effects only by being severely constrained – which puts the issue of control in first place and denies the marginal advantage of a marginal liberalization. It is useless to argue that it takes more than social activism to structure a political opposition (even at elite level: the institutionalization drive after 1895 involved intellectual debates and a political structuration in relation with but different from local elites' dynamics); that we are far from the level where constructed politics would construct political alternatives; that institutionalizing the political is not just a matter of freedom and rights: it involves managing social divisions translated in political debates at the level of the general public and general interest; that in this respect the state still enjoys a considerable advantage. Recent events (in the Arab world) show revolutions bursting out of the wild, so to speak, with no political preparation, as did the anti-régime (republican) turn of the politically constructed and moderate constitutionalist movement in 1910-1911. Revolution looms above political institutionalization and portrays the progressive-proactive conservatism advocated by some in the régime and among its friends as a level-III kind of threat. The post-revolutionary power, together with many would-be democrats, still stalls on the specter that haunts its politics – as the specter of revolutionary communism haunted Europe in the *Communist manifesto* (1848) – and the authoritarian government moves from stationary to reactionary.

The past Xi's politics *really* point to is not Mao's – it is the part played by the state in Chinese history and politics – except for the major part of the 20th century. Taking the state as pivot is not unexplainable, and not entirely unwise. The tragedies of de-institutionalization in China's recent history and elsewhere in the world show that a working state structure – not something that can be improvised – is not less necessary than liberties and institutionalized politics. State building policies are assuredly necessary for the purpose – but how to break through the limitations built into governance? Is re-empowering the government instead of empowering the elites – or the people – as necessary? There is no reason to believe a Chinese democracy would be fairer, less corrupted and violent than India's – or Brazil's, not to mention the authoritarian ones. On the other hand, if social elites are not necessarily more liberal than authoritarian states, suitable institutional arrangements that coopt diversified elites in government (like England's after the Glorious Revolution) do make states more liberal. This is what China's state lacks. Xi and the like-minded believe they don't need it. They have a tradition (state and ethos) to instrumentalize, if no religious-political compact to saddle to national-populist purposes. Since the local state bears the brunt of social pressure and disorder (its contact surface is made larger than that of corruption at higher levels because it can be blamed for the problems that trigger local protests while the party is not blamed as such for high corruption), it is tempting to reassert controls by sweeping the grass-roots politics under the carpet while the system keeps exerting an unshared dominance over the elites and the crowned leader appropriates the top-down political impetus in appealing to the people – in majesty. The addition of politics ends up in sublimating politics – not Mao's fashion. Xi does what Napoleon I did after Thermidor, and Napoleon III after the failure of Juste Milieu. The mix of state building, collective ethos, revived politics, personal power, routinized surveillance, cultivated nationalism and belabored charisma, is a minimalist reading of Liang Qichao's *guoquan* and not even Hegel's illiberal but structurally legal state. The supposedly rejuvenated politics of recognition boil down to pure representation – a farce, was Marx's word on the post-1848 reaction that prompted the French imperial restoration. On the myriad terrains where state and party dissolve into local power, Xi's policies could be deflated (and skirted) at the very weak spots they address. If in jeopardy, they could lead to a more severe, Russian-like assertion of nationalism. Although the ingredients are extant (notably in education, the use of science as a lever of power and the military build-up), at the moment the system of power and authority breathes and does not seem near the point where the engine would stall. In other words, the political nation and its conservative compact hold their ground against the nationalist nation that could appear as an alternative to revolution for re-mobilizing both party and society.

For mainstream subjects the stakes are not to become activist zealots and perish as social subjects, but whether the conservative patterns of subjectivation will be affected beyond a political coating of the social-ethical substance. As for *their* politics – and for the prospects of the activist sphere – suffice is to recall that Napoleon III' s empire in 1868 was said by Henri Rochefort, a famous critic, to contain thirty-six million subjects without counting the subjects of discontent. Social divisions are not frozen, nor are the state's own divisions. The political "other side" (not underside) will not be taken out of limbo (by being allowed some structuration) and will not be sent back to inferno. The alliance with the bourgeoisie has yet to pass the test of politics (no longer the test of history) in facing such challenges as organizing a collective social response (and not just the state's response) to climate change, social security needs, the aging population, etc. The middle class is yet to be taken over *politically*: that is part of its making. It remains to be seen how it will respond – how many voices will, politically and not just socially.

Xi's twist is not the neo-revolutionary turn, his reaction is not the restoration, his politicization of the conservative package is not the radicalization that would belie my main criticism against the transition theory: not that it has nothing to say on authoritarian democracies, but nothing to say on post-revolutionary political histories that part with the restoration perspective as well as with that of revolution. A glance at Russia and Turkey would show that the conservative sense of equilibrium and the rejection of violent chaos is not just a matter of image ("Uncle Xi") and a cultural-moral-traditional envelope. The security machine, the army, the "deep state", protracted factional strife and the use of the norms to eliminate rivals, are certainly not of lesser importance in China. But the strategy of fear (order with the régime, chaos without it) is less extreme, if only because the supreme leader does not have to capitalize political gains on an electoral market. Enthroning Xi does not make him more liable to voters' consent. Enthroning an activist god-emperor would ruin the equilibrium. A further argument is that Xi's move occurs when the state has regained its monopoly on legitimate violence. As I remarked, it is doubtful that Mao's epigone would risk losing it. Mao's revolution had been conducted in a world where it had been lost and his goal as well as his practice of power in revolutionizing China had not been to reinstate it, not even in the state (this is another argument against viewing him as a crypto- or proto-nationalist). This is no longer the case. Whether Xi's obvious reach for a more dynamic equilibrium will stand as an equilibrium remains to be seen. The more fundamental interrogation is: will the no-trespassing lines be passed? This – not Xi's status and personal style of leadership – is the crucial parameter to be watched, as was the case in the 1980s when the campaigns against "spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois liberalism" demoted one general secretary but petered out; or around the mid-1950s, when Mao's open rectification sowed the activist winds that reaped the Great Leap storm and the tempests of the Cultural Revolution.

Readers will conclude that in assessing politics that I have analyzed as parting with history I look back at the past. In a typically conservative approach, Xi Jinping's politics do so. Still, the challenge lives on. The state is consensual for one part of society only, and even for that part only for one part. For numbers it appears as conservative and biased. It can't be the political solution to all problems for all. The final world is not final. At the moment, the ideas, the circles tuned to formulas akin to sharing a modicum of political partnership are silent and silenced. For the intellectuals who, in accordance, do not dissolve the political puzzle in depoliticization or issues of cultural and national identity, the stakes are no longer the subject's autonomy in front of abusive collective powers (Li Zehou's diagnosis of China's modern illness)[175] but legitimizing the politics of representation out of the revolution predicament that has legitimized the politics of recognition. At the very least, political prospects are not defined solely by the opposition, nor by the régime alone, and, inside the régime, not in one way. Chinese post-post-revolutionary politics are in flux. And so are and will be the subjectivation patterns and the subjects. The political is constructed today in complex, multi-layered and multidirectional ways mixing practices and techniques of power

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[175]   Li, 1987a.

as well as old and new styles. Subjectivation processes are multifaceted. As is well known, the "young" Marx criticizing Hegel denied history was at an end and brandished political action against the politics of recognition. The neat paradigmatic opposition (old conservative/young democrat) makes us understand how *real* subjectivation is *not* working in separate worlds, one that would be political, the other one social. Although they enjoy the recognition Mao denied them, bourgeois subjects who are political recognizers (rather than avoiders) may be destabilized and even antagonized by the lasting imbalance between the pace of social development and the practices of government. Hence the flux, the open history and, for us, the incertitude. Contrary to many observers who see the social pressure bending and even toppling the régime, the future seems to me to hang on the social elites and on the régime's attitude toward them. Juste Milieu is not over yet. It still has to survive Xi's freezing sublimation and get institutionalized as such. The prospect may not look exhilarating if we recall in *Sentimental Education* Frédéric Moreau as a Juste Milieu Ah Q. The transformation was under way when Napoleon III reached toward France's bourgeois elites and installed the "liberal empire" – before the military defeat of 1870 brought it to an end. It is unlikely that new zealots will resurrect Mao's world of political subjects. But how many subjects will quit the state of recognition they live in, resist the artificially made "intelligent" Big Brotherhood and re-subject in the world of contesting action, is a question. Is dissent, social resistance, protest, the only way for nourishing a rich experience of the political in bourgeois China? Is orthopraxy, rather than activism, the more general way for being a subject?

AFTERWORD

Looking for the making of Chinese subjects in the recent past (one century) I have followed the path of political subjectivation, because politics were all-important in the making of contemporary China, and activist political subjectivation was paramount in the making of modern Chinese politics. However, even during these troubled times, other kinds of subjects and other modes of subjectivation have been extant. Moreover, subjectivation is perhaps not as comprehensive an explanation as it seems to be. The historical reconstruction leading from imperial to democratic to totalitarian to social subjects shows the advantages and the shortcomings of a double-edged paradigm. It is frustrating when it transforms the subjects into abstract historical entities by moving from the subjective experience to subjectivation patterns related to the construction of the political – another abstraction where one would wish for singular histories and more individuals in the picture. And it is rewarding when it proves helpful for not dismissing modern Chinese politics for want of a sustained process of individualization. I have rather emphasized the missing state in the sense of a deficit of institutionalization relative to the social dynamics and political expectations in the society at given historical moments. This is certainly not the only way for looking, even in China, at the *political* twentieth century. The history of the revolution can't be limited to Mao's activism. Similarly, the successive figures of political de-institutionalization do not cover the whole range of questions pertaining to the history of the post-imperial state. Yet, activism counted far more than allowed by the familiar picture of contemporary Chinese politics torn between excessive power and repressed democracy. The history of subjectivations suggests that it definitely partakes of the political but belongs to a different category of social action. Due to the missing state, political subjects had and still have to be activist social subjects, while under Mao subjects were political subjects – the activist core more so, although not in a different category of social action. Mao's activist state brought to the abyss of totalitarian terror the main feature of activism: the personal and collective conquest of autonomy by resistance under conditions not conducive to autonomy.

Autonomy by action became more assertive and conscious of its vast democratic capacities from late imperial elites to the May Forth generation of stateless activists. Autonomy by politics was Mao's illusion and the drama of an entire people when the reconstructed state fell victim to Mao's practice of power. Recognition in society (the configuration that is under way) does not mean freedom, rights and

democracy. It means the state governs recognized social subjects. May Fourth activism was conceived, imagined, performed as a political practice responding to the challenge of the missing state. Mao's activism was a practice of power in the total state. The subjectivation patterns that define today's middle-classed mainstream are social practices allowed by the politics of social recognizing that have followed the post-Mao period in signaling an after-revolution. Detached from active politics and formatted by a conservative ethos reflecting the orientation of the overarching state, the subjects are less political "avoiders" than political recognizers. The practice of power by recognition allows and prompts many to criticize and contest lower-level authorities. Social activism, also a social practice, reenacts the activists' practice, constant throughout the century, of not transforming their political practices into practices of power – with Mao's monstrous exception. The configuration is not without precedents in China's past, but the social setting tilting the balance in favor of middle-classed subjects over the social activists is new. The conditions of subjectivation are therefore new and the emerging subjects are new subjects.

The underlying theme – and method – in this historical sketch is historicity. I have argued that activism's dire fate at Mao's hands was not written in the May Fourth script. His early political education in the context of sundered institutions and flourishing activism did not have to generate his activist totalitarianism. Mao's May Fourth activism would have remained unnoticed had he not gone on to one of the worst political catastrophes in Chinese and world history. On the other side of the picture, the failure of democracy (excepting Taiwan) is not a failure of the activist subjects but of the political state. Thanks to them, the democratic promise has survived while the democratic institutionalization of state and society has indeed failed. A re-historicized history of the political makes Chinese history look more mobile in the past, but also in the twentieth century.[176] Mao's total state has more to do with the war context of the 1940s and with his uneasiness (unlike Lenin) at solving the (Chinese) conundrum of state and revolution than with a revival of the activist spirit or of the imperial power pattern. Pushing historicity's case one step further, I have also argued for a dual etic-emic comprehension of successive historical worlds (together with the subjectivation patterns they contain), even at close range, like the ones of Chen Duxiu and Lu Xun at the turn of the 1920s, of Mao, and of today. The most forcefully closed of these enclosed universes was Mao's. Viewing his system of action as an activist practice of power (and vice-versa) from the angle of subjectivation explains the inconceivable – the subjects' participation – as another extreme example of the worst effects of political de-institutionalization. The puzzles the Chairman seems to have left behind are no longer puzzling: how could the régime be totalitarian and political? Was it a failed attempt at democratizing total power? Were political violence and social disruption the effects of well-meant if utopian intentions?[177] Were they the equally well-meant outcome of pragmatic attempts at redressing a bureaucratic involution? At curing social evils due to economic backwardness? Communism contesting nationalism? Was Mao implementing the proto-reformist program of the 19th century by politicizing the emperor's power over the state in addressing non-bureaucratic forces? Or was he the archetypal emperor, complete with empire reorganization and disruption, terror, tyranny and bureaucratic involution? These standard questions are useless if one does not realize that Mao ruled by revolution and not above it; that his régime was not the deconstruction of some intention but a comprehensive political construction; that the call for initiative and rebellion within a closed system of control and terror can only be explained historically, for those who answered the call, by the instrumentation and refurbishing of the activist heritage of political subjectivation.

The activist ethos calls for total commitment, and activist subjectivation is by essence political inasmuch as it delivers one. China's path shows that the claims and demands on the activist subject become total and effective when the state becomes total in a context of political de-institutionalization. During the

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[176]   Chevrier, 2010 and 2016.

[177]   Roux, 2009.

halcyon days of May Fourth activism, the missing state did for the activists what a democratic system would have done: it prevented political dependency. They depended on their own agency and were the masters, not the enslaved subjects, of their subjectivation. Today's political dilemma is reminiscent of the confrontation that occurred one century ago over giving priority to the politically institutionalized subjects (which does not necessarily mean democratization), or to the state under the paramount leader. But the alternative of *minquan* and *guoquan* has to be viewed in the light of a new historical era. China after revolution is not back to empire, nor to what it became after empire. The bicentennial crisis of the state is behind, not ahead. The régime still shows the weaknesses of its strength (weak local state, official corruption, lack of strong social elites) rather than the strength of its weaknesses (such as the lack of a political organization of the elites). The specter of an electronically enhanced Big Brotherhood starts peeping over the ethical-social consensus, no doubt to the despair of Gao Xingjian's One Man whose solitary ideal has more to do with invasive social and political practices than with a love for solitude in the absolute. The subjects under bourgeois Communism are presently subjected between these two poles. Not all are bourgeois, most new "bourgeois" are salaried men and women, not capitalists, but the mainstream flows away from the revolutionary storms. The fountainhead of political subjectivation and activism is not dry, yet the Golden Age of their (illusory) autonomy and the time of their totalitarian confusion are well over. How will the social subjects shape their new world, brave or not brave, under the political construction of the new period remains open to further investigations.

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Political Subjects, Activism and Social Subjectivation in Contemporary China: a Tentative Historical Sketch
Abstract

Rather than using a substantive definition of subjects and examining their relation to politics as an effect of their agency, subjectivation patterns are analyzed in light of the successive modes for producing the political that have spanned the Chinese twentieth century. The rise of the political subject from citizen to social activist is linked to the failed political institution that takes place after empire (part I). In the de-institutionalized context of missing state that ensues, the activist mode of subjectivation takes a violent turn under Maoism (part II), while the present after-revolution is characterized by a social reframing of subjectivations without the long-standing support of political activism (part III). Foucault's concept of subjectivation is mustered together with Hegel's own concept of political subjectivation in the context of the French Terror, and with that of the contemporary Chinese philosopher Li Zehou, in order to explain how there were political subjects under Mao's totalitarian rule, and how there can be social subjects in today's authoritarian China with no "transition to democracy" in sight.

Sujets politiques, activisme et subjectivation sociale dans la Chine contemporaine : essai d'esquisse historique
Résumé

Au lieu d'une approche substantielle des sujets conduisant à étudier leur relation au politique via leur *agency*, des formes de subjectivation sont analysées en rapport avec les modes de construction du politique qui se succèdent en Chine au long du XXème siècle. De la citoyenneté à l'activisme social, l'essor du sujet politique est lié à l'échec de l'institution politique après la chute de l'empire (partie I). Dans le contexte désinstitutionnalisé d'Etat manquant qui s'ensuit, la subjectivation activiste subit le tournant violent du maoïsme (II). L'actuelle après-révolution se caractérise par le reformatage social des subjectivations, sans le support longtemps prédominant de l'activisme politique (III). La conception foucaldienne de la subjectivation est mise en rapport avec la théorie hégélienne de la subjectivation politique dans la Terreur, ainsi qu'avec celle du philosophe chinois contemporain Li Zehou, afin d'expliquer comment il put y avoir des sujets politiques sous le régime totalitaire de Mao, et comment il y a des sujets sociaux dans la Chine autoritaire d'aujourd'hui en l'absence de « transition démocratique ».

Keywords

Activism (political, social); agency; de-institutionalization; institution (of the political); recognition (politics of); state (building, formation, missing); subjectivation; subjects (political, social, totalitarian); Terror; violence (political)

Mots clés

Activisme (politique, social) ; *agency* ; désinstitutionnalisation ; Etat (construction, formation, manquant) ; institution (du politique) ; reconnaissance (politiques de la) ; subjectivation ; sujets (politiques, sociaux, totalitaires) ; Terreur ; violence (politique)