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DEPOLITICIZED POLITICS, FROM EAST TO WEST

CHINESE COMMENTATORS HAVE been curiously absent from international discussions about the Sixties, despite the fact that the Cultural Revolution was so central to that tumultuous decade.¹ This silence, I would argue, represents not merely a rejection of the radical thought and practice of the Cultural Revolution but a negation of China's whole 'revolutionary century'—the era stretching from the Republican Revolution in 1911 to around 1976. The century's prologue was the period running from the failure of the Hundred-Day Reform in 1898 to the 1911 Wuchang uprising; its epilogue was the decade from the late 1970s through to 1989. During this whole epoch the French and Russian Revolutions were central models for China, and orientations towards them defined the political divisions of the time. The New Culture movement of the May Fourth period championed the French Revolution, and its values of liberty, equality and fraternity; first-generation Communist Party members took the Russian Revolution as a model, criticizing the bourgeois character of 1789. Following the crisis of socialism and the rise of reform in the 1980s, the aura of the Russian Revolution diminished and the ideals of the French Revolution reappeared. But with the final curtain-fall on China's revolutionary century, the radicalism of both the French and the Russian experiences had become a target of criticism. The Chinese rejection of the Sixties is thus not an isolated historical incident, but an organic component of a continuing and totalizing de-revolutionary process.

Why do the Sixties seem to be more of a Western than an Asian topic today? First, although the Western and the Asian Sixties were connected, there were also very important differences. In Europe and America, the

rise of the Sixties protest movements saw an interrogation of capitalism's political institutions and a far-reaching critique of its culture. The Western Sixties targeted the post-war state, ruthlessly criticizing its domestic and foreign policies. By contrast, in Southeast Asia (particularly Indochina) and other regions, the uprisings of the Sixties took the form of armed struggles against Western imperialist domination and social oppression. Revolutionary political movements fought to transform the nation-state, to create their own sovereign space for economic development and social transformation. In today's context, the armed revolutions of the Sixties seem to have vanished from memory as well as thought; the problems of capitalist critique remain.

A second point concerns the particular character of the Chinese Sixties. Beginning in the 1950s, the People's Republic of China was unfailingly supportive of Third World liberation movements and the non-aligned movement generally, to the point of clashing with the world's greatest military power, the United States, in Korea and Vietnam. When European radicals developed a left critique of Stalinism in the Sixties, they discovered that China had already developed a far-reaching critical analysis of the orthodox Soviet line. Yet as China's wholly new form of party-state was being established, the corrosion of depoliticization was already beginning to set in. Its most important manifestations were bureaucratization and internal power struggles within the party-state, which in turn led to the suppression of discursive freedom. In launching the Cultural Revolution, Mao and others sought a range of tactics to combat these tendencies, yet the end result was always that these struggles became implicated in the very processes—of 'depoliticizing' faction fights and bureaucratization—that they were designed to combat, leading to renewed political repression and the rigidification of the party-state.

Even before 1976, the Sixties had lost their lustre in the eyes of many Chinese because of the continuous factional struggles and political persecutions that had occurred during the Cultural Revolution. Following the death of Mao and the restoration to power of Deng Xiaoping and others, the Chinese state undertook a 'thorough negation' of the Cultural

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Revolution from the late seventies. Combined with popular feelings of doubt and disappointment, this led to a fundamental change in attitudes that has lasted to the present day. Over the past thirty years, China has transformed itself from a planned economy to a market society, from a headquarters of world revolution to a thriving centre of capitalist activity, from a Third World anti-imperialist nation to one of imperialism's 'strategic partners'. Today, the most powerful counter to any attempts at critical analysis of China's problems—the crisis in agricultural society, the widening gap between rural and urban sectors, institutionalized corruption—is: 'So, do you want to return to the days of the Cultural Revolution?' The eclipse of the Sixties is a product of this depoliticization; the process of 'radical negation' has diminished the possibility for any real political criticism of current historical trends.

Revolutionary endings

How then should we understand the politicization of the earlier post-war era? The outcome of the two World Wars had served to dismantle the Eurocentric inter-state system; with the onset of the Cold War, the world order was defined above all by the antagonistic division between the us and Soviet blocs. One prodigious accomplishment of the Sixties was to break of this bi-polar order. From the Bandung conference in 1955 to the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution in 1975, the social movements and armed struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America took the form of a 'politicization process' that forced an opening in the Cold War order. Mao's 'Three Worlds Theory' was a response to this new historical configuration. As the national liberation movements broke the grip of Western imperialism, the rupturing of the Communist bloc that began with the Sino-Soviet split also created a space for renewed debate on the future of socialism. Theoretical and political struggles led to challenges to the structure of power, which had grown ever more ossified within the socialist camp. This too can be viewed as a politicization process.

Yet the Chinese Sixties also contained a self-contradictory 'depoliticizing tendency', with the anti-bureaucratization struggles becoming subsumed in faction fights—and, above all, in the violence that came to accompany them at the end of the Sixties. In his important essay, 'How to Translate Cultural Revolution', the Italian sociologist Alessandro Russo argues that these violent factional struggles created a crisis in the political culture that had developed in the early years

of the Cultural Revolution, centred upon open debate and multiple forms of organization.² This crisis provided the opening for the re-entry of the party-state. In this sense, the final stages of the Cultural Revolution unfolded within a process of depoliticization.

Hollowing of Western democracy

Russo's reflections on the Cultural Revolution are set against his analysis of the decline in the parliamentary-democratic systems of the West over the last thirty years. The corner-stones of these parliamentary democracies, he argues, were the political parties. A multi-party system presupposes that each party has a specific representative character and political values, for which it will fight against its rivals within the parliamentary-institutional framework. However, as the character and values of the parties become increasingly indeterminate within a broad macro-economic consensus, real democratic politics disappears. Under these conditions, parliament is transformed from a public sphere into an apparatus for ensuring national stability.

At the heart of the contemporary crisis of democracy, then, is the decline of the political party. In the context of a weakened party system, nation-states become depoliticized. From this perspective, there would appear to be an internal dynamic common to both the single-party and the multi-party systems. Over the past thirty years, their structural, internal and historical differences notwithstanding, both China and the West have been caught within a current of depoliticization. In contemporary China the space for political debate has largely been eliminated. The party is no longer an organization with specific political values, but a mechanism of power. Even within the party it is not easy to carry on real debate; divisions are cast as technical differences on the path to modernization, so they can only be resolved within the power structures. Since the mid Seventies the CCP has conducted no public debates about political values or strategy. An outstanding characteristic of 20th-century China's revolutionary transformations, however, had been the continuous and intimate connection between theoretical debate and political practice.

² Russo, 'How to Translate Cultural Revolution', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4. I would like to express my deep thanks to Alessandro Russo and Claudia Pozzana, who engaged in extended discussions on these topics with me at the University of Bologna in 2004. Without them, this essay could not have been written.

A key instance of this process was the disappearance of the concept of 'line struggle' after the Cultural Revolution. If this was the terminology used by the victors of the factional conflicts, it also illustrated a central element of the CCP's history: that every great political battle was inextricably linked to serious theoretical considerations and policy debate. From the conflicting analyses of the question of revolutionary defeat following the catastrophe of 1927, through the theoretical disputes of the early 1930s on the social character of the Chinese revolution; from the discussions of national and international politics in the Central Soviet and Yan'an periods to the debates on contradiction during the Cultural Revolution, we can trace a series of important theoretical divisions arising from differing analyses of social conditions and with divergent implications for party strategy. In my view, it is precisely these theoretical battles that maintain a party's internal vitality and ensure that it does not become a depoliticized political organization. Subjecting theory and practice to the 'line struggle' also functions as a corrective mechanism, enabling the party to recognize and repair its errors.

Due to the absence of functioning mechanisms for inner-party democracy, these debates and differences often found their 'resolution' through faction fights. After the Cultural Revolution, many of those who had suffered in the process came first to detest and then to repudiate the 'line struggle' concept. On regaining power in the late Seventies they sought only to suppress this type of argument in the name of party unity, rather than to analyse the conditions whereby 'line struggle' had degenerated into mere power play. This not only resulted in a thoroughgoing suppression of the political life of the party, but also destroyed the possibility of exploring the relationship between the party and democracy. Rather, it laid the foundation for the statification—i.e. depoliticization—of the party.

During the Sixties China had developed a wide-ranging theoretical agenda, revolving around such questions as the dynamics of history, the market economy, the means of production, class struggle, bourgeois right, the nature of Chinese society and the status of world revolution. There were heated exchanges between different political blocs on all these questions; the link between theory and political culture epitomized the period. In the context of its subsequent trajectory, we can see that China's depoliticization process has had two key

characteristics: firstly, the ‘de-theorization’ of the ideological sphere; secondly, making economic reform the sole focus of party work.

In terms of de-theorization, the turning-point came in the Seventies when the mutual interconnection of theory and practice was replaced by the notion of cautiously ‘crossing the river by feeling for the stones’. Nevertheless, the figure of ‘feeling for the stones’ does not accurately describe the reform process, for several reasons. First, in the mid Seventies, the CCP did engage in quite lively theoretical discussions about the market, labour compensation, civil rights and other questions, thus touching on many of the fundamental issues facing the country. Without these debates, it is difficult to imagine how the course of reform and the development of a market economy would have come about. Subsequently, from the end of the Seventies, there were a series of discussions about the problem of socialism, humanism, alienation, the market economy and the question of ownership both within the CCP and Chinese society as a whole—the two discussions, inside and outside the party, constituting a single continuous process. These, then, were countervailing trends to the general ‘de-theorization’.

The second characteristic of the depoliticization process has been to set economic reform at the centre of all party work. Formally speaking, this has involved the substitution of ‘construction’ for the former ‘two-line’ goal of ‘revolution and construction’. These political choices—understandably—met with wide approval at the end of the Seventies, appearing as a response to the factional struggles and chaotic character of politics during the latter years of the Cultural Revolution. Yet by this stage, the tension between party and politics that had characterized the early years of the Cultural Revolution had been thoroughly eliminated. The unification of politics and the state—the party-state system—diminished the earlier political culture.

From party-state to state-party?

The concept of the ‘party-state’ was, of course, a derogatory Cold War term applied by the West to the Communist countries. Today all the world’s nations have become party-states or—to extend the term—parties-states. Historically, the development of modern political systems from the preceding monarchical forms was a highly uneven process; by the mid-20th century, parties had still not been completely subsumed

into the parameters of national politics in China. The creation of a new form of party-state system was a fundamental development of the post-war period.

As the party, through the process of exercising power, became the subject of the state order, it increasingly changed into a depoliticized apparatus, a bureaucratic machine, and no longer functioned as a stimulant for ideas and practice. For this reason, I would characterize the dominant contemporary form as having undergone a transformation from a party-state to a state-party or 'state-multiparty' system. This implies that the party no longer conforms to its past political role, but becomes a component of the state apparatus. What I want to emphasize here is the change in the party's identity: no longer possessing its own distinctive evaluative standpoint or social goals, it can only have a structural-functionalist relationship to the state apparatus. If the state-party system is the result of a crisis transformation of the party-state, contemporary China is the embodiment of this trend. Yet the Chinese case should also be seen as a symptom of the worldwide dynamic toward depoliticization. Those analyses which, avoiding recognition of the generalized crisis in party politics, attempt to prescribe the best means of reforming the Chinese system—including setting Western-style multi-party representative democracy as the goal of Chinese political reform—are themselves only extensions of this depoliticization.

The Cultural Revolution was possibly the last stage of the political sequence wherein the party-state recognized that it faced a crisis and attempted to carry out a self-renewal. The political debates in the early stages of the GPCR included currents that hoped to smash the absolute authority of the party and the state, in order to further the goal of progress toward genuine popular sovereignty. The Cultural Revolution was a reaction against an early stage in the statification of the party; in order to change course, it was thought necessary to re-examine the party's political values. Efforts at social remobilization and stimulating political life outside the party-state context were crucial characteristics of this early period. In these years, factories across China were reorganized along the lines of the Paris Commune, and schools and other units engaged in social experimentation. Due to the forceful re-assertion of the party-state system, most of these innovations were short-lived and the extra-state processes of political activism were quickly suppressed. Yet, traces of these early experiments remained in later state and party

reorganizations—for example, the policy of admitting worker, peasant and army representatives into leadership positions, or the requirement that every level of state and party send their members to do social work in the rural villages or factories, etc. These practices, tainted with the character of the bureaucratized system and thus unable to unleash creative energies, became, at the end of the Seventies, prime targets of the government's drive to 'clean up the mess' and 'return to normal'.

Today, workers and peasants have wholly disappeared not only from the leadership bodies of party and state, but also from the National People's Congress. Following the failure of the Cultural Revolution and the development of a market society, depoliticization has become the main current of the age. At its core has been the growing convergence of politics and the party-state, and the emergence of the state-party system.

Concepts of class

The consolidation of the state-party system in the Chinese context is directly connected to the concept of class. The representative character of the Communist parties had inevitably become increasingly problematic with the establishment of Communist-led states. Following the Sino-Soviet split in the late Fifties and early Sixties, Mao emphasized the concept of class to stimulate a renewal of the party's political culture. His target was the Soviet notion of the 'party of the whole people', which not only indicated confusion about the representative character of the CPSU, but marked the depoliticization of the party-state system. While there is not room here to evaluate the classical Marxist theory of class, what needs to be emphasized is that, in Chinese political practice, class is not merely a structural category centred on the nature of property ownership or relation to the means of production; it is rather a political concept based on the revolutionary party's appeal for mobilization and self-renewal. Similarly, within the party, the concept was used to stimulate debate and struggle, in order to avoid depoliticization under the conditions of the party's administration of power. The concept denoted the attitudes of social or political forces toward revolutionary politics, rather than the structural situation of social class.

However, this highly subjective concept of class contained internal contradictions and dangers. Once crystallized into a structural, immutable notion—i.e., a depoliticized concept of class—its political dynamism

vanished. As an essentialized discourse of class identity, it proved incapable of stimulating political transformation. Rather, it became the most oppressive kind of power logic, the basis for the merciless character of subsequent faction fights. The increasing predominance of discourses of identitarianism, ‘family origin’ or ‘blood lineage’ was a negation and betrayal of the subjectivist and activist outlook that was the core of the Chinese revolution, whose central task was the dismantling of class relations formed through a history of violence and unequal property relations.

The tragedy of the Cultural Revolution was not a product of its politicization—signifying by debate, theoretical investigation, autonomous social organization, as well as the spontaneity and vitality of political and discursive space. The tragedy was a result of depoliticization—polarized factional struggles that eliminated the possibility for autonomous social spheres, transforming political debate into a mere means of power struggle, and class into an essentialized identitarian concept. The only way to overcome the tragedy of this period is through understanding its dimensions of repoliticization. If we take 1989 as the final end-point of the Sixties, the consolidation of depoliticization, this must imply that it could also have marked the beginning of the long road toward repoliticization.

Defeats and depoliticization

Explaining the phenomenon of depoliticization is a complicated task; clearly its dynamics cannot be analysed within the confines of China alone. Considered in historical perspective, it could be argued that broad currents of depoliticization arose in the wake of virtually every defeated revolutionary upheaval: after the French Revolution and the crushing of the 1848 uprisings; after the European and Asian Sixties; after 1989. Carl Schmitt’s analysis of what he called ‘neutralization’ offers a further insight into this process.³ For Schmitt, the central political problem of the 1920s was the containment of the rising power of the working class. The unsystematic interpenetration of the political and the economic during the period was, from this perspective, a mistake and a danger. He sought a new form of relationship between the political and the economic, neither *laissez-faire* nor social-democratic. Schmitt’s concept of neutralization,

³ See Carl Schmitt, ‘The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations’ [1929], *Telos*, Summer 1993, Issue 96.

although specifically situated within the context of Western intellectual and political history, is clearly open to broader application.

Historically, the development of the capitalist system was based upon the hypothetical separation of economy and politics, through the nascent bourgeoisie's challenge to the feudal aristocracy's monopoly over both. Schumpeter used the concept of 'political exchange' to describe the process through which this took place. Without the substantive protection of some aristocratic elements, the bourgeoisie would have been unable to further its own class interests. Political exchange already implies a certain separation between the political and economic spheres, without which there could be no such trade-offs. From this perspective, the separation of politics and economics is not a naturally existing phenomenon, but the product of capital's drive to realize an ever-greater share of power. Over the long 19th century, this objective was gradually achieved in the national and supra-national structuring of the market economy. Contemporary capitalism attempts to create a self-enclosed market economic sphere and a depoliticized political order, in which the key concept is that of the neutral state.

Classically, once the bourgeoisie had asserted its rule against the power of the monarchy and aristocracy, a kind of depoliticized politics replaced the multiple political structures of the revolutionary period—the product of political exchange, through the unification of capitalist and non-capitalist elements in the ruling stratum. This depoliticization process involved, for example, the legitimation through constitutional means of the *nouveau-riche* expropriation of social and national assets. As a result, the meaning of democracy shifted from popular to representative forms, the nation-state was transformed from a political space to an institutionalized structure of rule, and party politics from a struggle for representation into a power-distribution mechanism.

The era of finance capital has involved a further institutionalization and legalization of the concept of the spontaneously self-ordering market—the central nostrum of neoclassical economics, under which all non-capitalist institutions and forms of labour allocation are disparaged as 'political interference'. The unlimited expansion of the market economy into the political, cultural, domestic and other spheres is seen as an apolitical, 'natural' process. In this sense, the neoclassical and neoliberal concept of the market is an aggressively positivistic, depoliticized-political

ideology. The retreat of the state championed by these forces is a fundamentally depoliticizing proposition.

China's party-class exchange

China's current depoliticization encompasses yet another kind of political exchange, characterized by the party elite's effort to transform itself into the representative of special interests while still holding onto political power. In this instance it is transnational capital that must pass through a depoliticizing exchange process in order to gain the support of the power apparatus. Since marketization takes place under the aegis of the state, many aspects of the apparatus are imbricated in the economic sphere. (In a state-party system, this must include the party apparatus as well.) The 'reform' of property rights, which has led to large-scale expropriations, has been a conspicuous example of this depoliticizing exchange, which uses the law to depoliticize the property-right transfer. In the contemporary Chinese context, notions such as modernization, globalization and growth can be seen as key concepts of a depoliticized or anti-political political ideology, whose widespread usage militates against a popular political understanding of the social and economic shifts at stake in marketization. Against this background, the critique of corruption is also a critique of much deeper levels of inequality and injustice involved in the asset-transfer process.

Three factors underpin the current stage of China's depoliticization:

- ▶ In the marketization process, the boundary between the political elite and the owners of capital grows gradually more indistinct. The political party is thus changing its class basis.
- ▶ Under conditions of globalization, some of the economic functions of the nation-state are ceded to supranational market organizations (wro), so that a globalized, depoliticized legal order is consolidated.
- ▶ As both market and state are gradually neutralized or depoliticized, divisions over questions of development become technical disputes about market-adjustment mechanisms. Political divisions between labour and capital, left and right, are made to disappear.

If these developments began at the end of the Seventies and flourished in the Eighties, they have achieved worldwide predominance in the era of neoliberal globalization.

State and ideology

The contemporary depoliticization process is a product of this historical transformation, under which a new social inequality has been naturalized. The critique of this inequality must realize a repoliticization as the precondition for its own success. At the heart of this repoliticization is the destruction, in theory and practice, of the ‘natural’, neutral state. Denaturalization must be used to combat depoliticization.

How should we conceptualize the contemporary state? In the realm of Marxist theory, the emergence of the ‘neutral’ state led some authors to posit a separation between state power and the state apparatus, and to limit the objectives of political struggle to the question of state power. In fact, as Althusser pointed out, ‘in their political practice, the Marxist classics treated the state as a more complex reality’ than in the definition provided by their theory.⁴ This definition, he argued, lacked an objective description of the ‘ideological state apparatuses’. In contradistinction to the ‘repressive state apparatus’, the ISAs include religion, education, the family, law, labour unions, political parties, the media, the cultural sphere. While there is only one, unified, repressive state apparatus, there exists ‘a plurality of ideological state apparatuses’. And whereas the RSA belongs in the public domain, the larger part of the ISAs are in the private sphere. Under the pre-capitalist state, ‘there was one dominant Ideological State Apparatus—the Church’, while under capitalism the dominant ISAs shifted to the School–Family couple. Victory in the political struggle for state power, then, also depended on engaging in struggle within the sphere of the ideological apparatuses.

The central ISA system in socialist-era China comprised the Ministries of Propaganda, Culture and Education. This system combined the functions of ISAs and RSA, but the ISA was foremost. In contemporary China, although this apparatus still strives to perform an ideological function, it faces insurmountable obstacles. It has therefore largely turned into a

⁴ Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)’ in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, London 1971, p. 135.

repressive one; its control of media and other spheres is not primarily ideological, but rather is based on the need to preserve stability. Yet because all state apparatuses penetrate deeply into the institutions of daily life, the fundamental existential character of the state itself assumes a kind of depoliticized political form. Increasingly, this is now supplemented by the ideological hegemony of the market.

Three components of hegemony

To confront the logic of depoliticized politics, we must therefore analyse the forms of contemporary hegemony. I will argue that there are three components of this hegemony, with complex historical inter-relationships. First, as clarified in Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Althusser's 'ideological state apparatuses', hegemony and the sovereign state's monopoly of violence are mutually implicated. Gramsci identified two modes of the operation of hegemony: directive power, and intellectual and moral leadership. Directive power operates in the realm of coercion, while leadership refers to the ruling group's strategy of proposing solutions to common problems, which at the same time allocate exceptional powers to itself. According to the *Prison Notebooks*, the state is a particular form of collective structure whose aim is to create the most advantageous conditions for the expansion and development of its total capability.

Second, the concept of hegemony has been closely connected to interstate relations. Western scholarship has tended to distinguish Gramsci's approach from the critique of the international hegemon within Chinese political thought. My concern here is to attempt to reconstruct the theoretical and historical links between the two. Mao's concept of the hegemon was always deployed within the sphere of global relations. The 'Three Worlds' theory did not only posit the Third World as a political subject which, through links and breaks with elements of the Second World, would oppose the two hegemonic powers, the USA and USSR, and form a new kind of international relations. It also sought, through theoretical investigation, political debate and moral appeal, to break the ideological power and prestige of the American and Soviet systems. The practice of counter-hegemony implied a contestation of *cultural* authority. The ancient Chinese classics, *The Spring and Autumn Annals* and *Master Zuo's Commentary*, use the concepts of ducal authority—control by force—and hegemonic authority—domination through rites and rituals—to

differentiate the two types of power in the ancient states of Qi, Jin, Chu and Qin. Although the concept of hegemony in the Chinese-speaking world normally refers to political, economic or military domination and control, it also involves the question of ideology.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Machiavelli's concept of power are explicitly combined in Giovanni Arrighi's *Long Twentieth Century*, where the sphere of national ideological hegemony is linked to international political relations. In Machiavelli, power links consent and force: power implies the use of armed force or the threat of armed force; consent implies moral authority. By virtue of its hegemonic power, the USA has become a model of depoliticization, and likewise one for modernization, marketization, globalization; it has thus established its own global ideological authority. American hegemony rests on the multiple foundations of a monopoly of violence, economic dominance and ideological 'soft power'. But, just as the process of depoliticization has national and international dimensions, the possibility of breaking this depoliticized political settlement also exists within these two dimensions. The débâcle of America's military expansionism since 2001 may unite an increasing number of global forces in 'de-Americanization'.

Thirdly, hegemony not only relates to national or international relations, but is intimately connected to trans-national and supra-national capitalism; it must also be analysed within the sphere of globalized market relations. Classical political economists emphasized that the process of reproduction was an inexhaustible and unending global process; something that has never been clearer than today when market ideology constitutes a type of hegemony. Neoclassical economics is itself a textbook case of globalized ideological hegemony—its principles permeate the rules and regulations of the major trans-national trade and financial institutions. All of these function as 'ideological global apparatuses', though of course they also have the power of economic coercion. The most direct expressions of the market ideological apparatus are the media, advertising, the 'world of shopping' and so forth. These mechanisms are not only commercial, but ideological. Their greatest power is in their appeal to the 'common-sense', ordinary needs which turn people into consumers, voluntarily following market logic in their daily lives. Market ideological apparatuses have a strongly depoliticizing character.

The three components of hegemony discussed above do not operate in abstraction from each other but form mutually entangled networks of power. They are internal to contemporary social mechanisms and institutions, internal to human activity and beliefs. Depoliticized politics is structured like this network of hegemony—an essential point for understanding China's current situation. Contemporary hegemony commonly uses internal contradictions to expand its operability. For example China's economic policy and developmental trajectory are locked into the process of capitalist globalization, whose outcomes have included successive financial crises and growing social tensions and inequalities. Yet in China, capitalist globalization is never viewed as a factor in the contradictions and conflicts of interest at the national level.

De-nationalization?

The more open climate in China during the Seventies and Eighties permitted definitions of autonomy and liberalization that challenged the ideological state apparatuses. However, this 'de-nationalization process', as it was known within critical intellectual circles, did not result in repoliticization. Rather, occurring just as the sovereign authority of the nation-state was beginning to be challenged by new forces of capitalist globalization, the processes of autonomy and liberalization of the period were reincorporated into the dynamic of depoliticization and the consolidation of international ideological hegemony.

In fact, 'de-nationalization' denotes the outcome of fierce conflict between two different national political systems, two ideologies. The 'nation' to be 'de-nationalized' is understood to refer only to the socialist nation. De-nationalization, therefore, is simply the process of identification with a different hegemonic form. In contemporary China, anti-socialist ideology uses the image of anti-statism to cover up its inner connection to this new national form. But the above analysis of the multiple dimensions of hegemony demonstrates that this new form of state ideology has a supra-national dimension as well, which often expresses itself as an attack on the state from the supra-national position.

This de-nationalization process was accompanied by an ideological depoliticization, incorporated into the new form of hegemony that privileged modernization, globalization and the market. 'De-nationalization' presumes the erosion of any distinction between state power and the state

apparatuses. Once this distinction has been obliterated, the space for political struggle is diminished, and political problems are turned into a 'non-political' process of de-nationalization or de-statification. Indeed many of today's social movements (including most NGOs) are themselves a part of the depoliticization process. They are either absorbed by the state apparatus, or constrained by the logic of national or international foundations. Not only are they unable to offer different understandings of development, democracy or popular participation; they actually function as cogs of the depoliticized global mechanisms. A pressing issue of our time is thus how to overcome the social movements' self-imposed depoliticization, and how to link a critical internationalism to political struggles within the nation-state framework.

Today, any challenge to the fundamental logic of depoliticized politics will require us to identify the fissures within the three forms of hegemony; to dismantle the totalizing quality of these spheres and find within them new spaces for political struggle. Contemporary globalization and its institutions encourage the transnationalization of finance, production and consumption, but at the same time strive to limit immigration to the framework of state regulation, thus creating regional rivalries between workers. Our response should not be to retreat into nationalist mode, but rather to redevelop a critical internationalism in order to expose the inner contradictions of globalization. In China, because of the huge conflicts between the practice of reform and socialist values, there remain internal contradictions between the reform movement and the ISAs. As a result, the ISAs are mutating into repressive state apparatuses, relying on force or administrative authority to impose a system of control. In this respect, the Chinese ISAs operate according to a logic of de-ideologization and depoliticization, even though they make their appeal in the language of ideology.

Based primarily on the requirements of legitimization, the Chinese Communist Party, while thoroughly repudiating the Cultural Revolution, did not repudiate either the Chinese Revolution or socialist values, nor the summation of Mao Zedong thought. This has created a twofold effect. First, the socialist tradition has functioned to a certain extent as an internal restraint on state reforms. Every time the state-party system made a major policy shift, it had to be conducted in dialogue with this tradition. At minimum, it had to couch its announcement in a particular language designed to harmonize the policy transformation with its proclaimed

social goals. Secondly, the socialist tradition gave workers, peasants and other social collectivities some legitimate means to contest or negotiate the state's corrupt or inegalitarian marketization procedures.

Thus, within the historical process of the negation of the Cultural Revolution, a reactivation of China's legacy also provides an opening for the development of a future politics. This opening is not a simple doorway back to the 20th century, but a starting point in the search for a means to break the hold of depoliticized political ideology after the end of the revolutionary era. In a situation where all earlier forms of political subjectivity—party, class, nation—face the crisis of depoliticization, the search for new forms must be accompanied by a redefinition of the boundaries of politics itself.