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How Modern was Chinese Modernity?

Exploring Tensions of a Contested Master Narrative

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Abstract

“Modernity” continues to be a useful historiographical tool, however, it is tension-laden both theoretically and empirically. Conceptually, “modernity” can denote either a quality (“modern-ness”) or a condition referring to a specific period in history. With regard to empirical research, the essay takes a look at the recent history of China, arguing that although there exists a line between what is modern and what is not (between modernity and its Other[s]), this often appears fuzzy when we look at concrete historical manifestations. Two case studies bear this out: The first looks at the possibility of locating a rural modernity, challenging conventional scholarship that has situated the modern almost exclusively in China’s cities. The second case study elucidates the relationship between “Chinese” and “global” modernity, striking a balance between universalistic and pluralistic understandings of modernity. In sum, the essay shows that it is essential to incorporate the paradoxes inherent in the modern condition into the analytical framework.

Keywords: modernity, historiography, master narrative, China

Introduction

In the past few decades, many historians have viewed master narratives with suspicion. Such sweeping accounts, it was argued, squeeze diverse and variegated historical processes into the Procrustes bed of a uniform storyline. Microhistory and historical anthropology, with their focus on small-scale phenomena (such as individuals or local communities) were proposed as one way of avoiding big narratives that all too often appeared

to take the nation for granted as the “natural” subject of history.¹ A variety of approaches seeking to transcend national history rather than shrink the national framework – such as global history or the various concepts coming under the “trans” label (transnational, transregional, transcultural, etc.) – have made the latter criticism obsolete. On the other hand, master narratives have retained their usefulness as historiographical tools, in particular in producing historical syntheses and in providing a common framework for specialist enquiries – the past could not be properly understood if historians published nothing but disjointed microstudies.² Rather than rejecting master narratives out of hand, historians should therefore scrutinise individual concepts for what they are worth.

This is exactly what I set out to do in this article. From the perspective of a historian of China, I examine the value (in other words the potentials and pitfalls) of modernity as a historiographical concept. For the most part, I will limit myself to the study of China in the “West” here: Chinese historians, regardless of to what extent they base themselves on Marxist theory, have rarely been bothered by notions of Eurocentrism, be it within academic circles or with regard to a wider public.³ I will argue that in order to use modernity productively as an analytical category, we need to thoroughly engage with its inherent tensions. My starting point is a review of the rise (or re-emergence) of “modernity” as a master narrative in the 1990s. I will then discuss the relationship of modernity and its Others before zooming in on two specific research areas where the problems of “modernity” are particularly salient: the urban-rural divide and China’s relationship with the wider world.

The Rise of “Modernity” in the Historiography of China: Potentials and Pitfalls

Generally speaking, the emergence of “modernity” as a concept in the 1990s and its ongoing popularity is somewhat surprising: For it rose from the ashes of the older modernisation theory, which had gradually crumbled away as a generation of historians of Asia and Africa coming of age intellectually in the 1970s had castigated it as self-servingly Eurocentric or as favouring a capitalism-friendly teleology of history.⁴ In the case of Chinese history, Paul Cohen’s *Discovering History in China*, published in the mid-1980s, debunked the notion that the “West” had been the sole or even the primary agent of China’s transformation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Instead, Cohen called for a “China-centred” approach that would

engage with Chinese history on China's own terms.⁵ It is partly a reaction to this critique that scholars in the early 1990s sought to demonstrate individual elements of modernity in China's past, going back until at least the eighteenth century, in other words to the period before the traumatic clash with "Western" imperialism. The most obvious case here is the debate on a public sphere/civil society in Chinese history.⁶ Although it makes little sense to isolate the historiography of China from other historiographical trends pointing in the same direction, it is possible to think of this search for a common historical ground between China and the "West" as an intellectual link between a China-centred history and the open espousal of modernity from the mid-1990s onwards. The new perspectives offered in the late 1990s and early 2000s by the Great Divergence debate on the simultaneous development of early modern Europe and East Asia as well as the notion of "multiple modernities" – to which I will return later –, probably had a similar effect.⁷

And indeed there are good arguments in favour of modernity as an analytical concept. Not the least of these is that the term – or equivalents thereof – has informed the consciousness of historical actors themselves.⁸ If we discard the self-strengthening (*zhiqiang*) rhetoric of the 1860s to 1890s, we may safely say that a semantics of modernity has existed in China since about 1900, expressing itself in a number of terms.⁹ Most if not all of these had a political connotation. One was "new" (*xin*), which since the turn of the century denoted a marked break with the past, from the Qing dynasty's (1644-1912) "New Policies" (*Xin zheng*) as an ultimately failed attempt to shore up the declining Imperial authority in the closing decade of the monarchy, to the influential New Youth magazine (*Xin qingnian*) founded in 1915, to the idea of the People's Republic after 1949 as a "new China", exemplified, among others, in the name of its news agency, *Xinhua*. An ephemeral alternative was "young" (*shaonian*), which had been associated with radical revolutionary or reformist movements before, such as Young Italy in the nineteenth century or the Young Turks of 1908.¹⁰ Another term was *jianshe*, mostly translated as "reconstruction" for an international audience.¹¹ Then there were the more literal renderings of the term "modern", such as *jindai* and *xiandai*, which by adding the suffix *hua* ("change") could be made into an equivalent of "modernisation". Arguably the most widely known example is the political slogan of the Four Modernisations (*Si ge xiandaihua*), which became the overarching guideline for reshaping post-Mao China from the late 1970s onwards. In the late 1920s, a phonetic derivative of the English "modern", *modeng*, gained currency; it could be

used interchangeably with *xiandai*, but, not unlike Western usage, it even more often referred to things fashionable.¹²

Despite this impressive array of linguistic evidence, there is no reason why historians should accept the historical actors' interpretation of themselves and their times as a matter of course. Indeed, the bird's-eye view of the historian produces a far more comprehensive catalogue of social, cultural and political changes than the worm's-eye view of even the best-informed contemporary. As a result, the two perspectives are not on the same level, nor can we gauge modernity directly by applying instruments from a social-science toolkit to measure past experiences.¹³ On the other hand, if modernity is to make sense as a historical concept, then historians need to agree on criteria in order to adequately appreciate the specifics of change. Candidates that a majority of scholars would no doubt agree on are the emergence of industrial capitalism and concomitant processes of urbanisation, the intensification of communication and the growing interconnectedness across the globe as well as the spread of scientific rationality. While personal experience of modernity in the early twentieth century is perhaps best described, in Harry Harootunian's now classic formulation, as "speed, shock, and the spectacle of constant sensation",¹⁴ changes were often at the same time more subtle and more profound. Consider, for example, the creation of a new scientific and political vocabulary in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in China, much of which permeated into everyday usage, contributing crucially to a fundamental reshaping of the Chinese language.¹⁵

But modernity is a contested concept, and for good reasons too. To begin with, the term poses semantic difficulties. "Modernity" can mean two things: it may refer to an inherent *quality* of being modern, a "modern-ness"; alternatively, it is conventionally applied to a specific period in history.¹⁶ While the first meaning is relatively more flexible, the second is rather static and semantically unfortunate. For "modernity" suggests a *state* or *condition* rather than a process, and this creates all sorts of problems when historically the terms "modern" and "modernity" (in the original Latin: *modernus/a, modernitas*) have been applied – with regard to Europe, that is – over a period of more than 800 years.¹⁷ Even confining the modern epoch to the period between the Enlightenment and our own present, as has become customary, cannot steer clear of the problem that when dealing with modernity, historians stand on constantly shifting ground. Quite obviously, modernity means a different thing in the digital age of mass communication than it meant in an age in which steamships, railways and the truly revolutionary invention of telegraphy were the fastest

means connecting people with one another. Were it not for its unfortunate association with modernisation theory, “modernisation” would be the far better term; for semantically at least, it allows the construction of the process to which it refers as open and ongoing.¹⁸ The inbuilt teleology of “modernity”, by contrast, has necessitated terminological and conceptual fine-tuning, some of which – admittedly with the benefit of hindsight – appears premature. In 1970s Europe and North America, hit by the oil shock, economic recession and concerns about the future, the idea of having moved into an age beyond industrial modernity – a postmodernity where knowledge and information were taking over from manufacturing – no doubt was attractive.¹⁹ On the other hand, the digital age and the increasing awareness of globalising processes have given rise to second thoughts about the historical trajectory; indeed, some authors have proclaimed a “second modernity” rather than a move beyond the modern.²⁰

“Modernity” also tends to be Eurocentric, in particular where it is assumed to be a singular phenomenon. The notion that if there is only one modernity, then it must have its origins in Europe, has a long pedigree going back to at least the Enlightenment, and its roots reach even deeper into the past. Generations of historians, building on eighteenth-century philosophy or yet earlier religious discourses, have inherited a worldview according to which Europe was moving forward while at the same time other parts of the world were going backward. Under the influence of “Western” imperialism, many leading lights outside Europe and North America subsequently accepted this idea of a degeneration of their own societies and cultures.²¹ If we acknowledge, however, that the continuity between historical actors and scholarly interpretation is not a given, then this problem is not insurmountable. Contemporary perspectives and historiography are potentially disjointed, and attempts at pluralising modernity – such as the search for “multiple modernities” or the notion of a “coeval” modernity allowing for the contemporaneousness and coexistence of different forms of modernity – have worked towards a “provincialisation of Europe”, to borrow Dipesh Chakrabarty’s term.²² I will return to this aspect in the latter part of the essay.

Partly as a result of this inbuilt teleology, the concept of “modernity” is also inherently normative. It has been driven by the idea that history is not only a process of continual change, but that this change is usually (if not always) for the better. As a result, it has proved difficult to integrate starkly gloomy episodes into the fabric of the modernity narrative: The debates about Nazism and to what extent it can be described as modern is the most obvious case in point, although the destructive aspects of modern Chinese history – such as

the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of 1851-1864 or the Cultural Revolution slightly over a century later – furnish equally illustrative examples.²³

Yet another problem of the modernity debate is its level of abstraction. Proponents and critics of the concept argue about its general validity on a theoretical level, but provide little guidance as to how the pros and cons should be translated into empirical research. I agree with Carol Gluck that debating modernity is both a theoretical *and* an empirical problem.²⁴ “Modernity” is sufficiently problematic to require handling with care and sufficiently helpful to hold on to, the more so as alternative concepts either are not in sight or lack the universal acceptance to serve as a common platform for a large, international and interdisciplinary community of scholars. In what follows, I propose that we look at the tensions within “modernity” and with their help turn the concept into a productive research tool: tensions between the perspectives of historical actors and historians, tensions between modernity and its Other(s), tensions between different spatio-social entities (such as city and countryside), tensions finally between a reading of modernity in the singular and in the plural. These tensions will be elaborated on in the following sections. After a rather brief discussion of modernity and its Other(s), I will focus on two areas that have been discussed in terms of modernity: urban modernity and the concomitant question whether we can speak of a rural modernity in China; and global modernity with a view to the question whether modernity should be conceptualised as singular or plural. Not all of the empirical studies on which I draw are explicitly focused on modernity, but all of them can be harnessed to a discussion of modernity’s relevance for Chinese history.

Modernity and its Other(s)

All concepts are defined against at least one explicit or implicit Other. Were it not so, they would lose their edge. An all-encompassing concept would be completely useless as a means of intellectually engaging with the world. This is also true of modernity: If there are phenomena that can be described as modern, there must be others that are not. As modernity has not always been there but has emerged historically, we must be able to trace its genealogy – or alternatively, if different modernities have made their appearance over time, we need to be able to say what distinguishes the modernity we currently live in (*our* modernity) from previous ones. In attempting to do so, I wholeheartedly endorse Sheldon Pollock’s view that “[t]here is no shame in premodernity”.²⁵

The problem with “modernity” is not that it lacks an Other from which to be distinguished. Quite the contrary. In the case of China, American scholars in the 1950s and 1960s operated with a binary tradition-modernity scheme borrowed from the arsenal of modernisation theory. “Tradition” here referred not so much to a historically transmitted chain of values, ideas and practices, but to a condition that was transformed in the process of modernisation. Two elements were of crucial importance: Firstly, the transition from tradition to modernity was wholesale, radiating from one sector of society into all others. And secondly, China – as all non-“Western” societies – did not have any inherent potential of radically transforming tradition. “[W]ithout direct Western contact”, wrote three leading East Asia specialists in a widely read textbook, ideas and practices “underwent only ‘change within tradition’”.²⁶ Another eminent China scholar, Joseph R. Levenson, opened his monumental intellectual history of Confucianism in the modern era by asking whether China, “without the catalytic intrusion of Western industrialism”, could have evolved into “a society with a scientific temper”. Somehow the question was rhetorical, because predictably the answer was no.²⁷ The problem about the binary polarisation of tradition and modernity is that both are understood as distinct aggregate states so that movements from one to the other are always complete. This failure to conceptualise transformation other than as an unambiguous clear-cut change has been one of the fundamental weaknesses of classical modernisation theory.²⁸

On the other end of the spectrum, we might consider whether to view modernity as a condition that encompasses the (seemingly) non-modern or even anti-modern. This appears to be a fairly recent perspective; I take my cue from a publication on the Boxer War arguing that this event was “a wholly modern episode and a wholly modern resistance to globalization, representing new trends in modern China and in international relations”.²⁹ Indeed, there were many modern aspects to the Boxer War of 1900-1901. Consider, for example, the way that thrilled audiences were kept abreast of developments via the telegraph, the novelty of a multi-national intervention that foreshadowed practices of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, or the fact that the “Western” troops were facing a Chinese army that was technologically and tactically their match.³⁰ But at the core of anti-imperialist resistance was neither the Chinese military nor the Chinese government, but the Boxer movement. As research by Paul Cohen, Joseph Esherick and others has shown, the Boxers were enmeshed in popular culture and religion, attempting to offset “Western” weaponry through spirit possession as well as invulnerability rituals and espousing a rigorous Luddism.³¹ As a consequence, referring to the Boxer War as

“wholly” modern presupposes a concept of modernity that subsumes the anti-modern under the modern. Such an approach, however, irons out the inconsistencies, contradictions and tensions of the modern condition, turning “modernity” into a catch-all concept devoid of substance. It makes far more sense, as a number of studies have done, to look at anti-modern resistance to state expansion, reform projects and the concomitant tightening of the tax screw, especially in rural China, from the 1900s and the 1950s (and possibly beyond).³² As these studies show, modernity is always a contested, never to be taken for granted process. What matters is that historical enquiry should refrain from a normative teleology, acknowledging resistance to modernity as a legitimate standpoint. The felicitous phrase by Pollock already cited above³³ – that there is no shame in pre-modernity – applies not only to the macroperspective of historical periodisation, but also to microhistorical empiricism.

If neither a binary polarity nor the eradication of all distinctions is helpful, how can we capture the relationship between modernity and its Other(s)? I will suggest an answer by drawing on two examples. The first is about continuity.³⁴ In his examination of the modern Chinese state, Philip Kuhn has argued that its origins lay in responses to three constitutional problems of the late Imperial system: how to confront the abuse of power, how to control the majority of the educated elite not in government service and how to keep in check a populous society by means of a small territorial administration.³⁵ With regard to the latter, Kuhn demonstrates how even a measure such as Mao’s collectivisation in the 1950s had roots that went further back than the exigencies of socialist transformation. Essentially, he argues, the Maoist state was bent on eliminating middlemen in the taxation system, tax payment by proxy having been one of the central features (and problems) of late Imperial as well as early Republican China.³⁶ This means that much of the institutional innovation in modern China was underpinned by an ongoing search for a solution to an enduring problem. It is therefore important to see the creation of a modern state not so much as a clean break with what preceded it, but rather to emphasise continuities and connections with the Imperial past.

My second example concerns religion, which for a long time has been regarded as an almost quintessential Other of modernity, following the Marxian and Weberian tradition that in modern society, religion would be ultimately doomed to vanish. It has taken a long time to realise that, in Peter Berger’s words, “[t]he world today [...] is as furiously religious as it ever was”.³⁷ This realisation has opened up new perspectives on the relationship of religion and modernity. In a fascinating study, the Cambridge-based Tibe-

tologist Hildegard Diemberger has shed new light on Tibetan responses to the changes in religious policy undertaken by the Chinese Communist Party after 1978. From inside Tibet, the period of “reform and opening” (*gaige kaifang*) proclaimed by the Chinese leadership is viewed as the era of the “further spread of the [Buddhist] doctrine”, a continuation of two earlier periods of Buddhist expansion in the sixth to ninth and tenth to eleventh centuries.³⁸ To a considerable extent, this revival has been accompanied by a recovery of sacred texts that has all the trappings of the digital age: Not only are foreign libraries scoured for Buddhist writings, which are then often digitised to make them available for religious use at home; more importantly, CDs have become part of Tibetan Buddhist book culture and are sometimes treated as prayer-wheels, “spinning their sacred message at electronic speed”.³⁹ We are dealing here with two different temporalities, one subjective and to a degree backward-looking, connecting the present with a glorious past; the other in tune with the brave new world of the digital age, looking to the future (and perhaps more obvious from the vantage point of the academic observer). The Tibetan Buddhists discussed by Diemberger apparently do not aspire to being modern; yet they have no problems with living in a modern age. The relationship between modernity and its Other(s) is by no means clear-cut, it thrives on tensions and contradictions. We will encounter this problematic as we proceed to take a closer look at two specific research areas.



Figure 1 Tibetan monk typing a Buddhist text into a computer. In recent years, CDs have become part of Tibetan Buddhist book culture, revealing different temporalities within “modernity”.

(Photograph: Hildegard Diemberger)

Urban Modernity! Rural Modernity?

When rifling through the historical literature on Chinese modernity, one impression is paramount: Chinese modernity is urban. This is confirmed, among others, by a fairly recent volume on everyday life in modern China, in which the countryside gets no mention at all.⁴⁰ In all probability, this is no coincidence but reflects a fundamental shift in the focus of China historians. In the decades following the foundation of the People's Republic in 1949, what needed to be explained was the successful Communist seizure of power. This had come to pass through a successful agrarian revolution, and the social and economic change of the 1950s gripped the countryside as much – perhaps even more – than it did the cities. From the 1980s onwards, academics focused their attention on the new China of economic reform, and since the late 1990s, this trend has intensified in tandem with China's rise as an economic world power. The China emerging from this rise was increasingly urban and middle-class, a shift that prompted researchers to increasingly preoccupy themselves with urban modernity.

Enquiries into the history of modern urban spaces have produced a vast number on studies on individual cities, to the extent that they cannot be exhaustively discussed in this article. The majority of publications have focused on Shanghai, although this cosmopolitan metropolis can hardly be said to have been representative of China at large.⁴¹ Other cities that have been studied include Guangzhou, Chengdu, Tianjin and Beijing.⁴² Major themes have included urban self-government – a twentieth-century innovation building on some pioneering developments in the nineteenth – , the transformation of cityscapes and new policies such as public health. Other studies take this reconfiguration as a starting point for looking at how political spaces have been created, the most important of these being Tian'anmen Square in Beijing, which became a site of symbolic political contest for the first time in 1919.⁴³ Cultural production, the emergence of a consumer culture and the fledgling media have also been analysed as parts of an urban modernity.⁴⁴

When it comes to modernity, it appears that much of urban historiography discusses the late Qing and Republican eras, in other words the formative period of modern China. Rather unsurprisingly, the emphasis is more on the ruptures with the past, on the new things that were taking shape and that changed the face of China for good. However, this process was an uneven one, as some studies remind us. For one thing, although cities became better integrated, evolving into an urban network, there was a keen awareness of the difference between the more “advanced” coastal

cities and the more “backward” cities in the interior of China in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴⁵ For another, not all urban dwellers shared equally in the blessings of modern life, such as glitzy shopping venues, music halls and cinemas. The poorest urbanites did not use public transport and their mobility was for the most part restricted to their own neighbourhood; they wore cheap, hand-sewn clothing produced and purchased locally. The downside of urban life up until the end of the Republican era included beggary, crime and prostitution.⁴⁶ Perhaps no feature of urban life in early twentieth-century China embodies the conceptual tensions of “modernity” more than the rickshaw, which was adopted from Japan. In an era of increasing motorisation, it used the most archaic form of propulsion imaginable: human energy. And yet, with its rubber tyres, its success as a commonly used means of transport was as dependent on paved, macadamised or tarmacked roads as were cars or autobuses.⁴⁷

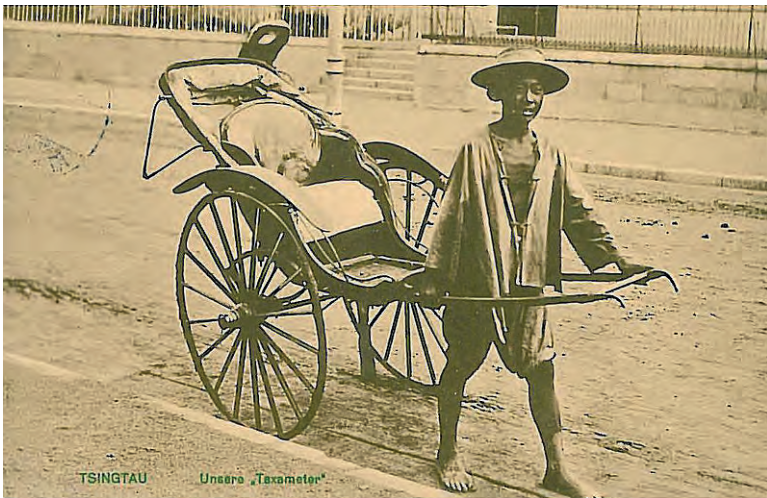


Figure 2 “Tsingtau. ‘Our taxameters’” (1914). The photograph shows a rickshaw puller in the German leasehold of Qingdao (Tsingtau). Despite using an archaic form of propulsion, rickshaws required modern technologies of road building to operate properly.

(Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tsingtau_Taxameter_1914.jpg)

Interestingly, whereas the inequalities of Chinese urban modernity have been acknowledged at least by a number of researchers, it appears that the question to what extent the rural areas had a share in Chinese modernity has rarely been asked. To a degree, this is surprising, as cities and countryside were not hermetically sealed off from one another: indeed, in the early

twentieth century a lot of the industrial workforce as well as a considerable part of groups at the bottom of urban society – such as rickshaw pullers and beggars – were recent migrants with rural origins.⁴⁸ And clearly the countryside was needed to feed the urban population. But the changes experienced in the countryside have been obscured by the idea of an urban-rural divide that emerged in the cities in the first half of the twentieth century. Since about the 1920s, country folk were ridiculed as conservative bumpkins unable to keep up with the new forms of lifestyle sprouting in the cities.⁴⁹ The early decades of the twentieth century also witnessed the appearance of a new semantics of the Chinese “peasant”. By adopting the term *nongmin* from Japanese, not only did leftist intellectuals construct the peasants as a social class; they also associated that class with other terms such as “feudalism” (*fengjian*) and “superstition” (*mixin*), thereby endowing it with a specific temporality (that of the past), marking it as backwards and in need of a complete overhaul.⁵⁰

At the same time, the urban dwellers’ notion of a radical divide between the “modern” city and the “backward” countryside should also be seen as the starting point of the radical transformation of life in rural China at the hands of a largely urban-socialised elite.⁵¹ The story of this shift does not have to be told in modernist language: It is also possible to present it, underpinned by a negative teleology and perhaps in somewhat nostalgic terms, as an example of “deagrarianisation”, as the decline of a rural or peasant lifestyle. Such a narrative may have been reinforced by the rapid rural urbanisation in China since the 1990s.⁵² But even when adopting it, one still has to account for the remarkable change in the Chinese countryside.

China’s agricultural transformation began as early as the 1860s and gained momentum in the early 1900s through the founding of peasant associations, the establishment of model farms using capitalist methods of production, the transmission of agronomic knowledge through agricultural schools and the introduction of chemical fertiliser.⁵³ In the Republican era, this approach was continued and expanded by warlord governments and by the Rural Reconstruction Movement, which sponsored local model projects focusing on education, local self-government and the formation of cooperatives.⁵⁴ After 1927, the Nationalist government likewise pursued a “green revolution” aimed predominantly at developing new breeds, raising quality standards and stabilising the peasants’ economic situation by making cheap credit available.⁵⁵ The 1930s witnessed an increase in commercialisation, but also a first, small wave of mechanisation and industrialisation – mostly in peasants’ subsidiary occupations, such as

textile production.⁵⁶ A second wave followed in the 1940s and 1950s under early Communist rule, a third in the 1980s.⁵⁷

The Communist Party of China (CCP), who seized power locally in the late 1920s and 1930s and at the national level in 1949, took an altogether different approach. For them, the solution to rural China's problems lay in a radical restructuring of the relations of (agricultural) production, in other words of property relations. This was connected with a process of state-building. As Pauline Keating, writing from the vantage point of the local level, has argued, the Communist revolution was "at one and the same time a restoration movement in the style of imperial restorations of China's past and a 'modernization' movement centered on economic development".⁵⁸ But the Communists not only altered class structures and the mode of production, first through the redistribution of land and in the 1950s through collectivisation. They also sought to change the social and cultural fabric, e.g. by introducing the new Marriage Law of 1950, which abolished arranged marriages and for the first time made it possible for rural people to divorce.⁵⁹

To determine whether we can speak of "rural modernity" in twentieth-century China, we must decide what exactly it is we mean by this term. If we understand modernity as a *condition*, then we are running into difficulties. To begin with, the urban-rural divide has never been fully bridged, even into the twenty-first century; China's peasants are still, as one Chinese-language publication has argued, "second-class citizens".⁶⁰ Nor did the peasantry see themselves as modern the way a sizeable number of urbanites did at the same time. Peasants embraced social change when they could turn it to their advantage (e.g. by participating in the land reform or by exercising their right to control their sexual life), but they also resisted technological innovations under the Nationalists or found ways to withhold grain from the Communist cadres, who sought to extract as much as possible from the peasantry so the state could feed the urban population.⁶¹ Clearly, we need to state that prior to the take-off of rural industrialisation in the 1980s and 1990s, rural China was not modern. But then cities, as we have seen, were not uniformly modern either. If we view modernity as a *quality*, however, then we might say that modern elements were infused into the countryside, even if this presupposes the impact of urban modernity.

As a final point in exploring the tensions and paradoxes of modernity in rural China, I will turn to the collectivisation of the 1950s and its sad climax, the Great Famine of 1958-1962, whose human tragedy has recently been covered by a number of monographs.⁶² As its dimensions have pro-

gressively taken shape, this greatest man-made disaster in history has not been debated in terms of modernity, and indeed such a discussion is probably counterintuitive. But it is revealing, too, as the Famine was the unintended consequence of the collectivisation policy of the 1950s. The creation of ever greater collectives deprived individual households of decision-making over agricultural production, integrating them into an institutional framework characterised by rationalisation, bureaucratic planning and mechanisation – all of which would, by any textbook definition, count as tokens of modernity. Ironically, it was the move to dismantle the collectives – in which the peasants, for once, took the lead⁶³ – which unleashed the productive forces of Chinese agriculture in the late 1970s. In other words, a time-honoured way of agricultural production won out over a seemingly more “modern” one, turning our wonted chronology on its head. The distinction between “modernity” and its Other(s) are by no means clear-cut, a phenomenon that we also observe when looking at the problems of China’s role within global modernity.

Chinese Modernity vs. Global Modernity

Whereas the classic modernisation theory postulated world-wide convergence as the ultimate outcome of the modernisation process, the 1990s saw a development towards a conceptual pluralising of modernity. To a degree this was spurred by tangible evidence: China, India and other global players were acknowledged as being undoubtedly modern, but political and cultural differences to Europe and North America were undeniable. This realisation of the world being pluralistic is reflected in Shmuel Eisenstadt’s concept of “multiple modernities”. Eisenstadt does not doubt that “the civilization of modernity developed first in the West”; yet he not only points to the “internal antinomies and contradictions” in “Western” modernity.⁶⁴ Despite championing a mildly diffusionist model, he also emphasises that societies in Asia and Africa appropriated modern ideas selectively, reinterpreting and reformulating them in the process, which resulted in a world that is both globalised and culturally pluralised, denying the “West” a monopoly on modernity.⁶⁵ By contrast, Harry Harootunian’s notion of “coeval modernity” is less interested in origins and diffusions. Based on Ernst Bloch’s and Reinhart Koselleck’s ideas about non-synchronism or the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous, Harootunian develops his idea that alternative modernities – in his case that of Japan – “shared the same historical temporality (as a form of historical totalizing)

found elsewhere in Europe and the United States". And he goes on to say that "whatever and however a society develops, it is simply taking place at the same time as other modernities".⁶⁶

Such pluralistic notions of modernity have not gone uncontested. In the process of pluralisation, it has been argued, the actual meaning of "modernity" is lost. Instead of one recognisable phenomenon, we are left with an array of multiple yet incommensurable ones.⁶⁷ Another question is whether it is legitimate, after all, to link alternatives to European modernity to certain peoples and to denote a specific kind of modernity (if that is what it is) as "Chinese" or "Islamic".⁶⁸ On the other hand, the increasing awareness of global interconnectedness has stimulated the search for a "global modernity" that results from globalisation and more specifically from global capitalism.⁶⁹

In looking at the relationship between "Chinese" modernity and global modernity, I am even more than usually aware that "China" cannot be taken for granted as an analytical category. Partly because the name "China" (and its equivalents in the Chinese language) has meant different things at different times, was – in its modern sense – used abroad before it was adopted in China itself, and is by all means a fairly recent term, originating informally in the late nineteenth century and officially with the proclamation of the Republic of China (*Zhonghua Minguo*) in 1912.⁷⁰ Partly because, as William Kirby has written, "the lines between things international, or global, or external, on the one hand, and things 'Chinese', on the other hand, are in many realms nearly impossible to draw".⁷¹ However, by looking more closely at empirical findings, we may get a clearer sense of the complex fabric in which Chinese modernity was enmeshed. In so doing, it is important to destabilise the notion that global modernity is tantamount to "Western" modernity, while at the same time we must acknowledge that in the formative period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, China's becoming part of the modern world took place within an unequal power structure: To an extent at least, China was pushed into the wider world by "Western" imperialism, e.g. in adopting new forms of diplomatic intercourse as well as opening itself up for commerce, as much as it was pulled in an attempt to find its rightful place in the emerging global order.

The transformation of Chinese concepts of time is a good starting point for our discussion. I am concerned here with two different expressions of this transformation. The first is the adoption of a linear mode of conceptualising time. Such a perspective had not been unknown in China (genealogical records function this way, for example), but the dominant mode, in

particular with regard to historiography, was cyclical. It was the confrontation with imperialism and the experience of dynastic decline and “unprecedented change” in the mid-nineteenth century that prompted a number of literati to conceive of China’s recent past in a linear mode, which could then be extended to more remote periods. In part, the effort aimed at countering “Western” ideas about China’s history as stagnant.⁷² The introduction of linear time also gave rise to a modern, professional historiography in the early twentieth century that began to rely on methods of textual criticism. If Leopold von Ranke became its model, Chinese historians deliberately overlooked his religious convictions and political conservatism because they aimed at reviving the empiricist Confucian school of the eighteenth century, hoping to demonstrate that modern science could go hand in glove with Chinese culture.⁷³ At the same time, the application of new methods led to surprising results: While some early historians, drawing on textual analysis, had doubted that the Chinese civilisation was indeed of great antiquity, the excavations at Anyang between 1928 and 1934 provided material evidence of the Shang dynasty and allowed tracing back China’s history to the second millennium BC.⁷⁴ Modern historiography could thus help to boost a sense of Chinese self-confidence and cultural authenticity.

The second new conceptualisation of time, the adoption of the Gregorian calendar on 1 January 1912, provides an even more striking example. The move was one of several measures of the early Republican governments to mould the Chinese population into a modern citizenry by introducing new, “Western” fashions and forms of etiquette.⁷⁵ In the 1920s and 1930s, the Nationalist regime even converted traditional holidays and anniversaries of pre-1912 revolutionary events to the solar calendar.⁷⁶ This pattern was not confined to China alone, in fact, it was a global trend followed by quite a few new and mostly revolutionary regimes. Japan and Egypt had switched to the Gregorian calendar as early as the 1870s, Albania followed the same year as China, and within a few years Finland (1917), Soviet Russia (1918) and Turkey (1926) joined in.⁷⁷ Calendars are social conventions, not scientific facts, and there is nothing to suggest that the “Western” calendar was in any way more “modern” than the old, lunisolar one, which was kept in tune with the changing seasonal rhythm by inserting intercalary months. Practical considerations aside (e.g., to coordinate times better on an international scale), the reform was grounded in the identification of “Western” with “modern”. However, at least one significant adaptation was made: Rather than following the Christian era, the new calendar counted the years of the Republic (with 1912 as the year 1),

thus bringing the revolutionary government in line with the Imperial dynasties that preceded it. This practice still continues in present-day Taiwan. And the practical value of the new calendar was limited anyway: many people held on to the old one, not least because it determined the major religious festivals, a practice which is still common in today's China.⁷⁸ Calendar reform is a fine example of how the Chinese government deliberately sought to connect to a global and – in this case – “Western”-defined modernity, but for reasons both voluntary and coincidental, this transformation remained incomplete. The outcome, therefore, was neither simply “Western” nor simply “Chinese”. It was not simply “global” either, although China was jumping on the bandwagon of a worldwide trend. And to a degree, it blurs the temporality suggested by diffusionist models – not all of Europe was equally modern or “ahead” of China.

Yet, pointing to modernity as the result of adapting “Western” concepts, practices, and objects simply repeats a diffusionist understanding. It is important to point out that China not only looked to the “West” for inspiration. Its involvement with global modernity also included an intellectual (and to an extent practical) engagement with countries in Asia, Africa, the Pacific and Latin America. This is an important field still awaiting closer scrutiny. There is evidence, however, that Chinese nationalism and anti-imperialism, both ingredients of the Chinese modern experience, were fuelled by knowledge of the fate of colonised peoples across the world. By the turn of the twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals had begun to closely watch the American annexation of Hawaii, the Philippine revolution and the Boer War in South Africa, drawing lessons for the future development of China.⁷⁹ An illumination of the relationship between China, India, the Ottoman Empire/Turkey and also Latin American countries such as Mexico is necessary and might help to flesh out China's location within a global modernity that was neither simply of “Western” making nor pitting the “West” and the “rest” against one another in a binary relationship.⁸⁰

Another misunderstanding that needs clarification consists in invariably placing China at the receiving end of global modernity. This may be partly a problem of China scholars, who tend to see “China” as the object of their analysis, running the risk of hypostatizing it. It is vital, however, to understand the ways in which China contributed to shaping the modern world. By way of example, let me discuss here the global repercussions of Maoism and the Mao cult in the 1960s and 1970s, which are widely regarded as a period of social reform and renovation, particularly in Western Europe and North America. To appropriately gauge the impact of the wor-



Figure 3 An advertisement for cigarettes. Such advertisements were called “calendar posters” (yuefenpai) because they included a calendar, in this case for the year 1918. Like other examples of the same genre, this one juxtaposes a Western-style Gregorian calendar and a Chinese-style lunisolar calendar, pointing to the often uneasy coexistence of time-honoured, “local” and seemingly more “modern” and “global” forms of conceptualising time.

(Source: private archive of the author)

ship of Mao, one must first take a broader look at the history of political religion in China.⁸¹ On a global level, political religion can be seen as the solution to the decline of transcendent legitimacy of political authority in the modern world. In China, the 1911 Revolution had dismantled the sacral

aura with which state religion had endowed the Emperor, who had served – to all intents and purposes – as its high priest. Mao and the CCP were not the first to have tried out the sacralisation of a modern political leader. In fact, they could rely on the historical precedent of the Sun Yatsen cult, installed by the National Party (Guomindang, GMD) in the mid-1920s under Soviet influence and in direct emulation of Lenin (though reminiscences of the first Ming emperor also played a role).⁸² Although the Nationalists were following the Soviet precedent, it would be grossly misleading to state a difference in modernity here. It is far more appropriate to speak of a conjunction of emerging political religions; on a timeline, the Chinese case followed in the wake of Bolshevism and Italian Fascism, but preceded similar developments in Turkey as well as Nazi Germany.⁸³

By the same token, the cult of Mao owed a lot to that of Stalin; but as in the fields of ideology and economic reconstruction, it was equally a site of emancipation from the Soviet “big brother”. In the 1960s and 1970s, when China was presenting itself as a Communist alternative, Mao’s name, his image and his writings began to appeal to a widely divergent global constituency. On the one end of the spectrum, this included revolutionary liberation movements in largely agrarian societies, from the Naxalites in India to the Shining Path in Peru, the viciously brutal Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and – much later – the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).⁸⁴ On the other end of the spectrum, the Mao cult was adapted by extra-parliamentary groups in Europe seeking to create new forms of public protest by provoking established authorities and state institutions. Such forms, which turned political action into stage-managed events, were “deeply rooted in Futurist, Situationist and avant-garde art theory”.⁸⁵ Mao was one icon amalgamated into the new protest culture; at the same time, his China seemed to be offering a concrete utopia on which to model the rebirth of “Western” societies. It almost goes without saying that each of these adaptations was connected with but different to the original contexts in which Mao had become an icon: the civil war in China from the 1920s through the 1940s, the consolidation of Communist rule after 1949 and the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s as both a social protest movement and an attempt by Mao to radically restructure political authority.⁸⁶ The Mao cult was the product of a modern culture of mass politics that could be transmitted on a global scale. Prior to its decline in the wake of Mao’s death and Deng Xiaoping’s reform policy, it was a major force that emanated from China and, for better or for worse, contributed to fundamental changes across the world.

Conclusion

Modernity is still a useful tool with which to capture the transformation of China (and indeed the globe) in the past 250 years: It has provided a conceptual framework for our understanding of the transition from Imperial autocracy to mass politics, the introduction of new forms of knowledge, industrialisation, the emergence of urban and cosmopolitan lifestyles, to name but a few. At the conceptual level, however, modernity is too easily taken for granted, with scholars failing to take into account just how ambiguous and elusive it can prove. In order to exhaust the full potential of “modernity” as a tool of understanding, it is essential that its inherent paradoxes are properly integrated into the analytical framework: Modernity is a lived experience *and* an analytical concept, an ideology *and* a set of processes “on the ground”; it can be radically new *and* is always incomplete (and not necessarily linear); it of urban origin *and* encompasses the countryside; it has “Western” *and* Chinese roots; it is uniquely Chinese *and* it integrates China into global processes. As shown above, scholarship over the past decades has already provided us with data highlighting the complexities of modernity. What is necessary is to develop a better analytical grasp of the ambiguities and contradictions of the modern in empirical research on China.

Notes

1. John Walton, James Brooks and Christopher R.N. DeCorse, “Introduction,” in *Small Worlds: Method, Meaning, and Narrative in Microhistory*, ed. James Brooks, Christopher R.N. DeCorse and John Walton (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008), 4.
2. For a defence of master narratives see, for example, Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), xix, although the clarity and outspokenness of the German original are somewhat lost in translation. Cf. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. 5th ed. (Munich: Beck, 2010), 19. The book is itself a masterful and exemplary synthesis. The same could be said of another book that is more closely related to the purposes of this essay: C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).
3. An interesting case in point is the recent TV series *The Rise of Great Powers (Daquo jueqi)*, which was drafted by academic historians and broadcast in 2006. It suggests that China should learn from the examples of European modernization; cf. Q. Edward Wang, “Rise of the Great Powers’=Rise of China? Challenges of the advancement of global history in the People’s Republic of China,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 19

- (2010): 273-89, DOI: 10.1080/10670560903444223; cf. also Gotelind Müller, "Intervention: Some thoughts on the problem of 'popular/public history' in China," *Rethinking History* 15 (2010): 231-32. For the attitudes prevalent among Chinese historians, see also one of the most influential studies: Xiong Yuezhi, *Xixue dongjian yu wan Qing shehui* [The influx of Western learning into the East and late Qing society] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1994).
4. Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 117-19.
 5. Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); see also Jürgen Osterhammel, "Modernisierungstheorie und die Transformation Chinas 1800 bis 1949. Kritische Überlegungen zur historischen Soziologie," *Saeculum* 35 (1984): 31-72.
 6. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, "Modernity: The Sphinx and the Historian," *American Historical Review* 116 (2011): 644, additionally refers to capitalism, "incipient capitalism" and "legal rationality," but the literature he cites focuses on the "public sphere" debate. See also Frederic A. Wakeman, "Civil Society in Late Imperial and Modern China," in Frederic A. Wakeman, *Telling Chinese History: A Selection of Essays*, ed. Lea H. Wakeman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 333-58. This article was first published in 1997.
 7. Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence. China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed. Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); S.N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129 (2000): 1-29.
 8. A similar argument is made by C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, 10-11.
 9. For an interesting overview, see the database by Michael Lackner, Iwo Amelung and Joachim Kurtz, "Modern Chinese Scientific Terminology," accessed 31 March 2014, <http://mcst.uni-hd.de/procSearch/procSearchMCST.lasso>.
 10. An example is the Young China Study Association (Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui), which existed between 1919 and 1925 and published two influential periodicals, "New China" (*Shaonian Zhongguo*) and "New World" (*Shaonian shijie*). For the genealogy of "young" see Şerif Mardin, "Heaven and the Administration of Things: Some Remarks on Law in the Tanzimat Era," in *Shared Histories of Modernity: China, India and the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Huri Islamoğlu and Peter C. Perdue (New Delhi: Routledge, 2009), 256.
 11. Tang Leang-li ed., *Reconstruction in China. A Record of Progress and Achievement in Facts and Figures* (Shanghai: China United Press, 1935). A party magazine of the National Party or Guomindang (GMD) bore the name *Jianshe*, and in 1952 a number of influential personalities, some of them with a GMD background, launched an English-language journal called *China Reconstructs* (later renamed *China Today*) in mainland China.
 12. Zhang Yong, *Modengzhuyi 1927-1937: Shanghai wenhua yu wenxue yanjiu* [Modernism 1927-1937: Studies on Shanghai Culture and Literature] (Taipei: Renjian Chubanshe, 2010), 23-36.
 13. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Muddle of Modernity," *American Historical Review* 116 (2011): 671-72, who provides a critique of the argument in Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, 10-11.
 14. Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Inter-war Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). For Mark Roseman, "Na-

- tional Socialism and the End of Modernity," *American Historical Review* 116 (2011): 697, this was "the polar opposite of cold rationality."
15. Michael Lackner, Iwo Amelung and Joachim Kurtz eds., *New Terms for New Ideas: Western Knowledge and Lexical Change in Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Michael Lackner and Natascha Vittinghoff eds., *Mapping Meanings. The Field of New Learning in Late Qing China* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
 16. Some languages can mark the distinction between the two lexically or morphologically. In German, for example, being modern can be rendered as *Modernität*, whereas the modern epoch is referred to as *Moderne*.
 17. See Carol Symes, "When We Talk about Modernity," *American Historical Review* 116 (2011): 719-21.
 18. It is interesting to note that Roseman, "National Socialism and the End of Modernity," 692, still envisions a place for "modernization" where the focus is on "a set of common processes," if not necessarily benign ones; whereas modernity would be "conceptualized as a set of potentials or propensities," and modernism – a term not discussed in this essay – would refer to states of minds, dreams or claims.
 19. David Lyon, *Postmodernity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), 37-45. Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), provides an exclusively intellectual history of postmodernism, tracing its origins into 1930s Hispanic America.
 20. Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 5.
 21. For an interesting discussion of this problem see Benite, "Modernity," especially 638-643. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 113-14, provides a systematic overview of the singularity-plurality debate.
 22. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). For "multiple modernities" see S.N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities"; Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Jens Riedel and Dominic Sachsenmaier, "The Context of the Multiple Modernities Paradigm," *Reflections on Multiple Modernities. European, Chinese and Other Interpretations*, ed. Dominic Sachsenmaier, Jens Riedel and Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1-27; for "coeval modernity" see Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, xvi-xvii and Harry Harootunian, "Some Thoughts on Comparability and the Space-Time Problem," *boundary 2* 32 (2005): 23-52.
 23. One of the best discussions of modernization theory's influence on a largely optimistic narrative of modernity is in Thomas Mergel, "Geht es weiter voran? Die Modernisierungstheorie auf dem Weg zu einer Theorie der Moderne," in *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft: Beiträge zur Theorie-Debatte*, ed. Thomas Mergel and Thomas Welskopp (Munich: Beck, 1997), 202-32; for a discussion of Nazism see *ibid.*, 220-24 and Roseman, "National Socialism and the End of Modernity."
 24. Carol Gluck, "The End of Elsewhere: Writing Modernity Now," *American Historical Review* 116 (2011): 678. I am more reluctant than she is to simply accept modernity as a reality, cf. *ibid.*, 676.
 25. Sheldon Pollock, "Pretextures of Time," *History and Theory* 46 (2007): 383; see also his "Introduction," in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500-1800*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1-4.
 26. John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia: The Modern Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 5.
 27. Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucianism and Its Modern Fate*, Vol. 1: *The Problem of Intellectual Continuity* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 3-14; the quotation is on p. 3. A

- scathing critique of this and the previous title as well as related publications is to be found in Cohen, *Discovering History in China*, 61-79.
28. Mergel, "Geht es weiter voran," 217.
 29. Robert Bickers, "Introduction," in *The Boxers, China, and the World*, ed. Robert Bickers and R.G. Tiedemann (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), xii.
 30. See Thoralf Klein, "Insecurities of Imperialism. The Siege of Beijing and Its Aftermath in the 'Western' Press, Summer 1900," paper presented at the conference *Helpless Imperialists. Imperial Failure, Radicalization, and Violence*, Freiburg, Germany, 14-16 January, 2010; Eric Ouellet, "Multinational counterinsurgency: The Western intervention in the Boxer Rebellion 1900-1901," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20 (2009): 507-527; Jane E. Elliott, *Some Did It for Civilisation, Some Did It for Their Country. A Revised View of the Boxer War* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2002), 381-474.
 31. Joseph W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987) and Paul Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Faithful to his criticism of modernisation theory, Cohen does not discuss the Boxers in terms of modernity; however, drawing on Paul Rabinow, he engages in the "anthropologisation of the West," pointing to beliefs and practices that would appear to be anti-modern. See Paul A. Cohen, *China Unbound. Evolving perspectives on the Chinese past* (London: Routledge, 2003), 96-97. For the Boxers' reliance on magic see also Yang Tianhong, "Yihetuan 'shenshu' lunlue [A sketch of the "magical techniques" of the Boxers]," in: *Jindaishi Yanjiu* [Modern History Studies] 77 (1993): 189-204.
 32. Roxann Prazniak, *Of Camel Kings and Other Things. Rural Rebels against Modernity in Late Imperial China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); Elizabeth J. Perry, *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven. Social Protest and State Power in China* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2002); cf. also Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Imperial Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 623-24.
 33. Pollock, "Pretextures of Time," 383. See also note 25.
 34. A theme that also informs one of the last attempts to provide an overview of modern Chinese history on the basis of modernisation theory: Gilbert Rozman ed., *The Modernization of China* (New York: Free Press, 1981).
 35. Philip A. Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 8. Note that Kuhn refrains from any conceptual discussion of the term "modern", treating the modern state as a matter of course. However, there must be something to distinguish the "modern" state from its predecessors to warrant the additional descriptor.
 36. *Ibid.*, 80-113; for the role of taxation see Li Huaiyin, "Village Regulations at Work. Local Taxation in Huailiu County, 1900-1936," *Modern China* 26 (2000): 79-109.
 37. Peter L. Berger, "The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview," in: *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter L. Berger (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999), 2.
 38. Hildegard Diemberger, "Tibetan Books in a Digital Age," in *Globalization and the Making of Religious Modernity in China: Transnational Religions, Local Agents, and the Study of Religion, 1800-Present*, ed. Thomas Jansen, Thoralf Klein and Christian Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 211-12.
 39. *Ibid.*, 224-29, the quotation is on p. 224.
 40. Peter Zarrow ed., *Creating Chinese Modernity. Knowledge and Everyday Life, 1900-1940* (New York: Lang, 2006).
 41. Two recent comprehensive studies are Marie-Claire Bergère, *Shanghai: China's Gateway*

- to *Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009) and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *Global Shanghai, 1850-2010. A history in fragments* (London: Routledge, 2009). Other studies on Shanghai will be mentioned in subsequent footnotes.
42. Michael Tsing, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Kristin Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu. Chinese Urban Reform, 1895-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University East Asia Center, 2000); Ruth Rogaski, "Hygienic Modernity in Tianjin," in *Remaking the Chinese City. Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 30-46; Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing. The City and Its Histories* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).
 43. Shi Mingzheng, "From Imperial Gardens to Public Parks. The Transformation of Urban Space in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing," *Modern China* 24 (1998): 219-54; Nelson K. Lee, "How is a political public space made? – The birth of Tiananmen Square and the May Fourth Movement," *Political Geography* 28 (2009): 32-43; Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005). For Shanghai see Robert Bickers and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, "Shanghai's 'Dogs and Chinese Not Admitted' Sign: Legend, History and Contemporary Symbol," *China Quarterly* 142 (1995): 444-66.
 44. Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in Shanghai 1930-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Zhang Yingjin ed., *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Andrew D. Field, *Shanghai's Dancing World: Cabaret Culture and Urban Politics, 1919-1954* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2010); Sherman Cochran, *Inventing Nanjing Road. Commercial Culture in Shanghai, 1900-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1999); Yeh Wen-hsin, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Ye Xiaoqing, *The Dianshizhai Pictorial: Shanghai Urban Life, 1884-1898* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2003); Paul Pickowicz, Shen Kuiyi and Zhang Yingjin eds., *Liangyou: Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926-1945* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
 45. Joseph W. Esherick, "Modernity and Nation in the Chinese City," in *Remaking the Chinese City. Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 2-6.
 46. Lu Hanchao, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); cf. Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*, 129-151, for stories of urban social decline. For beggary see Janet Y. Chen, *Guilty of Indigence: The Urban Poor in China, 1900-1953* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Zvia Lipkin, *Useless to the State: "Social Problems" and Social Engineering in Nationalist Nanjing, 1927-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 200-250; for prostitution see Gail Hershatler, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).
 47. See David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 23-25.
 48. Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights*, 7; Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*, 28-30; Gail Hershatler, *The Workers of Tianjin, 1900-1949* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 43, 49-50.
 49. Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights*, 7-8; Yeh Wen-hsin, "Shanghai: Commerce and Culture in a Republican City," *China Quarterly* 150 (1997): 382-84; Liu Tao Tao, "Perceptions of City and Country in Modern Chinese Fiction in the Early Republican Era," in *Town and*

- Country in China. Identity and Perception*, ed. David Faure and Liu Tao Tao (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 203-4, 221-228.
50. Myron L. Cohen, "Cultural and Political Invention in Modern China: The Case of the Chinese 'Peasant,'" *Daedalus* 122 (1993): 151-170.
 51. Thoralf Klein, "Technologische Innovation oder soziale Revolution? Chinas Bauern in der Transformation der Agrargesellschaft," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 33 (2007): 584-587. See also Rhoads Murphey, *The Fading of the Maoist Vision: City and Country in China's Development* (London: Routledge, 2005, first published in 1980). Jeremy Brown, *City Versus Countryside in Mao's China: Negotiating the Divide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) also emphasises the domination of the countryside by the city, but also looks at interstices between the two where real life undermined administrative divisions; see esp. pp. 169-70.
 52. Klein, "Technologische Innovation," 576-78. See also Walter Goldschmidt, "Foreword: The End of Peasantry," in *Farewell to Peasant China: Rural Urbanization and Social Change in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. Gregory Eliyu Guldin (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1997), xiii-xiv. Goldschmidt is sceptical about the optimism he observes in other contributions to the volume.
 53. Zhao Chaofeng, "Qing mo Xinzheng yu Zhongguo nongye jindaihua [The New Policies of the Late Qing and the Modernisation of Chinese Agriculture]," *Shoudu Shifan Daxue Xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* no. 1 (2001): 12-17.
 54. Klein, "Technologische Innovation oder soziale Revolution," 589.
 55. Loren Brandt, "Reflections on China's Late 19th and Early 20th-Century Economy," *China Quarterly* 150 (1997): 303-5; Tang Leang-li, *Reconstruction in China*, 288-328.
 56. Yixin Chen, "New Views of the Agricultural Economy of Republican China: A Review Article," *Twentieth-Century China* 28:1 (2002): 86-88.
 57. Bozhong Li, *Agricultural Development in Jiangnan, 1640-1850* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 174-76.
 58. Pauline B. Keating, *Two Revolutions. Village Reconstruction and the Cooperative Movement in Northern Shaanxi, 1934-1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1-6; the quotation is on p. 1.
 59. Neil J. Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family. Politics, Love and Divorce in Urban and Rural China, 1949-1968* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 6-7. Diamant's study traces in great detail the unintended consequences this law produced.
 60. Bai Shazhou, *Zhongguo er deng gongmin – dangdai nongmin kaocha baogao* [China's Second-Class Citizens – A Survey of Present-day Peasants] (Hong Kong: Mingjing Chubanshe, 2001); see also Chen Guidi and [Wu] Chuntao, *Zhongguo nongmin diaocha* [A Survey of Chinese Peasants] (Taipei: Tiandi Chubanshe, 2005). The latter book was originally published in the PRC but subsequently banned there.
 61. For changes see Lucien Bianco, "Peasant Responses to CCP Mobilization Politics, 1937-1945," in *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution*, ed. Tony Saich and Hans van de Ven (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1995), 178-181; Diamant, *Revolutionizing the Family*; for resistance see William Kirby, "Engineering China: Birth of the Developmental State, 1928-1937," in *Becoming Chinese. Passages to Modernity and Beyond*, ed. Yeh Wen-hsin (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 144; Jean C. Oi, *State and Peasant in China in Contemporary China: The Political Economy of Village Government* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 104-130.
 62. Alfred Chan, *Mao's Crusade: Politics and Policy Implementation in China's Great Leap Forward* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Ralph A. Thaxton, *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China: Mao's Great Leap Forward Famine and the Origins of Right-*

- eous Resistance in Da Fo Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-62* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010). Zhou Xun, *The Great Famine in China 1958-1962: A Documentary History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), provides English translations of important documents.
63. Kate Xiao Zhou, *How the Farmers Changed China: Power of the People* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).
 64. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," 7.
 65. *Ibid.*, 24.
 66. Harootyan, *Overcome by Modernity*, xvi; cf. Ernst Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics," *New German Critique* 11 (1977): 22-38; Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 90-91, 237-39. This book was first published in German in 1979. The idea of the noncontemporaneous is, of course, highly problematic, as it is based on a normative underpinning that determines the place where a society "ought to be" on a temporal axis.
 67. Benite, "Modernity," 650.
 68. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 114; cf. the more elaborate discussion *ibid.*, 119-131.
 69. Arif Dirlik, *Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), 7. Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, follows Hobsbawm in assuming that the age of capital arrived at a global level only in the 1870s.
 70. William C. Kirby, "When did China Become China? Thoughts on the Twentieth Century," in *The Teleology of the Modern Nation-State: Japan and China*, ed. Joshua A. Fogel (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 106-07.
 71. William C. Kirby, "China in Transnational Perspective: Introductory Remarks," *Berliner China-Hefte* 30 (2006): 4.
 72. Luke S. Kwong, "The Rise of the Linear Perspective on History and Time in Late Qing China, c. 1860-1911," *Past and Present* 173 (2001): 157-190.
 73. Q. Edward Wang, "Is there a Chinese Mode of Historical Thinking? A Cross-Cultural Analysis," *History and Theory* 46 (2007): 204.
 74. Q. Edward Wang, *Inventing China Through History. The May Fourth Approach to Historiography* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 126-28.
 75. Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen. Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China 1911-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 49-83; for the calendar see *ibid.*, 65-70. Other measures included hairstyles (including the abolition of the queue for men), the bow as a new form of greeting and attempts at the suppression of foot binding.
 76. Shuk-Wah Poon, *Negotiating Religion in Modern China. State and Common People in Guangzhou, 1900-1937* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011), 94-108.
 77. Samuel L. Macey, *The Dynamics of Progress: Time, Method and Measure* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 34. The book was originally published in 1989.
 78. Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights*, 297-301; Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen*, 65-67.
 79. Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 53-148.
 80. Cf. Huri Islamoğlu and Peter C. Perdue, "Introduction," in *Shared Histories of Modernity: China, India and the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Huri Islamoğlu and Peter C. Perdue (New Delhi: Routledge, 2009), 4-5. This volume is perhaps the first comprehensive attempt to tackle the issue; however, on the whole it takes a comparative approach and the degree

- to which the three country actually “shared” histories of modernity (rather than these histories running parallel to each other) is left underdetermined.
81. In the following paragraphs, I draw to a large extent on my own research: Thoralf Klein, “Political Religion in Twentieth-Century China and Its Global Dimension,” in *Globalization and the Making of Religious Modernity in China: Transnational Religions, Local Agents, and the Study of Religion, 1800-Present*, ed. Thomas Jansen, Thoralf Klein and Christian Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 52-90.
 82. Charles D. Musgrove, “Monumentality in Nanjing’s Sun Yat-sen Memorial Park,” *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* 29 (2007): 1-19; Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen*, 207-239.
 83. See, for example, Michail Ryklin, *Kommunismus als Religion: Die Intellektuellen und die Oktoberrevolution*, trans. Dirk and Elena Uffelmann (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2008), 13-50 – a book that, as far as I can see, sadly has not been translated into English –; Christopher Duggan, *Fascist Voices: An Intimate History of Mussolini’s Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Klaus Vondung, “National Socialism as Political Religion: Potentials and Limits of an Analytical Concept,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6 (2005): 87-95; Christopher S. Wilson, *Beyond Anitkabir: The Funerary Architecture of Atatürk. The Construction and Maintenance of National Memory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013) For a study of China’s role within short-term global trends, albeit in a radically different context, see Alys Eve Weinbaum et al. eds. *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).
 84. Alexander C. Cook, “Third World Maoism,” in *A Critical Introduction to Mao*, ed. Timothy Cheek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 288-312.
 85. Sebastian Gehrig, “(Re-)Configuring Mao: Trajectories of a Culturo-Political Trend in West Germany,” *Transcultural Studies* 2 (2011): 189-231.
 86. For an interesting analysis of this context, see Rana Mitter, “Maoism in the Cultural Revolution: A Political Religion?”, in *The Sacred in Twentieth-Century Politics: Essays in Honour of Professor Stanley G. Payne*, ed. Roger Griffin, Robert Mallett and John Tortorice (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 143-168.

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