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Rethinking Land Reform: Comparative Lessons from China and India

(in Mahmood Mamdani, ed. *The Land Question: Socialism, Capitalism, and the Market,* Makerere Institute of Social Research, 2015, ISBN 978-9970-473-04-5, pp. 95-157)

Lin Chun

Back in 2013, Amartya Sen penned an op-ed for the *New York Times* in which he repeated one of his long-standing observations about the great gap between India and China when it comes to providing "essential public services" (Sen 2013). "Inequality is high in both countries," he wrote, but "China has done far more than India to raise life expectancy, expand general education and secure health care for its people." In previous work, he's called China's efforts to improve the quality of life of its citizens, especially women, an "excellent achievement" (Sen 2000, 17). India, by contrast, has suffered "chronic undernourishment, a disorganized medical system [and] dysfunctional school systems" (ibid; see also Dreze and Sen 2002). According to recent World Bank data, forty-three per cent of Indian children are underweight, compared to only seven per cent of Chinese children (and twenty-eight per cent of sub-Saharan African children) (Burke 2013). When it comes to education, approximately one-fifth of all Indian men and one-third of all Indian women over the age of seven are illiterate (Sen 2013). China's literacy rate, meanwhile, is approximately 94.3 per cent for both sexes (UNDP 2013). Given these differences in workforce health and education, Sen argued that "for India to match China in its range of manufacturing capacity—its ability to produce gadgets of almost every kind, with increasing use of technology and better quality control—it needs a better-educated and healthier labour force at all levels of society" (2013). What China has achieved is not primarily due to market reforms, especially if one considers new China's track record of clean government, equality, and the public provision of popularly affordable education and health services. In the Mao era, Chinese development had already advanced significantly and was laying the foundation for subsequent growth (Saith 2008: 730-1).

Comparing China to India is a common practice given the two countries' comparable sizes and starting points of development. In fact, China in 1949, ruined by decades of war (and soon to be mired in another in Korea), was thought to be far more backward than newly independent India, at least in terms of industry (the availability of electricity, and steel, iron, and cement output), infrastructure (railway mileage), and agricultural production. At the time of independence in 1947, India was already the world's seventh largest industrial country by volume of output (Desai 2003). Over time, however, India's relative advantages have reversed in China's favour, a change reflected in a number of social indicators, some of which Sen noted (above). Recent data from the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) various indices on development, for instance, all favour China over India. The Human Development Index (HDI) for 2012, for example, ranked India noticeably lower than China (136 versus 101 respectively, out of 186 countries). On UNDP's Multidimensional Poverty Index, China continues to fare better than India (0.056 versus 0.283). Statistics on gender inequality via the Gender Inequality Index likewise look better for China (0.213) than India (0.610). In 2013, meanwhile, life expectancy in China was approximately 73.7 years, while in India it was 65.8 years (UNDP 2013). Over half a century, the overall HDI value in China increased from 0.225 to 0.718 between 1950 and 1999, while in India during that same period, the rate of increase was much more modest, from 0.247 to 0.571 (Crafts 2002).

To be sure, uneven development features prominently in both countries. The Indian state of Kerala, for example, not only has higher human development scores than the Indian

average, but also does better than China in certain respects. At the national level, however, the general disparity between the two countries is striking, and Sen is yet to answer his own question: why does India trail China?

Interestingly enough, in his *New York Times* op-ed, Sen mentions land reform in the early Mao era, but fails to see it as a main explanatory factor. He attributes India's underperformance to "a failure to learn from the examples of so-called Asian economic development," again without specifying land reform as a foundational step in that development. His diagnosis also begs the question: why has India failed to learn from the experiences of the country next door? China is not a democracy, but the Chinese "have been strongly committed to eliminating hunger, illiteracy and medical neglect," as Sen notes. If, in East Asia, "rapid expansion of human capability" was largely achieved through economic returns coming from "bettering human lives, especially at the bottom of the socioeconomic pyramid" (Sen, again, in his *Times* op-ed), didn't revolutionary China actually lead the way in that effort? Land reform under the Guomindang in Taiwan—which initially resisted land reform in the mainland, only to lose the war to the communists in the end—is an excellent case in point.

Concerning the complexities of the Chinese Communist Revolution over the peasant struggle for land, the late historian Maurice Meisner once remarked that "with an acute and painful awareness of all the horrors and crimes that accompanied the revolution," it is also true that "few events in world history have done more to better the lives of more people" (1999, 1, 12). The significance and fundamental justice of this truly great historical event lie in its transformative and emancipatory effects on the social relations and conditions of the hitherto deprived and oppressed classes. By the same token, the lack of "a revolutionary break with the past and of any strong movement in this direction" (Moore 1966, 431) may well explain the prolonged economic backwardness and governing difficulties in countries like India (Weil 2010). Concerning land reform specifically, "While the landowning class had lost out in the socialist revolution in China, it effectively remained powerful in India as an integral part of the winning coalition of classes that gained independence, protected by and well ensconced in the ruling political party, and able to thwart any further redistributive or collectivist agrarian reforms"（Saith 2008: 727）.

While many works have sought to compare the diverse political-economic paths to modernisation in these two old agrarian societies, insufficient attention has been paid to the land as a potential answer to the important question that Sen asks. The first two sections of this essay therefore trace the trajectories of land reform in China and India respectively. The next two sections discuss collective farming in China and the green revolution in India. These are followed by a brief intervention in the debate over famine and democracy. The last section addresses present rural destructions in both countries in their shared context of capitalist globalisation. It concludes with a recap of the argument for "land to the tiller" anchored in peasant (re)organisation.

The Land Revolution in China

Nineteenth century European thinkers had a difficult time understanding traditional land systems in Asia. The most influential perceptions tended to be based on very limited knowledge about a "timeless Orient." Before the existence of more historically informed and rigorously undertaken ethnographic studies of the non-Western world, the Marxian conceptualisation of Indian and Chinese structures, for example, was concerned with the absence of private land ownership and landed nobilities under an "Asiatic state."[1] Such a state was then simultaneously the landlord and sovereign due to its monopoly over rents (Marx 1971, 352). In his analysis of "pre-capitalist economic formations" in the *Grundrisse*, Marx

further elaborated on "the self-sustaining unity of manufacture and agriculture" that "contains all the conditions for reproduction and surplus production within itself." This lack of social divisions and labour and class differentiation both featured and explained what Marx perceived to be closed communities and stagnation in "Asia" (Marx 1973, 486).

These observations, however, were largely negated by empirical evidence that emerged later from extensive research in archaeology and social-economic history. As far as China is concerned, private land-owning and a landed aristocracy are confirmed to have existed early and widely. For two millennia, a partially commercialised agriculture and cottage industry developed in addition to subsistence farming, sustaining booming markets for short- and long-distance trade. Such internal and external market activity arguably amounted to a peculiar form of commercial (as opposed to industrial) capitalism. Together with certain splendid achievements in science and technology, the oriental economies were once the most advanced in the pre-modern era. Meanwhile, despite an ancient moral ideal of equal land sharing and repeated top-down reforms to halt land annexation, powerful officials and landlords kept imposing heavy rents and levies, and encroaching on petty holdings. Almost every major dynasty in Chinese history was thus overturned by peasant uprisings, which aspired to see *junping*, or the equalisation of land, under an enlightened emperor. Yet each new imperial order that instituted relatively reasonable land (re)distribution eventually devolved into what became socially unbearable conditions of landlessness and poverty or famine. Over time, land concentration persisted, which took periodic social upheavals to break.

The Chinese economy began to lose its advantageous position in the seventeenth century, undergoing monetisation while suffering from depleted silver inflows. The latter led to serious inflation, which was compounded by climate disasters and disease epidemics (Wakeman 2009). By the mid-nineteenth century, the situation in China took a decisive turn for the worse in the wake of Britain's dirty drug war, which was then followed by encroachments from other Western imperialist powers and by Japan. If the Opium War signified an unprecedented "national" crisis, the devastation of the Chinese countryside marked a profound social crisis as well. Entrenched nexuses of landlordism (involving both resident and absentee landlords) and clan patriarchy widened alongside exploitative gentry-official coalitions, aggressive foreign financial capital, monopolised trading, formal and informal usury, and warlordism via profit-seeking brokers who marginalised the traditional gate-keeping rural elite. This trend of "state involution" was fostered by corrupt central, local, and village autocracies themselves (Duara 2010). Although very large landholding was not common in most parts of China, and peasant hardships not solely caused by unequal land ownership, the conjoined national and social crises deepened both tendencies. They were causally rooted in the re-institutionalised local land regimes. Revolution became inevitable.

The "awakening of Asia" was first marked by China's Republican Revolution of 1911, when the reactionary impulses of "cultured Europe" clashed with the progressive democratic platform of the "barbaric Asians" (Lenin 1913, 65-66, 99-100). The "three people's principles" of nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood (proposed by the revolutionary leader Sun Zhongshan) entailed an agrarian policy of land to the tiller within a larger nation-building program of public land management in line with the industrial principle of "constraining capital" (Sun 1986). The idea of equalising land rights echoed an ancient yearning in China, which for Sun was directly translatable into "socialism or communism as *datong*-ism [great harmony]" (ibid., 355). However, the actual revolution was narrowly political: it overthrew the monarchy but did not change society. Nor did it consolidate national independence for the country. What the republican revolutionaries were unable to achieve, then, had to be taken up by the Communist Revolution, whose aim was liberating the Chinese nation and its toiling masses. The twentieth century communist transformation of China in

general—and the transformation of rural China, in particular—can be viewed through four interconnected phases: 1) a land revolution in China's rural peripheries (1927-37) following the party's utter defeat in its infantile urban adventures; 2) nationwide yet unevenly conducted land reforms (1947-51) during and after the civil war under the communist local and, after 1949, national power against Guomingdang regime that represented the interests of big landlordism and bureaucratic-comprador capital; 3) the cooperative movements and communal organisations (1951-80); and 4) decollectivisation since the 1980s.

At its core, the Communist Revolution was a "land revolution." It was meant to overturn China's "semi-colonial and semi-feudal" conditions (as elaborated in party theory) and seize state power through a people's war of encircling the cities from the countryside.[2] This original strategy counted on peasant mobilisation away from the powerful centres of counterrevolution, which required a firmly pro-poor land policy. But the policy also had to be flexible in its implementation to accommodate specific political considerations and constraints. Certain compromises were necessitated by the "united front" of a "new democratic revolution" to be distinguished from both classical bourgeois and socialist revolutions. The degree of rent reduction or land redistribution, for instance, was reined in at times by the need to win over an "enlightened gentry" or the rich peasants. In the end, it was the communist success in tackling the land question that had sustained the unity of the party, government, and army, and facilitated the coordination between land reform, mass agitation, and military campaigns during the revolution. This novel process of state building and regime construction from below also fostered new subjective formations and innovative institutions in the new China.

During the Jiangxi Soviet period (from the guerrilla struggles in the Jinggang Mountain area beginning in 1927 to the Long March in 1934), land reform was central to the work of the party, with popular support garnered from a cross-section of grassroots communist organisations comprised of peasants, women, and youth. In this hilly area before the communists arrived, "most peasants had at least a little land, but few had enough to support themselves fully, and the bulk of the land was owned by a few individuals, lineages, and associations" near regional market towns that dominated the mountain areas and regional hinterlands (Averill 1993, 283). In 1928, the first plenary of the Sixth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which was held in Moscow, passed two resolutions on the land and peasant question, calling for the expropriation of the landlord class. The party subsequently set its immediate tasks as enlarging Soviet territory, deepening the land revolution, and recruiting for the Red Army. A forceful counterrevolution was inevitable. As vested local rulers incited conflicts between different revolutionary groups, and as Nanjing's military brutally encircled and suppressed the communists, there was little possibility left for consolidating land redistribution. The red base was lost and peasant activists suffered enormous reprisals.

In the wake of this defeat, the land revolution had to be suspended until after the victorious national resistance against the Japanese invasion, resuming only when civil war broke out again in the 1940s. The monumental Outline of Land Law was promulgated in 1947,[3] marking the beginning of a nationwide transformation in land ownership and rural relations. Ultimately, this helped determine the outcome of the war. Tens of millions of peasants who had recently gained land joined the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The now-legendary example of the massive Huaihai campaign of 1948-9 showed how the communist victory was aided by "a million *fanshen* (liberated) peasants" pushing wheelbarrows of donated food to "the army of their own sons and brothers" crisscrossing the vast battleground. Division after division of Guomindang troops defected to the PLA for the same reason that the peasant- soldiers chose to fight for their land in the first place.

The principle of equality drove the project of land reform, in which all farming

families and individuals of both sexes held equal rights to land. Achieving this meant categorizing all farmland by size, quality, and distance for the purposes of distribution and compensation, with the goal of equalising possession and tax burdens. Although the male-dominated household was not challenged, women did enjoy the same rights to land, which they could own in their own names. Meanwhile, the process involved a highly charged undertaking of class identification designed to "rely on the poor and landless, ally and stabilise the intermediate, neutralise rich peasants and target the landlords," as the policy slogan went. One of the lessons from earlier struggles in Jiangxi was that ultra radicalism that hurt the middle strata must be avoided. Excesses of violence that mostly occurred in a northern base area in 1947 were denounced as an error of "leftist adventurism" and rectified.[4] After the founding of the People's Republic, the pursuit of regime consolidation and economic recovery led to more moderate policy in the form of the new Agrarian Reform Law and the Report on the Question of Land Reform, both of which emerged in 1950. Industrial and commercial enterprises owned by landlords were excluded from confiscation, and the rich peasant economy was preserved.

By the end of 1952, apart from certain minority regions, three hundred million poor peasants throughout the country had obtained their fair share of farmland along with farming tools, animals, and other means of production. Parts of pastoral and forest regions underwent similar reforms. Nationally, the lower- and middle-class peasants who accounted for ninety per cent of the rural population owned their corresponding proportion of land.[5] Compared with the heavy rents and levies of the past (which were typically over fifty per cent of peasant income), the gross tax rate was more than halved. In 1949, for example, it was between nineteen and twenty-one per cent, for which party leaders still felt apologetic and wished to reduce further.[6] Having first enjoyed an egalitarian land system, followed by the advent of cooperatives, the peasantry saw their economy grow apace. It was estimated that in 1952, about thirty-five per cent of national gross investment was financed by the agricultural sector (Lippit 1974). Between 1950 and 1957, grain production achieved a 5.2 per cent annual increase. The reforms also resulted in an equalisation of rural incomes (Khan 1977; Griffin, Khan, and Ickowitz 2002). As such, "land reform and everything that went along with it was remarkably popular in the Chinese countryside" (Bramall 2009, 94-95).

Depending on expectations, any direct productive benefit of land redistribution is subject to debate. Indisputable is its socio-political impact, from improving the lives and the prospects of life chances for the vast majority in an agrarian society to winning the trust, support, and participation of peasants in creating a new social order. In the process, a new rural subjectivity would be nurtured. Beyond land rights as an issue of redistributive justice, land reform was also a vital step in dismantling the rural infrastructure of economic, political, and cultural power of an *ancien regime* in modern times.[7] The land revolution as a whole thus granted the communist rule its initial legitimacy, moral confidence, and practical authority indispensable for the country's subsequent construction. New China, borne of an epic revolution, became a model of popular emancipation and national development, symbolised above all by the immensity of the rise of the country's subaltern classes in the process.

For orthodox Marxists, a "communist peasant revolution" is a contradiction in terms. They overlook the determining role of communist leadership and the revolution's epochal background of uneven and compressed development. However, the emblematic charge that without a large membership of workers, the Chinese Communist Party was only of a "petty bourgeois" nature is both empirically inaccurate and conceptually superficial. Not only did China's industrial working class, however small in the early twentieth century, play a pivotal role in leading the revolution, it also forged a necessary worker-peasant alliance that included hired labour in agriculture and waged rural migrants on precarious city jobs. Moreover, "class" cannot be a positivist category; the formation and recomposition of revolutionary

classes were optimal in the party's mass line politics. Likewise, it was due to China's oppressed "class" position in a capitalist global political economy that the Chinese party emerged as an innovative proletarian organisation. As such, the new type of "bourgeois democratic revolution" carried within itself socialist ambitions and prospects. Although land issues were not the sole causes of the revolution, their redistributive resolve was a decisive contribution to its triumph.

Land Reforms in India

Unlike China, whose territorial frontiers were historically plastic but in one way or another definable, the territories of India as a sub-continental civilisation were unsettled for many centuries. While the first Chinese Republic and then the People's Republic of China more or less inherited the Qing territories, the Raj once controlled only about two-thirds of British India, leaving the remaining third of the so-called princely states and tribal areas ungoverned from the centre. Even after the partition of 1947, which violently divided the country, the Indian union with a Hindu national legend remains a myth (Desai 1990; Wallerstein 1991). Contemporary India and China are both huge entities with a diverse eco-agricultural makeup of regions and cultures. But their geo-historical conditions also differ. Due to an even tighter land-to-labour ratio, China tended to be more advanced in farming technology, management, and land productivity. Its use of iron-tipped animal-drawn ploughs, for example, emerged at least half a millennium earlier than India. And Chinese irrigation systems were bigger and more sophisticated than any in South Asia, where neither large-scale hydraulic works nor the bureaucracies that such works required widely existed (O'Leary 1989, chap. 6).

Under the overlord-ship of ancient kings who ruled much of today's northern India, there was a complex set of land relations involving private owning, royal possession (land granted to the Brahmins for administration), custody claims by religious bodies, and customary communal holdings, along with various forms of bonded labour. Social stratification was centred on the hereditary and occupational castes. Land distribution and transfers, however, were mostly flexible in response to demographic changes and migration patterned by interregional, not caste, mobility (Bandyopadhyay 1993, 52). While the village evolved as a more or less self-sufficient unit, commercial ties developed in ports and towns to make the country a great global trader in the Middle Ages. Culturally, Pauranic Hinduism, which was established in the late classical period, was tolerated or even incorporated by the Islamic rulers from 1100 to 1750, whose power culminated in an expanded empire beginning in the mid-sixteenth century.

The British took over agrarian organisations from the Mughals while also superimposing those of their own. As they conquered more provinces, they systematically measured and recorded cultivated lands, making detailed field notes on the crops grown, the local people, and their customs. New land revenue systems were tried out, mixing Indian and European inputs. The East India Company Act of 1784 instructed the company "to inquire into the alleged grievances of the landholders, and if founded in truth, to afford them redress, and to establish permanent rules for the settlement and collection of the revenue" (Desai 2011, 81-3). A few years later, with the introduction of renewed land taxes under the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, the Raj popularized a Zamindari system (along with Ryotwari and Mahalwari in different regions) at the cost of the *jajmani* relationship that the landless used to share with the landed to ensure minimal subsistence in a form of traditional moral economy (Sethi 2006). Generally speaking, under the British crown, land-use and landownership in India were managed in a way that eased the acquisition of land at low prices by colonial traders, settlers, and entrepreneurs for the establishment of mines, plantations, and other businesses in the empire's network of colonial extraction (Baden-Powell 1892, III, book

iv, chap. 1).[8]

The institutionalisation of modern private property delegitimised the communal ownership of tribal societies in India as elsewhere, since the capitalist transformation was "a scheme of destruction" that threatened "annihilating the human and natural substance of society" (Polanyi 1957, 163, 45ff). Global capitalism expanded "by destroying the two main sources of its own wealth: the land and the labourer," at home and abroad (Harvey 2006, 14). Empirical evidence in modern India shows that differences in historical institutions of property rights led to differences in productive organisation and policy choice, with repercussions for economic outcomes. Geographical areas in which land rights had previously been granted almost exclusively to landlords saw significantly lower levels of agricultural investments, productivity, and public goods provision than areas in which such rights were also customarily held by the cultivators (Banerjee and Iyer 2005).

The independence movement rightly blamed colonialism for the economic devastation and immense rural poverty caused in part by diverting agriculture away from food production and towards commercial crops (Bagchi 2009, 101-103).[9] Independent India found itself in an inherited semi-feudal agrarian system, in which the ownership and control of land were concentrated in the hands of landlords and their intermediaries as rent collectors. Small landholders, tenants, and landless workers were mostly trapped in their fixed class-caste positions with little bargaining power.

The land question was thus high on the agenda of the new government, which faced the daunting task of nation-building. Imbuing land reform with a sense of urgency, India then "was subject to the largest body of land reform legislation ever to have been passed in so short of period in any country" (Besley and Burgess 2000, 390). The legislation consisted of four main categories: 1) abolishing *zamindari* and tax farming,[10] 2) tenancy contract regulation, 3) placing a ceiling on landholding, and 4) rationalising disparate tenure systems. The first two five-year plans allocated substantial budgetary support for these reforms, and local administrations made various strides to comply. Decades on, however, only the abolition of intermediaries had some tangible effect on increasing the security of smallholders and protecting tenants' rights (ibid., 395). The record of other areas of reform fluctuated across states and over time, with many of the central problems still not yet resolved (Ghatak 2007).

This seems not to be (as is often assumed) merely an issue of bureaucratic tardiness in policy implementation. Apart from lack of clear land titles in places like Bihar and many tribal areas (see below), the design of land reform was itself weak concerning questions of redistribution, which were considered of "limited importance." The reform efforts were rather confined to the third category (above): the legislative abolition of landlordism by imposing ceilings (Besley and Burgess 2000, 390, 420). Yet, the landlords were permitted compensational retention, and the set ceilings were often compromised through dodging and even disguised forms of land expansion.[11] Although legal measures were adopted with a view to redistributing surplus land to landless farmers, the latter was a secondary concern and was thus marginalised in practice. "Loopholes in land tenure legislation have facilitated the evasion of some of the provisions in land ceiling reforms by those large landholders who have wanted to maintain the status quo" (Sethi 2006, 75). Indeed, as history amply shows, "it was easier to dictate land reform than to legislate it." A martial law edict redistributed parcels quickly and effectively in Japan and Korea under American occupation (Cullather 2010, 100). In India, the opposition of large landholders amounted to a political hijacking of the reform agenda as they mobilised local and private interests to impede real change. In those states that attempted more serious efforts at reform, the process was also halted midway by beneficiaries other than the rural poor who succeeded in obstructing more radical policies. Essentially a matter of political power and class struggle, it was not surprising that throughout the post-independence decades, regardless of whichever party controlled the central government,

"with many state legislatures controlled by the landlord class, reforms that harmed this class tended to be blocked" (Besley and Burgess 2000, 394).

In fact, land reform in India was initially resisted by ideologically driven Western agencies as much as by local landed elites, with foreign aid institutions putting forward alternative programs to land reform in the early 1950s. The Ford Foundation and Point Four in the United States, for example, initially invested in a fifty-million-dollar (a small fraction of US aid which massively increased later) community development project to build model villages, partly as a "cultural" effort to conquer the "minds" and "feelings" of the peasant population, beginning with 25,000 villages in 1952 and ending with 123,000 villages by 1956.[12] Nehru's government later replaced the scheme with *panchayat* village councils, supported by Ford with another ten million dollars. Yet such councils only reproduced old social structures and hierarchies, and neither project demonstrated visible results in productive yields or poverty alleviation.

In effect, India's rather cautious land reform project, compounded by fragile state backing, ultimately permitted the country's landlords to resist any meaningful overhaul of the status quo. "The political will of the landowning class is as much a challenge to the redistributive process as are the existing legal and structural dimensions of the current landholding regime" (Sethi 2006, 75).[13] As shown in the states of Kerala and West Bengal, successful land reform depended on the political power and determination of governments.

In Kerala, the first communists elected to office in 1957 committed themselves to transforming agrarian relations. They introduced a radical ordinance followed by several reform bills and a landmark Land Reforms (Amendment) Act in 1969. With the goal of supporting self- cultivation, the reform set a non-negotiable ceiling on landholding to help farming families claim the excess land they had worked for generations. The new laws also secured tenure against eviction (Parayil 2000, chaps. 2, 3, 4). However, these local measures alarmed big land owners nationally. Nehru, fearing political backlash and instability, invoked the President's rule to remove E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Kerala's chief minister, in 1959. In West Bengal, however, the communist-led government managed to survive more than three decades in power, beginning in 1977, over which time it rigorously implemented a series of land reforms. Operation Barga, launched in 1978, was among the first policies designed to implement the long-dormant tenancy laws of 1955, which were meant to regulate rents and ensure the security of tenure for sharecroppers (Sengupta 1981). The reforms reached deep and wide in the 1980s to empower the peasants by enforcing their legally protected contracts, along with providing additional support through multiple anti-poverty programs. The government also experimented with "social forestry" based on government-community cooperation in managing publicly owned forestland (Franco 2008). In the end, it was state-sponsored land acquisition through the creation of so-called developmental zones in the wake of the neoliberal turn of economic policy in the late1990s that led to peasant unrest. Losing their rural constituents amid a perceive betrayal, the Left Front was eventually defeated in the 2011 election (Banerjee, Gertler, and Ghatak 2002).

Apparently, land reform in India was a subnational matter more than a national project. Unlike the Chinese pattern of using a central authority and a uniform policy and revenue system albeit with some local autonomy and variation, India, with its manifold legal provisions and rival policy frameworks in different places, struggled to reform its agrarian sector amid locally different priorities, paces, and effects. The processes were also uneven and torturous in the face of complicated caste, language, ethnic, and religious diversities. This leaves any overall assessment indeterminate. If in China land reform was comparatively straightforward in equalising land ownership across the country, in India it was a maze of socioeconomic, political, regional, and hierarchical complexities. Yet the ultimate fact remains that in India, "there had not been a peasant revolution and the [ruling] Congress Party

was not a revolutionary organisation" (Desai 2003, 7).[14] The record of Nehru's administration, according to an astute critic, was barren of any impulse of meeting even modest requirements of social equality and justice. "No land reform worthy of mention was attempted. … As a party, Congress was controlled by a coalition of rich farmers, traders and urban professionals, in which the weight of the agrarian bosses was greatest, and its policies reflected the interests of these groups" (Anderson 2012). Post-Nehru—despite Indira Gandhi's "war against poverty," or anti-corruption campaigns under other leaders, and despite changes in government coalitions after the decline of Congress—the land problem has remained unsolved.

Today, land-related problems in India—from insecure tenancy rights to blocked or lost access to land for subsistence farming—continue to pose grave challenges. By 2005, although the agriculture's share of GDP had declined, about fifty-eight per cent of the national population still depended on farming for their livelihoods. Sixty-three per cent of these farmers owned less than one hectare of land, while large parcels of ten hectares or more were in the hands of less than two per cent of the rural population. Agricultural labour classified as landless or nearly landless (those who had less than 0.2 hectares) accounted for forty-three per cent of all peasant households, which was actually an increase from 1950, while the wealthiest ten per cent of Indians monopolised more land (Sethi 2006, 74-75).[15] Estimates based on a land and livestock survey in 2003 showed that if a uniform ceiling of twenty acres was assumed, there would be fifteen million acres of above-ceiling redistributable land, which was "more than three times the total amount of land that has ever been redistributed under land reform programs in all states" (Rawal 2008, 47).[16] Meanwhile, there are about 57.6 million landless households in present-day India (Lerche 2013, 398-99). While petty cultivators, agricultural workers, and "footloose labour" fall prey to poverty and debt due to capital deprivation, remittance arrears, or usury, the landed class—traditional and capitalist alike—retain its control over wealth and power. In addition to land, members of this class also possess myriad resources in industry, commerce, and finance, as well as powerful positions in the educational and medical sectors, law, legislature, and government (Ramachandran 2011).

Worse still, agricultural growth has been slow, and surpluses are generally used to alleviate bureaucratic and military demands more than aiding the poorest segments of society. Over time, the absence of meaningful large-scale land reform has only highlighted its benefits in the places in which it has been implemented. Fairer resource sharing and labour rewards in turn are bound to lead to positive social results. "Well conceived land reform has often been shown to permit huge gains, in terms of liberty and peace as well as growth and reduced inequality and poverty" (Lipton 2009, 10). In India, after all, even just precarious reforms have reduced poverty through increased access to land by the poor in certain areas, initially nurturing a class of small- and medium-scale farmers and raising wages for landless labourers, thereby enhancing human development—the results of which are brightly visible in the state of Kerala (Parayil 2000).[17] Scholars continue to debate the relationship between land reform and agrarian productivity, but broadly agree on land reform's moral basis and social benefits. In India, there is an especially "robust link between land reform and poverty reduction" due to needed changes in the terms of land contracts and thereby productive relations (Besley and Burgess 2000, 391).

Beyond economic performance, at issue are social equity, fairness, and welfare. Politically, land reform is also straightforwardly a matter of both eradicating the backward relations that hinder production and unshackling a hitherto oppressed people who otherwise cannot win the fight to secure their constitutionally and legally stipulated entitlements and rights. Even if, in the twenty-first century, two-thirds of all farming Indians appear to be small landowners, and even if they vote or rally around political parties, they are marginal or neglected in the policy decisions that affect their lives. For "inequality in landownership still

gives considerable power—economic, social, and political—to the relatively small numbers of larger landowners and the increasing numbers of capitalist farmers" (Harriss 2013, 359). Given the stubborn durability of feudal arrangements—which have become increasingly infused with modern-day financial and corporate interests of both domestic and foreign capital—land reform must be continuously argued for as instrumental to any program of rural and national development.

Collective Farming in China

While land revolution in China overturned landlordism and its structural networks, subjugating reactionary forces and empowering the peasantry, India's crippled land reform omitted such a revolutionary break. The Chinese process was also necessarily one of political socialisation for the peasant masses to shake off their age-old mentality of subordination and attain a new subjectivity while transforming society.[18] Nowhere else is the contrast more manifest between revolutionary and colonial modernity, or between the people rising from below as agents of social change and a general passivity or lack of popular participation. Throughout the postcolonial world, as typified in the modern Chinese and Indian trajectories, land reform explains important developmental variations. Indeed, the superiority of revolutionary transformations of large, poor, rural, illiterate, and patriarchal societies is very much within the mainstream of liberal consensus.[19]

However, if the revolution stops at redistributing land, it will not have definitively distinguished itself from numerous other attempts at achieving the kind of land equity that we see in Chinese and other histories. Any intended revolutionary transformation is not complete without the subsequent steps of reorganising the economy and society, so as to overcome scattered and secluded petty farming and its social-structural and political- psychological ramifications. That is, the significant gains from initial land reform need to be developed through forms of cooperative agriculture. Although the connotation of "land reform" could incorporate more organisational advances, such as cooperation and collectivisation,[20] for the sake of clarity such moves are treated here in their own right and specifications. Collectivisation in its upward process of concentrating productive factors and centralising distributive management, for instance, may even appear to be a negation of initial land reforms.

As it happened, structural reforms that created equal land holdings could not, by themselves, solve the problems of those who lacked the necessary capital, tools, animals, or labour to cultivate their land. In many places, poor peasants began to sell their newly acquired plots while rich peasants hired labour to work on the extra land they bought, threatening a return of the pre-land reform pattern. The obvious vulnerability of petty peasant life was a real concern in situations of flood or drought or family emergencies. In response, the mutual aid groups and work-exchange teams that had emerged before 1949 in the communist controlled areas grew almost instantaneously as land redistribution swept the country.[21] Alarmed by signs of rural polarisation and pressed both to safeguard peasant livelihood and finance industrialisation, while also encouraged by spontaneous experiments at the grassroots (Ma 2012, chaps. 2, 7), the centre decided to push for agricultural socialisation. The draft party Resolution on Productive Mutual Aid and Cooperation in Agriculture was adopted in December 1951.

The socialist transformation of rural China, in conjunction with that of handicraft and capitalist industry and commerce, was a designated part of the Communist Revolution. The theoretical justification for cooperation was constitutive of Chinese ideas articulated in terms of "transition from new democracy to socialism." Initial policy debates on its pace and phases were open within the party (Ma 2012, chaps. 2-5). Mao was of the view—while trying to

persuade his colleagues—that changing from semi-socialist to socialist agriculture was key to upholding and developing the new China. And the best vehicle for securing common prosperity for the peasants would be their cooperation in generating greater productive capacity, while steadily dismantling private domination and suppressing income disparities (Mao 1955; Bramall 2009, 216). By mobilising the agrarian surplus, the cooperatives also afforded small industries to provide agriculture with its needed cement, steel, and chemical fertilisers. This, in turn, augmented rural productivity and output to ensure national grain self-sufficiency, increased household income and rural purchasing power, while shoring up industrialisation. Politically, only by organising themselves could the individually vulnerable households find security, support, and hope for the future. Their wellbeing was presumably a primary element in the sustention of the new regime's power base.

Instead of rolling out a clearly phased, incremental process, as was intended, the actual cooperative movement proceeded hectically. Mutual aid groups were quickly replaced by cooperatives by 1955, which then merged into much larger and more centralised communes in 1958 (Selden 1979). The differences between each of these upward forms rest in their size and degree of collective ownership and control. In primitive cooperatives, land use was shared by all members, apart from the retention of a small portion around each family's homesteads, coupled with cattle and/or large tools as additional investments. The ratio of land to labour inputs in exchange for income was typically 3:7 or 4:6. In advanced cooperatives land dividends were duly removed.

It was not until the emergence of the people's commune that all the factors of production were collectively managed. The distributive principle became "to each according to her labour" based on a gradually refined system of self-management in which work points were calculated through regular, public, and practically democratic appraisals. This was supplemented by communal rules and funds of social relief for the needy in the manner of a government-backed moral economy. The "five-guarantees" (*wubao*), for example, ensured basic provisions for the security of handicapped and labour-deprived households.[22] In addition to private homes, small family plots had been retained precariously in different times and locations. The day-to-day management was at the level of the productive brigade (a cluster of natural villages) before policy readjustments in the wake of the failed Great Leap transferred management to the smaller productive team.

It is notable that collectivisation in China proceeded by and large on a voluntary basis "with neither the violence nor the massive sabotage characteristic of Soviet collectivisation" (Selden 1982, 85; Nolan 1976). It "was carried out smoothly primarily because, unlike their Soviet predecessors, the Chinese had already established a network of state-controlled institutions in the countryside" (Naughton 1991, 230). Or more accurately, the difference was attributable to China's revolutionary trajectory that cohered top-down and bottom-up movements. Compared with Eastern Europe, in China a powerful and popularly entrusted party and army were at work. The party had an accumulated experience of twenty years of running the local states in its base areas through the grassroots party branches and mass organisations. The army itself originated in the countryside, and recruited from and worked among the peasants in the land struggle (Mao 1997). Highlighted characteristically in the Maoist explanation is the existence of popular enthusiasm and peasant agency. On the one hand, as Mao put it, "the serious problem is the education of the peasantry" if their petty bourgeois or capitalist tendencies are to be surmounted (Mao 1949, 419). On the other hand, the communist leadership was adamant that the collective identity of the "Chinese peasantry," having served as the main body of a great revolutionary force, should no longer be taken to be a pre-modern or pre-political category.

Could the process have been more gradual as initially planned? In view of the failures of the Great Leap after 1958, even sympathetic critics argue that collectivisation in China was

all too hasty or misguided. However, such critiques tend to overlook at least two major points. First, collective agriculture has served as the cornerstone of Chinese development and was indispensable to the kind of socialist industrialisation to which the communist modernisers committed themselves. For Mao, the purpose of the "socialist upsurge in the countryside" was a revolution not only of ownership structure, but also in production itself. [23] It was about agrarian modernisation through mechanisation, technological upgrading, and expanded irrigation infrastructure. And the party was convinced that, given Chinese conditions, only collectively organised agriculture could make full use of the modern means of production—the deployment of heavy machines and the application of advanced farming technologies. Moreover, by allowing essential soil, water, and other works to be mobilised beyond the abilities of individual households, the collectives could surpass a traditional petty peasant economy that had trapped the rural population in permanent poverty. Unorthodoxly, perhaps, cooperation was specified as a step *prior* to mechanisation, which meant changing productive relations first so as to catalyse productive forces (Mao 1977). Although in the end mechanisation did not become a policy priority due to a range of practical constraints, the idea retained its validity and force.

The second point concerns the international context. External hostility could coerce internal responses which might appear irrational if viewed out of context. During the 1950s, China's geopolitical situation was overwhelmingly harsh, from the U.S.-led economic embargo and military threats, to the UN blockage, the Korean War (1950-3), and the various Taiwan Strait crises. Under immense pressure, the cooperative movement was conceived not only as part of the socioeconomic transition, but also as an organic component of China's war effort and self-repositioning to counter imperialist global strategies and aggression. At stake was national survival, independence, and dignity.[24] A telling example of this direct linkage between the domestic and foreign was the nationwide "patriotic sanitation movement" that ran parallel to rural cooperation and involved common households. It was triggered by the American bacterial warfare believed to be launched in Korea along China's northeast border (Ma 2012, 159-62). All considered, there was simply no assured peaceful chance for the new China to follow any "normal" path of a less rushed or more orderly development.

Despite a number of serious shortcomings, such as diminishing work incentives and urban- rural segregation, the advantages of collectively organised agriculture were evident. First, it saved land by minimising waste on hedgerows, boundaries, paths, and unnecessarily repeated water channels. Second, larger fields encouraged a higher degree of mechanisation, which improved both land and labour productivity. Third, collective cultivation facilitated the rapid diffusion of new seed varieties (especially of China's own revolutionary high-yielding hybrid rice), which increased output and helped China become a net grain exporter. Fourth, communal management enabled the spread of locally produced chemical fertilisers, along with other green technologies in land use and crop planning. "The China of 1978 stood on the edge of an agricultural revolution, and the collective farms deserve the lion's share of the credit" (Bramall 2009, 255).[25] Lastly, coordinated management allowed labour and resource mobilisation for large-scale infrastructural construction and rural industries. The unified government-communal managerial system (*zheng she he yi)* was an important institutional innovation. It had enabled not only labour accumulation and organisation for large scale infrastructural works and rural industries but also political participation and grassroots self-governance. The "mass mobilisation mode of transformation" demonstrated the superiority of the Chinese system (Saith 2008: 736-9). Between 1952 and 1978, irrigated land in China tripled. This also entailed unprecedented land rearrangements and soil consolidation for efficiency in both grain and side-line production. Meanwhile, communal factories spread to absorb rural labour while boosting peasant income, laying the groundwork for the township and village enterprises (TVEs) developed later in the reform era. Wherever non-farm enterprises could

thrive, "the collectives became powerful internal agents of rural accumulation so obviously lacking in other parts of the developing world, including rural India" (ibid: 740).

Socially, the collectives mitigated inequality among members by depressing polarising forces and protecting basic security. They also promoted gender equality by bringing women from the confines of housework into united and gainful labour through such provisions as community nurseries and dining facilities. Communal clinics, schools, and mass campaigns for eradicating illiteracy and epidemics and for "cultured life" extended to remote villages. The phenomenal contribution of China's "barefoot doctors" to rural public health and preventive medicine was widely recognized by the World Health Organisation and other key observers (Wang 2010; Ma and Sood 2008, 6). As an overall assessment, collectivisation appeared "not premature but instead a necessary precondition for the development of a modern agricultural sector" (Bramall 2009, 214-19, 225-26).

Acknowledging these achievements doesn't mitigate the moral dilemmas and many contradictions or failings the experiment had inflicted (Lin 2006, 65-69, 78-81). Rural development was curtailed to prioritise urban food supplies and price stability, which the government did by monopolising the purchase and marketing of essential agrarian produce. Despite policies designed to balance popular welfare, the kind of sectorial trades that would benefit peasants were eventually unachievable. So-called internal accumulation—without what the first industrialisers enjoyed through the colonial extraction of overseas resources—took a heavy toll. It prevented farming collectives from achieving higher rates of surplus retention. The majority of communes endured a relatively low level of income, which effectively rationalised decollectivisation in the early 1980s.

The Green Revolution in India

As earlier noted, land reform was a central component of India's freedom struggle. However, gradually betrayed by circumstances, its post-independence trajectory was vague, weak, patchy, and eventually unrealised. For instance, what was known as "reverse tenancy" or "reverse rent," was still common, whereby small farmers had to lease their land to larger holders due to their own inability to obtain access to credits, seeds, techniques, or water channels. The poorer the peasants, the more costly their cultivation could be (Ramachandran 2011). Unlike in China, cooperation was not an earnest policy response. In 1949, the Agrarian Reforms Committee of Congress did propose to promote rural coops, and in 1959 it put forward a resolution on agricultural organisational patterns. However, each move was eventually abandoned under the pressure of opposition from the landed elites. India's decision to first separate political democracy and social justice and then prioritise the former over the latter, concerning both land redistribution and agrarian cooperation, was not uncontroversial. But it looks as though critical voices from inside the country would always be stifled by local fears of class war, as well as the world's dominant ideology of formal democracy. As "most land reform interventions have languished in courts", there remains "endemic (near) landlessness, a dominance of uneconomic marginal, fragmented holdings, with the vast majority being below a scale which can guarantee a reasonable level of living" (Saith 2008: 734).

In spite of this, India nevertheless managed to undertake a fairly successful "green revolution" after a prolonged period of stagnant conditions in land pooling, technological adaptation, and labour productivity. In the 1960s, first in Punjab, the World Bank in collaboration with the U.S. Agency for International Development advocated and subsidised the importation of chemical fertilisers, high-yielding and fertiliser-responsive seeds, pesticides, and farm machinery. "A combination of foreign knowledge, domestic subsidies, and rural private initiative brought a capitalist revolution to the Indian countryside" (Desai

2003, 9). This development eased the dire situation of persistent hunger in some areas, as wheat production doubled over a period of twenty years while rice increased by fifty per cent. Yet, since the foreign aid agencies sponsored monocultures from imported seed varieties, the revolution was costly. Emphasising commercial crops such as sugarcane and cotton at the expense of crops like chickpeas and millet, which were traditionally produced by the poor to feed themselves, the new direction had "steadily eroded the self-sufficiency of the small farmer in food grains." Seed commercialisation in general undermined not only natural biodiversity but also the autonomy and security of petty farmers. Moreover, rich farmers as the "principal beneficiaries" of the revolution were able to politicise subsidies, facilitate the concentration of land, and reinforce dependency on capital-intensive inputs (Harriss 2013, 355; Sethi 2006, 77-79). Also lost were nearly 8.5 million hectares, or six per cent of the crop base, to redundant water logging and excess alkalinity (The World Resources Institute 1995, 79-81, chaps. 5, 6).

A striking contrast between India and China was that while the latter had to be self-reliant after the Sino-Soviet split, the former was a recipient of substantial funds and aid, alternately or concurrently, from East and West as well as from multiple international agencies.[26] The downside was that the World Bank, for instance, had compelled the Indian government to grant favourable conditions to foreign investment in local fertiliser and related industries, to remove several protective trade barriers, and to liberalise domestic price controls over basic food stuffs, from grains to milk (Kumar 2011; Sethi 2006, 78). Unlike democratic India, communist China was under the siege of both superpowers in the 1960s and 1970s. But in spite of that, it nevertheless completed its own green revolution and managed to advance socially and economically far more than India and most others in the developing world. This was the case despite India's many comparative advantages in geopolitical position and natural endowments, including a more relaxed ratio of arable land to people.[27] By 1980, China's per capita output in terms of many essential agricultural products was several times larger than India's in almost every single category.[28] The approach of the World Bank and Ford Foundation in India took technological progress as the solution to underdevelopment. However, technological determinism did not fare well in reality. The fact that green revolutionary technologies worked comparatively better, or even superbly, in collective agriculture seems to have eluded expert attention in development economics.

Another notable contrast concerns the unique Chinese strategy of "taking grain as the key link" within the country's policy framework. Agriculture was declared "the foundation of the national economy, and irrigation the lifeline of agriculture." In particular, as stipulated in the landmark 1956 Guideline of Agricultural Development (draft), known as China's "agricultural constitution," economic and social developments were deemed inseparable and interdependent. The guideline covered rural construction as a whole to encompass productive, financial, infrastructural, and environmental aspects as well as social security, public health, popular literacy, women's liberation, children's protection, and mutual support between peasants and workers. Nothing similar was found prominent in Nehruvian socialism, even when it peaked.

A missing transformation in social attitudes and relations seems to have continuously held India back, even beyond the "impassable trenches" of caste.[29] Legally denounced yet socially alive, "caste is about the worst form of inequality you can think of."[30] Even among Muslims and Christians, caste-like hierarchies continue to divide, with Muslims often finding themselves regarded as second-class citizens when it comes to government jobs, private-sector employment, affirmative action programs, or for that matter violence in Kashmir (Mishra 2007).[31] Unfortunately, Hinduism is not an egalitarian religion, even in theory, and Islam is not so in practice, at least in India (Desai 2003, 10). While communal and sectarian conflicts persist, they do not invalidate the ultimate category of "class" or caste-as-class

across ethnic or religious cleavages and gender divisions. The caste frontiers might have been weakened in the official political arena or marketplace, or even within individual villages since independence, but radical politics is still largely absent. Insofar as caste, either as a symbolic distortion or fatalistic ideology, remains "the habitual framework of the nation," it strikes away "any possibility of broad collective action to redress earthly injustice." The significance of caste perpetuates a structure of feelings, "at once sustaining Indian democracy and draining it of reconstructive energy" (Anderson 2012). Throughout India, pervasively visible is electoral dependency on the landed elites who subordinate the poor and low-caste peasants and control their votes (Ramachandran 2011).

Against this backdrop, the Maoist insurgency should be viewed as a major disruption of traditional political passivity. In tracing its origins, most noticeable are the *adivasis* or indigenous people who were left out by the green revolution. For generations, they had worked the land for upper-caste land-owners or taken casual jobs while relying on their homeland's natural resources with or without engaging in monetary or market activities. Of the eighty-five million people classified as "scheduled tribes," seventy million lived in the heart of India's hill and forest belt across a dozen states. Constitutionally, "adequate safeguards shall be provided for minorities, backward and tribal areas, and depressed and other backward classes." In reality, however, these marginalised "ancient inhabitants" found themselves victims of local state policies that had repeatedly failed to uphold their rights, entitlements, and preferred ways of life and wellbeing. Exploited and increasingly dispossessed as well, the tribes' relative and oftentimes absolute deprivation was "the more striking when compared with that of the Dalits and Muslims" (Guha 2007). The Naxalites in the "red corridor," as a heroic response at the margins of Hindu spheres, became a top security headache for New Delhi (Mehra 2000). Yet military crackdowns or so-called counterinsurgency tactics cannot be a solution, not morally or practically. The social ills that gave rise to the violent rebellion must be addressed.

Of the two dimensions of a socially and developmentally desirable agrarian reform, economic-technical and social-political, India has at most accomplished only one—the green revolution. The other one would involve not only equity in land sharing, but also forms of cooperative farming. Similar to China, India was tasked with industrialising through internal accumulation or agricultural sourcing of capital, at least initially. But India could not and did not resemble post-revolutionary China, which was also committed to social progress and popular welfare due to the powerful path-dependent effect of the Communist Revolution. To be sure, the Chinese government managed only rudimentary public goods along with essential communal provisions, and did not achieve an optimal resource allocation to benefit rural China. But a largely egalitarian and collectively organised agrarian sector did enable the country to lay its industrial foundation while meeting the basic needs of the world's largest national population. In fact, the generally ascending standard of living in the reform period—often credited to the alleged magic of market transition—would not have been possible without the fundamental pre-reform achievements in socioeconomic structure and organisation, including an egalitarian land system. And the problems of recurrent urban and rural poverty in recent years are attributable precisely to the abandonment of collective arrangements.

Moreover, collectivisation was also about popular agency. As a "socialist upsurge," it was also a political struggle and a gigantic training school for the country's five hundred million peasants. This was the case because of the party's ideological commitment, its pursuit of a "politics of recognition," which elevated the lower classes and commoners to a politically esteemed stratum through massively participatory and transformative popular movements. The total absence of anything similar in India explains much of its social conservatism and developmental lag.

The comparative experiences discussed above are an awesome testimony of the superiority of socialist agrarian reform. If the Indian Union has never forced itself to resolve its perpetual and spatially uneven land problems, China has taken two steps forward (land redistribution and collectivisation) and one step back. Returning to disorganized family farming, collective land ownership is formally retained within China, but effectively undermined. The point here is that continuities between the first two steps can be seen as both economically and politically logical; defending one should not require the demeaning of the other.[32] Unfortunately, however, in both countries now the agrarian question has come back to haunt policymakers in an age of capitalist globalisation.

Famine and Democracy

The received record of the disastrous Great Leap Forward (1958) and the subsequent famine have, together, posed a devastating challenge to any positive evaluations of collective agriculture in China. The controversies include rigorous and critical scholarship as much as an ideologically charged "famine industry" racing for body counts. Serious historians, economists, and demographers have sought to understand the entire picture of what happened in which circumstances, and have cautioned against a dubious play of numbers. Statistical manipulations have to be exposed given that even archival materials can be misleading or even fabricated for political aims (Vukovich 2013, chap. 4; Wang 2013a; Sun 2014). Serious scholars have also urged the pursuit of comparative studies of qualitative evidence of mass famines throughout world history, with the goal of understanding the magnitude of this particular event accurately in historical perspective (Riskin 1998; Yang 2013; Grada 2014; Wheatcroft 2014). An important additional point is that the Great Leap Forward cannot be simply equated with collective agriculture or quoted to negate the latter's rationality. The fiercely disputed figures of fatalities do not concern us here; the real issue is how to accurately dissect the causes of particular policy decisions in order to make an honest assessment of Chinese socialism.

Famine is indeed no stranger to histories the world over. Singling out communist sins cannot erase or lighten the crimes of "imperialist famine" or, for that matter and on an even larger scale, the colonial extinction of aboriginal populations in place after place outside Europe. Colonialism was responsible for massive starvation and tens of millions of famine deaths. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, India experienced simultaneously its worst famine ever and its largest grain exports, supplying nearly a fifth of Britain's wheat consumption (Davis 2001, part iv and chap. 9). Under the Raj between 1896 and 1900, more than ten million people died in avoidable famines out of a population of a little more than one-third the size of China's in 1960. A proportionally even greater number of people died from hunger in Ireland in 1845-46 under British rule. Mass famine had also been a common scene in old China before the revolution. Such atrocities should be noted not to elude any responsibility of the Chinese regime but to understand it squarely within context. The Great Leap famine, whatever actual toll might emerge from further research, is certainly unforgivable by the communist's own standards.

Keeping these comparisons in mind, it is questionable as why India did not have a "famine" when its total food output per capita was in fact less than that of China's during the Great Leap famine, where, moreover, the egalitarian rural structure should have mitigated any crisis of food shortage (Patnaik 2002, 64-65). To be sure, output is not the same as availability. Generally speaking, regional and class disparities are major, and pricing, entitlement, and other policy and market factors all play a role. There are also other historically and nationally specific conditions, such as China's debt burden to the Soviet Union at the time as compared with India's multiple aid incomes. What is most telling is that

a peculiar computational procedure of calculating "excess deaths" from estimated fertility rates (which allows "death" to happen without birth in the first place) "does not seem to have been ever applied by demographers and economists before, and never applied in contexts other than China" (ibid., 53). Or even if the procedure has since become more common, its application in the Chinese case did inflict some horrendous exaggeration (Yang 2013; Benton and Lin 2010, 9-10).

Although the Great Leap Forward turned out to be recklessly wilful and wishful, its intention was genuinely popular concerning independent national development and the rapid improvement of rural and urban living. The campaign had its intrinsic rationality, however tainted or paradoxical. Even a devastating famine could not obliterate the larger fact that the PRC government had from the beginning demonstrated a commitment to basic food security, and achieved overall a much greater and faster reduction of extreme poverty, hunger, infant mortality, gender inequality, and so on. The result was a more impressive increase in life expectancy than all other comparably poor countries well before post-Mao reforms (Sen 2001). The Great Leap ended catastrophically, but the constructive side of utopian, egalitarian, and emancipatory characters was also evident (Gao 2008, chap. 5; Vukovich 2013, chap. 4; Kueh 2014). It was during those radical years that China had markedly upgraded its land and irrigation infrastructure, agricultural techniques, and green technologies, paving the way for subsequent growth. It was also during the same period that urban medical and educational expertise was brought far and wide to the countryside. Bureaucracy was meanwhile curbed through mass movements with a popular democratic impulse. The party cadres were obliged to work among ordinary workers and peasants, and their privileges, treated as a kind of "bourgeois right," were criticized and trimmed down.

Concerning the influential thesis that famine does not occur in democracies, a much more sophisticated understanding of Amartya Sen's original formulation is required in the first place. The Sen thesis holds that food shortage cannot itself cause famine, since famine concerns the inability to buy, or lack of entitlement to receive, food. Adequate food supply is a basic social provision in a society capable of sustained equity, fair distribution, and sufficient basic income. By extension—and this is a powerful contention—poverty is caused not by scarcity as such or anything "natural" after a certain threshold has been globally crossed following the industrial revolution (Stedman Jones 2004, intro.), but by bad domestic and/or international politics and policies, such as wars, conflicts, and government inaction in the face of poverty and hunger. However, Sen stresses the role of a free press, which is the focal point of his comparison between what he sees as the occurrence and absence of famine in communist China and democratic India (2000, chap. 6, 7, 9).

Various objections have been raised by eloquent critics (e.g., Nolan and Sender 1992; Shiva 2002).[33] For one thing, universal rights or entitlements to subsistence is not a category of market function and should not be subject to uncertain market supplies. The prices of grain and foodstuffs cannot merely be determined by the market; and non-market channels must be kept open for social security schemes and crisis management under any "reasonable" political regime (to borrow from John Rawls's notion of political liberalism). For another, taking press freedom and impartiality for granted in India, as in all democracies, is overly optimistic. The media is often controlled by big capital and censorship has always existed and can at times be heavy- handed, as amply displayed in the world's major democracies, including the recent Indian attempts at shutting down Internet complaints about government and state policies. India's thoroughly commercialised mainstream media also appears to be "infantile," uncritical, or trivially minded, reflecting a kind of middle-class superficiality and indifference towards many of the country's most searing social problems (Parekh 2010; Nussbaum 2008, chap. 4, 6).

Empirically, depending on one's definition, famine can be well argued to have actually

happened in independent India.[34] Harvest failure in 1965-66 brought the country to its knees with regard to its foreign aid dependency. The Bhiha famine of 1966-67 was local but significant, given the population density of the affected areas. In particular, pertaining to the relationship between famine and democracy, relief efforts were delayed by a deliberate postponement of a famine declaration due to an upcoming state election (Brass 1986, Myhrvold-Hassen 2007). In this case, not only had the central and local governments failed to prevent famine, but elected politicians also blocked swift action on disaster relief in the name of democracy itself.

Even in years deemed good for agriculture and under conditions of general peace and stability, decade after decade, malnutrition, starvation, and destitution persisted as part of life for a massive number of lower class-caste Indians, especially women and children. "The lack of progress on the welfare dimension in India has led to human suffering and loss of life, not through spectacular disasters like in China but through the quiet, continuous suffering of the forty per cent of the population who are in absolute poverty" (Sorensen 2007, chap. 5). Even in its worst phase, the famine in North Korea in the mid-1990s "only began to approach India's year-in, year-out toll of infant mortality and death from starvation, as proportions of their respective populations" (Cumings 2000, 152). Is democracy nevertheless a cure? Standing by his position, Sen has sensibly modified the specifications of his thesis, noting that democracy does not automatically guarantee equality and security—such things have to be fought for. "I first argued that functioning democracies prevent famine in around 1979/80. I think today I would put it slightly differently and say that human beings in a functioning democracy prevent famine. The system in itself wouldn't do it unless there was activity along with it" (2013b). He is right. Of course none of the criticisms of his famine aversion thesis question the normative value of freedom of expression or public power and deliberation. The point is that an "argumentative India" (Sen 2006) needs to have its democracy socially substantiated. To not be complacent is to address the reality of how democracy is allowed to be hollowed out by steep socioeconomic deprivations and indeed how certain remnants of such premodern power as landlordism hinders democracy.

To be sure, India's Westminster-style parliamentary rule was not a gift, but achieved through a daring freedom struggle. Democracy has also succeeded in many ways to make the Indians proud. However, even procedurally the system is stained by the incompetence, corruption, and criminality of its political class. Worse still, the gravity of the country's disappointing social performance is such that the plight of its deprived common citizens—not to mention the sectarian strife or declining secularism, among other problems—makes a mockery of democracy's moral claims. China, conversely, has refused any multiparty competition or competitive national elections. It saw devastating policy blunders, of which a few were of an unprecedented magnitude given the size of the Chinese population. Abuses of personal liberties coexisted with, but then also logically distorted and undermined, forms of collective self-realisation. The rise of an authoritarian market regime only sharpened rather than solved these contradictions. At the same time, post-revolutionary China has also been characterised by a strong social commitment to *minsheng*, or people's livelihood. Before neoliberal policy became dominant, the communist government strived to meet basic needs by sustained public investment in physical as much as human development infrastructure at a time when the country was many times poorer than it currently is. As far as China's rudimentary but free or inexpensive networks of social security and services in housing, schooling, transportation, and healthcare are concerned, a devoted "public goods regime" of Chinese socialism has been unquestionably superior to any welfare arrangements under Indian democracy.

Above all, notwithstanding grave setbacks, China has succeeded in feeding one-fifth of the world's inhabitants on seven per cent of the globe's cultivable land, achieving a leap on

every main index of human development available (Lu and Montes 2002, 8-9). "The very fact that agricultural output did rise as fast as population during the late Maoist era is in many ways a tribute to the effectiveness of collective farming." That is, China used its available land "far more productively than any other large-scale agricultural producer on the planet" (Bramall 2009, 245, 231). Conspicuous in the background of these horizontal and vertical comparisons are not only desperate peasant uprisings in the past, but also global and peripheral capitalism continuing to trap nearly half of humanity in prolonged food insecurity and abject poverty in the present. And the latter is the case in the midst of, or in contrast to, a historically unparalleled accumulation of wealth and capital.

Capitalism, Agrarian Crises, and Land to the Tiller

If India has never freed itself from the chain of capitalist destruction, China, by willingly participating in neoliberal globalisation, is chaining itself, so to speak. Decollectivisation was a wholesale state project rapidly imposed on rural society, not without local resistance (Unger 2002, chap. 5; Xu 2013). The substitution effect—an initial reform policy to raise the price of grain and other farm produce—accompanied the liberalisation of output markets and improved access to inputs, did positively boost agriculture in the first part of 1980s (Griffin et al. 2002, 50-51; Griffin and Khan 2000). But the gains were soon offset by looming problems from rural disorganisation. Rarely discussed in the literature is that "double management," which was designed to preserve the collective level so as to mitigate the vulnerabilities of petty farming at the household level in a "family responsibility system," quickly collapsed in most places. The once collective and flourishing TVEs followed suit and were privatized. Market dictation then led to falling prices of products and rising costs of production in agriculture. The increased burden of locally enforced levy varieties, which occurred as the central government withdrew much of its social responsibility for rural investment, provoked peasant unrest.

A manifold crisis in the countryside was duly identified to depict unprofitable farming, land loss and displacement, urban-rural income disparities, and rundown public maintenance and grassroots governance (Wen 2005; Day 2013, 116-29, chap. 6). Also visible was a decline in the social status of women and a resurgence of patriarchal relations and superstitious customs. The crisis amounted to a testimony of the damages of decollectivisation, which paved the way for land and people to be increasingly commodified. The state responded belatedly and dubiously. Agrarian taxes were removed (since 2006), government subsidies and assistance upgraded, and village elections better monitored. However, gone with state taxes were also the most popular common funds from collective accumulation indispensable for a communal moral economy. As the national strategy became centred on urbanisation and policies that encouraged big capital agribusinesses, and as the debt ridden local governments promoted land acquisition by private investors and developers for cash returns,[35] China's farmland has been shrinking, which has also led to increasing overseas land deals in various forms.

Landlessness has re-emerged more than half a century after the greatest land revolution in world history. It is partly due to direct land loss and partly the policy that inhibits adjustments to land rights in accordance with demographic changes on the ground. This situation has contributed to a steady increase in outflow rural migration. The younger generation in particular is driven away by a lack of land entitlement, as well as commercialised urban attractions. As a result, dilapidated villages bear parcellised holdings, wasted farmland (left fallow by migrants), hurdles in accessing water and other common resources, and waning infrastructure in farming and grassroots government. Meanwhile, cultivated land continues to be lost to a breakneck urban expansion, and the official "redline"

for guarding the country's 1.8 billion *mu* (120 million hectares) against non-agricultural use is bound to be ignored. Between 1997 and 2008, China saw 6.2 per cent of its farmland engulfed by factories, construction sites, and sprawl, in addition to desertification and deforestation.[36] On top of worsening land, water, and air pollution, and increased coal (and imported oil waste) reliance, switching from rural to urban life is expected to double per capita energy consumption and carbon emissions.

Alarmingly, China's accession to the World Trade Organisation in 2001 bankrupted numerous domestic soybean producers throughout the country and weakened the market position of many others (Wang 2013b). Foreign food and seed corporations led by Monsanto, DuPont, and other powerful multinationals found China a receptive place with brilliant investment opportunities. As transnational agro-capital invaded both China's agrarian productive streams and supply channels, its share in Chinese corn, wheat, rice, soybean, and vegetables markets steadily rose. Rarely occurring elsewhere, the introduction or conversion of generically modified seeds and goods in China can be done without rigorous scrutiny for minimal protection of farmers, domestic markets, or diverse natural varieties. The heyday of self-reliance has become a distant memory under today's real threat to the hard won "people's food sovereignty" (Yan and Chen 2013).[37]

In India, although not similarly pressed by land shortages and ecological stresses, agriculture does have similar problems of soil degradation from the accumulated overuse of chemicals and fertilisers, alongside fossil fuel dependence and, above all, unprofitable farming. The costs of cultivation in India, for marginal farmers in particular, have followed a relentlessly upward curve in the past two decades. Since inputs came to be progressively ineffective in a tired or resistant soil, the amount farmers needed keep piling up, while retreating water tables also reduced the aptitude of existing groundwater irrigation (Lerche 2013, 390; Harriss 2013, 357). Yet, if both countries' eco-agricultural conditions are fragile, India's general food supply and living standards are still way behind China's. Since reforms in the early 1990s, India's economy has grown markedly to nurture an expanding middle class. However, despite optimism over a "rising India," turning its agriculture into a global commercial hub through a neoliberal model has had a decidedly negative impact on the sector. Rural conditions remain so calamitous that in some areas, village after village people are still starving. In large-scale contract farming (at times, of genetically modified crops), many cash farmers who "fail" in a fiercely competitive world market—unprotected from either cheap agricultural imports or expansive seeds and pesticides—have resorted to suicide (Deshpande and Arora 2010, chap. 6, 12). "It is estimated that more than a quarter of a million Indian farmers have committed suicide in the last sixteen years [1994-2010]—the largest wave of recorded suicides in human history."[38] The subalterns may have crystallised themselves into regional and Dalit parties, but no fundamental improvement of their lives is in sight. Insofar as the interests of the landed elites and bureaucrats collude, "the complicity of the state apparatus with the landlords in exploitation and oppression of the poor" continues to block long overdue social changes (Mehra 2000, 39).

That said, when looking at the two countries, India does possess a real and crucial advantage over China. The unsuccessful market reform of China's public health sector is a telling example. The comparison lies not in India's social expenditure being any better delivered, but rather in the basic institutional requirement that any overhaul of major national policies would have to be deliberated in the Lok Sabha and pass challenges from the opposition. Although urgent social problems can be overlooked depending on the dynamics of Indian politics or "which issues get dramatized and politicized" (Sen 2013), democratic procedures do guard against Chinese-style decision-making that can instantly impinge on hundreds of millions of lives. In this same vein, India continues to be much less reliant on export and foreign capital than China's wide-open economy, and is hence more protective of

its national industries and markets. Election pressures compelled the last Congress coalition to adopt a few high-profile laws, from stronger protections for women to more serious anti-graft measures. The Food Security Bill of 2013, meanwhile, justified as a universal basic right a minimal provision of wheat and rice at subsidized prices to seventy per cent of rural Indians and fifty per cent of urban Indians.[39] While these reforms have been criticised from both the left and right in India for their allegedly statist manner—a striking contrast with Chinese popular attitudes toward public welfare—they are expected to be honoured by the newly elected BJP government.

The capitalist upsurge in rural Asia since the 1990s has renewed and sharpened the question of land. India has seen bold enclosures of farmland, pasture meadows, and forests done in the name of modernisation. Given that grain crops are the least profitable, and as farmers and pastoralists are ever more separated from their means of production and subsistence, the shrinking of arable land and agricultural degrainisation continues to impair common livelihoods. To snatch productive assets away from local producers, natural resources included, and "sell them as stock to private companies is a process of barbaric dispossession on a scale that has no parallel in history." Encouraged by state policies, large mining and water projects have proceeded without sound, negotiated plans for either human resettlement or environmental rehabilitation, inducing desperate protests (Roy 2001, 60). Land disputes in China are different in that de-agrarianisation is linked to an urbanisation agenda financially dependent on public land. Private land grabbing and even forced eviction could gamble on real estate inflation for debt repayment in a short-term, overheated market. In both countries, the encroachment of tribal or collective land and the deprivation of variously land-dependent communities is the work of big capital—developers, investors, agro-businessmen, financiers, and the like—as much as the state.

In light of a global system that destroys the fertility of land by tolerating waste and pollution, the depletion of the environmental commons is seemingly unstoppable. However, accelerating capitalist globalisation and financialisation would also be hopeless in large and still more or less agrarian societies where a vast number of people continue to live on the land. On a finite earth, the remaining hundreds of millions of farming households in India and China simply cannot resettle themselves elsewhere without ruining the basis of their livelihoods. An organic agriculture for need rather than profit is therefore necessary for sustainable human existence. That is, it will be impossible at least in the next few decades for the majority of rural Indians and Chinese to find stable urban employment; less viable still for them all to depend on the market supply for their food. The size of their combined population alone predetermines the essential necessity of minimal national food sovereignty, as no global market could ever meet a demand of that scale. Moreover, the risks of international financial capital controlling and gambling on grain prices are real, which in turn threaten to precipitate political conflicts and economic crises. All this brings us back the question of land.

Yet, as capital moves by the logic of "spatial fix," the world's remaining communal land of all types—and its cultivators as the "last peasantry"—are targeted by attempts at "capitalising" agriculture so as to maintain a supply of cheap industrial labour for the global productive chain (Harvey 2001).[40] Without organised efforts in the direction of desirable agricultural intensification and diversification, an artificial rural "surplus labour" is being constantly squeezed off of the land. In the world's two greatest long-lasting agrarian civilisations, "floating labourers" seeking urban employment form unprecedented migration movements. The official figure for such labourers in China in 2013 was 260 million. An unofficial estimate for India in the same year was "as many as 100 million" (including seasonal workers) (Harriss 2013, 358). In the evermore crowded and bifurcated cities across China and India, newcomers struggle with unemployment, job insecurity, low wages or wage arrears, and even sweatshops in the poorly regulated and often informalised and casualised

labour markets. With little protection from either governments or trade unions, they constitute a "precariat" rather than proletariat.

Back in the villages, apart from the problems of land fragmentation and degradation or collective governance, Chinese farmers suffer from broken families and the "feminisation of agriculture," among other problems. The latter is incomparable with barriers to women's access to the essential resources of land, credit, farm inputs, technical training, and so on in India (Sethi 2006, 89-90). Such barriers are generally not present in China thanks to the socialist legacy of equal land rights and gender equality. But a significant number of China's rural women are part of the "floating population," and their plight is no less distressing (Pun 2005; Lee 2007, part 3; Yan 2008). Remittances from waged work now make up the bulk of rural income at an enormous human cost. In addition to heavy exploitation, especially in the manufacturing sector for export, children and elders are left behind to care for themselves.

In India, since land "as a basis of livelihood—for subsistence, survival, social justice, and human dignity—has largely been lost" (Sethi 2006, 74), the concern over inequalities in landholding has resurfaced. However, private companies and international lenders have driven market reforms on their own terms, for their own objectives, and by their own methods. Focused on structural "clarification of property rights" and the creation or expansion of a land market in close connection with the financial market, reforms are only geared toward rental and sales gains and local state revenue. Given that many farmers and tribal people are outside any documented system of land records and titles, the emphasis is "placed on the need to establish the basic legal and institutional framework that would facilitate a market takeover in land and resource exchange" (Sethi 2006, 76). As such, land reform designed to improve the condition of landless and poor farmers "is a good deal further down the mainstream political agenda" (Lerche 2013, 399).

Here, a single important difference between China and India is that China's "family responsibility system" is not a simple resumption of "private peasant agriculture" after the initial land reform (Griffin et al. 2002). The dissolution of communes altered neither collective land ownership nor equality of land rights among household holdings, at least not formally or legally. Resumed on an equal per capita basis is only the use right to land along with household management of farming. Class differentiation has nevertheless recurred, more polarising in some places than others due to market rather than land factors. Breakneck urban expansion, in particular, has created a new class of parasitic landlords as rentiers living on the proceeds of land compensation and private housing construction. But the reversion in land relations and class power has caused profound social and legitimacy crises precisely because it is still partial and even illegal. The aftermath of decollectivisation was typically a case of the "tragedy of the uncommons," yet the worst has so far been avoided because the peasants have retained their last defence. In particular, collective farmland functions as a secure means of subsistence for migrant workers. While they are away, their land can be tended to by family members or "circulated" within the community in support of their old and young. And they can return to farming in times of need, at will.

This distinction between displacement and dispossession is unique—indeed, it is the secret of China's "cheap labour" as a "competitive advantage" in the global market. The two-tiered structure has allowed migrant workers to be paid below the cost of family reproduction, while helping the country to evade the tribulations of landlessness or a visible urban underclass in slums (Wen 2005, chap. 3; He 2007; Lv 2011). By using the countryside as a social safety valve, the state can manage collaborating with capital, ironically by tapping into a socialist reserve (Day 2013, 192-93). That is, the essential benefit of equal land right has been permitted to share the cost of profits. The duality of China's post socialist political economy of exploitation and security as a hidden contribution to capitalist global expansion has yet to be conceptualised. If, globally speaking, industrialisation is no longer dependent on

rural sourcing, the classical agrarian question of capital may have indeed been bypassed (Bernstein 2009). China nevertheless appears to be an exception. Even in India, the on-going capitalist transformation from above or below endures, commodifying both land and labour (Byres 1996). The point remains that capitalism will never provide the rural masses of the Asian giants with enough jobs or income in either agricultural or industrial sectors to complete their proletarianisation.

The fact that the egalitarian principle of land sharing has been upheld in China following land redistribution and throughout collectivisation and its destruction is a major explanation for the country's continuing growth. In recent years, it is the conflicts over land rights being scrapped by officials and developers alike for commercial gains that have made land privatisation superficially appealing. However, if land is privatised to be freely tradable, peasants could be tempted or forced to sell their land and thereby lose their security. This fear is real within the context of rampant private seizures of state, collective, tribal, and other types of public and communal lands in the global South. As seen in India, the burdens of debts, bankruptcy, or family emergencies can lead to land loss, with poor farmers ending up in urban slums. Within China, further privatisation could quickly polarise between land concentration in the hands of (new) landlords, real estate gamblers, agro-industrial capitalists, and multinationals at one end, and landless and ruined petty producers and communities at the other. Class polarisation has long begun to form new exploitative relations, partly encouraged by a set of economic and financial policies leaning toward private agrarian capital, domestic and foreign alike. In the face of increasing monetisation of the global grain market, and hence increasingly grave threats to food sovereignty, the only alternative that holds promise for the future is "land to the tiller" and peasant (re)organisation in various forms of eco-agrarian cooperation, along with a participatory socio-political life supported by the state and larger society (Zhang 2012; Lin 2013, chap. 7).

The concept of land as a commodity contradicts traditional and socialist notions of common property as a natural or social right. The Polanyian thesis is resonant that private property in land and labour claimed in capitalist legal codes is "disembedded" from the cultures and political economies within which such codes operate: The commodification of people and land is "entirely fictitious" and necessitates social self-protection (Polanyi 1957, 72, chap. 6; Hann 1998, 7, 45-46). Given that the peasant population in the developing world still shoulders the largest proportion of global staple crops and food production, these peasants cannot be made "modernity's victims" in any responsible policy consideration (Watts 2009, 267). Their agency should be found in a great counter-transformation toward "the rational cultivation of the soil as eternal communal property" (Marx in Bensaid 2002, 313-24). Meeting "two of the greatest challenges facing humanity" in our times—environmental stresses and persistent poverty—requires land preservation for farming communities and redistribution of large private holdings (Pogge 2011, 335).

Returning to the question of "why India trails China," has not a land revolution given China a decisive advantage? Will not losing that advantage bear more dire consequences? Must not a radical program of land reform be revived to advance Indian development? Amartya Sen's question, astute and important as it is, is not answerable until the fundamental issue of land can be brought to the fore. Insofar as horrendous social inequalities and exclusions are still in one way or another associated with landed power in India, "there remains a strong case for redistributivist land reform" (Harriss 2013, 354, 362; Courville and Patel 2006, 5-12). Wider comparative experiences also sustain the immensity and feasibility of the idea (Lipton 2009, 7, 10). However, a crucial clarification here, once again, is that for land reform to retain its normative values in the twenty-first century it must reject "the pursuit of individual solutions to the contradictions of social existence, through securing and setting in motion private property in means of production" (Bernstein 2009, 253). Marginal

petty farming in closed communities is no answer. While promoting equal land rights needs to become a real political priority, and hence a matter of determined political intervention in India, policy reorientation toward rural construction through peasant (re)organisation is pressing in both countries if they are ever to overcome capitalist encroachment and its developmentalist impasse.

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[1] Later Marx seemed to have become aware of the existence of private landownership in China, but "Asia" in the conceptual context of his "Asiatic mode of production" is not a geographical entity anyway.

[2] "Feudalism," borrowed from European and Japanese historiography, was a politically handy term in Chinese communist discourse for the way it described rural social structure and class relations. Whether elements of a typical feudal system had ever developed in China was irrelevant, at least insofar as the term served the purpose of revolutionary mobilisation without implying a destined transition to capitalism in any linear social theory of societal evolution.

[3] William Hinton sees the law as playing a role similar to that of the Emancipation Proclamation during the U.S. Civil War (1972, 7). If this is an adequate comparison in terms of historical significance, the enormous size of the population affected in China ultimately dwarfs the U.S. case.

[4] See, for example, "The typical experiences of party rectification in the land reform" issued by the party's Central Propaganda Department in April 1948, http://www.marxistsfr.org/chinese/reference-books/chineserevolution/mia-chineserevolution-194804.htm (Accessed June 30, 2015).

[5] Poor or landless peasants, who at the time made up 52.37 per cent of the rural population, had increased their share of farmland from between 14.28 per cent to 47.1 per cent, while middle-class peasants, themselves enlarged from 33.13 per cent to 39.9 per cent of the rural population, also gained more land share, from 30.94 per cent to 44.3 per cent (State Bureau of Statistics Yearbook 1980).

[6] Bo Yibo, new China's first Minister of Finance, reported that "since the wars of resistance against Japan and of liberation, for 12 years the peasants have made their uttermost contribution [to the war effort] in both human and money forms. This is what must be ultimately appreciated. In the budget of 1950, unfortunately government income from agriculture remains the biggest, taking up 41.4 per cent.… To win the war and achieve economic recovery, we are yet unable to reduce peasant burdens" (Bo 1949).

[7] Mao was crystal clear from the beginning that "China's red army is an armed group of executing the revolution's political tasks. … Apart from engaging in the military struggle to eliminate the enemy's military forces, it also shoulders such great tasks as agitating, organizing and arming the masses and help them to establish revolutionary regimes and even communist party branches" ("Resolution of the Ninth Congress of the Fourth Division of the Chinese Communist Red Army," Dec. 1929).

[8] In addition to the land tax as a major source of revenue, the Raj also set up a debt repayment process that included not only the interest and dividends on the construction and operation of colonial management in India, but also the expenditure for reconquering northern India after the 1857 Mutiny. In other words, "the British imperial state made those who had been conquered responsible for paying for being conquered" (Bagchi 2009, 102).

[9] The retreating British were also responsible for deindustrialisation and the drain of local treasure, rolling back the nineteenth-century gains made by India in terms of modern infrastructure and industry (Desai 2003).

[10] The system began to weaken before independence, but the 1950 Zamindari Abolition Act provided firm ownership rights only to "a class of superior tenants who formed the first land-operating layer under the *Zamindars* and *taluqdars*. And "these beneficiaries were strongly represented in the Congress Party, and this has much to do with the subsequent loss of all momentum" for further reforms (Saith 2008: 734).

[11] The landlords, for example, could register their own land under the names of relatives and others to bypass the ceiling, or shuffle tenants around different plots, who then would be unable to acquire incumbency rights, as stipulated in the tenancy law (Ghatak 2007).

[12] By the same logic, land reform was essentially a tool of "counter insurgency" from the point of view of both the United States (given its operations in postwar Japan, Korea, Pakistan, and other places in Asia) and the United Kingdom (given its operations in Malaysia) (Cullather 2010, 77-91).

[13] See Desai (2011, 350-1) for a case study in Punjab that shows how wealthy landowners reclaimed the land and helped bring the first non-Congress coalition to power in 1977.

[14] Nehru, a "liberal individualist with socialist ideas," personally preferred more radical socioeconomic changes, even an overhaul of the land ownership and tenure system along with imposed restrictions on big private capital. But his fellow Congressmen were mostly "social conservatives" influenced by Gandhi's vision of consensual reform to reduce poverty by harnessing a cross-class alliance "with the landowners and industrialists firmly in the saddle" (Desai 2011, 319).

[15] For a slightly different set of statistics from the National Sample Survey for 2003-4, see Harris (2013, 359). See also certain relevant regional data in Lerche (2013, 395-97).

[16] "Inequality in ownership of land was the highest in Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh," the states that had the highest levels of landlessness. "The Gini coefficient was higher than 0.8 in each of these states" (Rawal 2008, 47).

[17] In India's Human Development Report 2011, Kerala tops the index in literacy rates, quality health services, and consumption expenditure. For example, the education index for Kerala is 0.92 as compared to 0.41 for Bihar, while the health index is 0.82 in Kerala, while in Assam it is 0.41. http://www.pratirodh.com/pdf/human_development_report2011.pdf.

[18] In his 1927 report on the peasant movement in Hunan, Mao wrote: "The gods? Worship them by all means. But if you had only Lord Guan and the Goddess of Mercy and no peasant association, could you have overthrown the local tyrants and evil gentry? ... You have worshipped them for centuries, and they have not overthrown a single one of the local tyrants and evil gentry for you! Now you want to have your rent reduced. Let me ask how will you go about it? Will you believe in the gods or the peasant association?" (quoted in Cohen 1993, 151).

[19] As Theda Skocpol argues, revolutions have generally "given birth to nations whose power and autonomy markedly surpassed their own pre-revolutionary pasts and outstripped other countries in similar circumstances" (1979, 3). This observation is shared among scholars of different political persuasions, including smart cold warriors like Samuel Huntington (1968, 266).

[20] "Land reform is a many splendored thing. The term has been used to include not only redistributive reforms of ownership rights but also the establishment of collective or communal forms of farming, state sponsored land colonisation schemes in frontier areas, and land tenure reforms…." (Griffin, et al. 2002, 279).

[21] Exceptions to this include Tibet and a few other minority regions, which were initially exempt from the program due to the political need of neutralising the ethnically identified landed upper classes, which were resistant to the communist takeover. As such, China's land reform, infused with cooperation and collectivisation, was not implemented throughout the territory until the late 1950s.

[22] The five items specified were food, clothing, fuel, medical care, and burial/education (depending on individual circumstances). Special care was also provided to the families of revolutionary martyrs and serving military personnel.

[23] Mao wrote as early as 1944 that "scattered individual economy—family agriculture and handicraft—is the foundation of feudal society. This is where Marxism differs from populism. Simply put, the foundation of our new democratic society must be the machinery and not handicraft. We have not yet attained the machines, so we have not achieved victory. If we cannot ever attain the machines, we shall never achieve victory; we would be wiped out…. From an agricultural foundation to an industrial one is precisely what our revolutionary task is" (1983, 237-39).

[24] Tao Lujia, the provincial party secretary of Shanxi, recalls that "we were poor and blank. Not to retreat or surrender, we had to rely on ourselves and our people's power. Only by moving ahead of schedule with agrarian cooperation and socialism, could we have integrated our national capacity and advanced against all odds" (Ma 2012, 206, 223).

[25] On the eve of communalisation in 1957, a web of nearly 14,000 agricultural technical stations had already been created across China as a result of cooperation, complemented by 1,400 seed stations, and 1,900 breeding and demonstration stations (Bramall 2009, 221).

[26] Since the 1950s, for example, 130 large agricultural projects in India have received a total of $10.2 billion in World Bank financing. India and Pakistan both benefited substantially from financial and technological aid from the West; "in the absence of such U.S. assistance, it is very unlikely that their wheat revolution would have been anything like as successful" (Bramall 2009, 222).

[27] As late as 2011, given a far more rapid population growth in India than in China, which had followed a "one-child policy" in the preceding three decades, arable land per capita was 0.08 hectare in China and 0.13 in India, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.ARBL.HA.PC. (accessed June 30, 2015).

[28] China's per capita output exceeded India's by 142 per cent for of grain products, 135 per cent for cotton, 375 per cent for cooking oil, 938 per cent for meat, 464 per cent for eggs, and 119 per cent for aquiculture (Yang 2009, 33)

[29] Hindu social organisation split the population into thousands of *jatis* (castes and sub-castes) in a universe of symbolism. "No other system of inequality…has ever been so extreme, and so hard-wired with religious force into human expectation" (Anderson 2012).

[30] Amartya Sen interview (Derbyshire 2013).

[31] Kashmir, a "valley of tears," is widely seen as a blot on Indian democracy. Moreover, in a caste society, the state also cannot be truly secular. The BJP, for example, upholds secularism on the grounds that "India is secular because it is Hindu" (Anderson 2012).

[32] For example, Bramall holds that "land reform was as unsuccessful across East Asia as it was in China" concerning both growth and equity (2004, 108, 130). Leaving aside other cases in East Asia, his verdict here undermines his own defence of collective farming in China by overlooking the necessary historical continuities between these two events or phases in Chinese agrarian development.

[33] See also Shiva (2002) and Massing (2003).

[34] Whether or not the 1943 Bengal famine, of which between three and seven million people died out of a population of sixty million, is a relevant case does not affect this critique. The fact that wartime Britain, a democracy, did nothing to either prevent it or provide relief speaks for itself.

[35] This process involved state appropriation, with differentiated compensations on a case-by-case basis for designated collective land first, and then the use right to land sold and bought through government auction

in a secondary land market. See Hsing 2010.

[36] Almost ten per cent of China's farmland is contaminated with heavy metals. The total use of fertilisers increased from 8.84 million tons in 1978 to 58.38 million tons in 2012 (with more than a third of global synthetic nitrogen output), which is 2.5 to three times the global average of unit consumption. A third of the Yellow River, for example, is considered too polluted for irrigation (Philpott 2013).

[37] According to Zhang Hongyu, the Bureau Chief of the Department of Rural Economic System and Management at the Ministry of Agriculture, China's self-sufficiency rate for grain has dropped to eighty-seven per cent, while self-sufficiency for all agrarian products is now just seventy per cent (Third International Forum of Agrarian Trade, May 2014).

[38] "A great number of those affected are cash crop farmers, and cotton farmers in particular. In 2009 alone…17,638 farmers committed suicide—that's one farmer every 30 minutes" (NYU School of Law 2011: 1).

[39] This £13bn ($20bn) plan is "a key part of the ruling Congress party's strategy to win re-election next spring" (Burke 2013). For a critical response, see Shiva (2013). See also Wittman, et al. (2010, 178, 182).

[40] This assault on nature and people takes such forms as "forceful expulsion of peasant populations (as in Mexico and India in recent times); conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights; suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neo- colonial and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); monetisation of exchange and taxation, particularly of land" (Harvey 2006, 43-4).

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