

**‘Revolutions worked against rather than worked for China’s modernization.’ Do you agree? Explain your answer with reference to Chinese history in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.**

‘Revolution’ is a bottom-up approach to replace the old with the new and change the status quo. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, revolution attempts in China included the *1911 Revolution* 辛亥革命, the *May Fourth Movement* 五四運動, the *New Culture Movement* 新文化運動 and the *communist revolution* 共產主義革命. They worked for China’s political, social and educational modernization but brought about adverse impact in economic and diplomatic aspects. Therefore, the statement is valid to a certain extent only.

In political aspect, revolutions worked for China’s political modernization. Revolution is an attempt to overthrow the existing regime and system in a bottom-up manner for a government that allows public participation in the running of the country. Although Chinese revolutions in the period concerned did not completely revolutionize the country’s politics, they contributed considerably to its political modernization. In terms of system, the 1911 Revolution put an end to the 2000 years of monarchical rule and marked the establishment of the *Republic of China* 中華民國. *Yuan Shikai* 袁世凱 and *Zhang Xun* 張勳 tried to restore monarchy in 1915 and 1917 respectively but both attempts ended up failing under the tide of history. In terms of government, the communist revolution with Mao Zedong as the leader was a campaign against the one-party dictatorship of the Kuomintang in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The communists managed to defeat the nationalists in the *Chinese Civil War* 國共內戰 and established the People’s Republic of China in 1949. They achieved their ideal by setting up a coalition government with representatives from different political parties. In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party held the first *Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference* 中國人民政治協商會議 to allow political participation of democrats from outside the CCP, contributing to China’s political modernization. Therefore, revolution was a sufficiently effective way to modernize China politically.

In social aspect, revolutions worked for China's social modernization by not only erasing racial inequality but also raising Chinese people's civil awareness. In terms of racial equality, after the successful 1911 Revolution, Sun Yat-sen changed his principle of 'nationalism' into '*five-group harmony* 五族共和' with a view to gathering the wisdom and power of all races. This was to achieve harmony among the Han, the Manchus, the Mongols, the Hui and the Tibetans for racial equality and unity. In addition, after the 1911 Revolution, slogans like '*racial harmony* 民族融和' spread extensively in the country, and Sun advocated to put the five races under the same category of '*the Chinese Ethnicities* 中華民族' to replace the single-race nationalism. This promoted racial equality and social modernization in China. In terms of civil awareness, the May Fourth Movement of 1919 was a significant event that marked the rise of civil awareness in China. In response to the unfair outcome of the *Paris Peace Conference* 巴黎和會 of 1919 in which the concessions in Shandong were transferred from Germany to Japan, there were large-scale protests nationwide against the conference and warlords. The movement itself became the model for civil rights movements in China and had profound significance in raising civil awareness among the Chinese. Therefore, revolutions were of utmost importance to China's social modernization.

In educational aspect, revolutions worked for China's educational modernization. Revolutions caused instability that was favorable for the liberalization of ideas, and revolutions themselves were useful in replacing the old with the new as exemplified by the change in the form of written Chinese. In terms of liberalizing ideas, the 1911 Revolution did not lead to the establishment of a stable regime, and China during the early republic period was under political instability as illustrated by Sun's campaigns against Yuan and the chaotic Warlord Era. As the ruling regimes were too busy to control people's thoughts, it was an excellent opportunity for different ideas and ideologies such as *Hegelianism* 黑格爾思想 and *socialism* 社會主義 to enter China. During this period, foreign ideas blossomed in China and this promoted the liberalization of ideas. In terms of the form of written Chinese, intellectuals like *Chen Duxiu* 陳獨秀 and *Hu Shih* 胡適 started the magazine *New Youth* 新青年 in 1915 that initiated the New Culture Movement. The Movement was to encourage people to write *vernacular Chinese* 白話文 instead of classical Chinese under the idea of '*my hand writes my mouth* 我手寫我口'. It was effective in revolutionizing the form of written Chinese and making vernacular Chinese the dominant written standard, being very important to China's educational modernization. Therefore, revolutions did help modernize China in educational aspect.

Despite the effectiveness of revolutions in modernizing China in political, social and educational aspect, they worked against China's modernization in economic and diplomatic aspects.

In economic aspect, revolutions worked against China's economic modernization. Revolutions brought about instability that created a business environment unfavourable for economic development and people's livelihood. In terms of economic environment, revolutions led to not a stable regime but *Yuan's autocratic rule* 袁世凱專政. The situation in China became extremely unstable and the region was ravaged by wars, as exemplified by the *Second Revolution* 二次革命(1913) started by Sun against Yuan, the *National Protection War* 護國戰爭(1915) against Yuan's monarchical attempt, and the *chaotic Warlord Era* 軍閥混戰(1916-28) after Yuan's death. These were all detrimental to the country's economic development. After that, the communist revolution also gave rise to the *two civil wars* 兩次國共內戰 between the KMT and the CCP (1927-37 & 1946-49), in which the nationalists made all-out efforts to eradicate the Communist Party in China. The armed conflicts interrupted production and dampened business activities in China. In terms of people's livelihood, warlordism after the 1911 Revolution greatly affected people's life. The warlord governments imposed conscription on all men and heavy taxes on all citizens for the sake of military build-up, making people's life even worse. Therefore, revolutions were counterproductive to China's economic modernization.

In diplomatic aspect, revolutions also worked against China's diplomatic modernization. Revolutions ended in chaos, which was taken advantage of by other countries to harm China's national interests and meddle in its politics. It was true that the May Fourth Movement was a nationalist revolution that prompted the powers to force Japan into returning its concessions in Shandong to China at the *Washington Conference* 華盛頓會議(1921-22). Nevertheless, the revolution gave results that were unfavorable to China's diplomatic modernization. In terms of national interests, the 1911 Revolution led to the takeover of the Qing regime but it also threw the country into complete chaos. China's vulnerability provided an excellent opportunity for other countries to seize. For example, Russia occupied *Outer Mongolia* 外蒙古 after the 1911 Revolution and China suffered territorial losses. In terms of political intervention, the 1911 Revolution left China divided. Under pressure from Japan, Yuan signed the *Twenty-One Demands* 廿一條款(1915) to gain its support. China thus became a protectorate of Japan and had even lower international status. Afterwards, the communist revolution inevitably led to the civil wars between the nationalists and the communists, and China was even more prone to foreign encroachment. For example, there were the *September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident* 九一八事變(1931) and *January 28<sup>th</sup> Incident* 一二八事變(1932) waged by Japan to invade Northeast China and Shanghai. They were followed by the *July 7<sup>th</sup> Incident* 七七事變 in 1937 that marked Japan's all-out invasion and put China at the risk of being conquered. Therefore, revolutions were counterproductive to China's diplomatic modernization.

In conclusion, revolutions in the period concerned gave positive impact on China's political, social and educational modernization, but they also undermined its economic and diplomatic modernization. Revolutions had both merits and demerits for China's modernization, which had slow progress and failed to transform China into a modernized country by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, I agree with the statement to a certain extent only.

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