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Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review

Title

Wang Qisheng, Revolution and Counter-Revolution: Republican Politics in Social-Cultural Scope [革命与反革命：社会文化视野下的民国政治]. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2010.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7fg2j57m>

Journal

Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review, 1(2)

Author

Ye, Bin Ye

Publication Date

2012-03-01

Peer reviewed

# CROSS-CURRENTS



## EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

Wang Qisheng, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution: Republican Politics in Social-Cultural Scope* [革命与反革命：社会文化视野下的民国政治]. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2010.

Bin Ye, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences

Wang Qisheng's recent book, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution: Republican Politics in Social-Cultural Scope*, challenges the official narrative of Chinese modern history in several ways. It disenchants revolutionary myths, such as the extraordinary influence of the magazine *New Youth*, the sacred meaning of the term "revolution," the purity of the communist organizations, and the spiritual motivation of the members of the Communist Party. It treats the Guomindang as a constructive force devoted to state building rather than as a reactionary regime concentrated on oppressing the revolutionary Communist Party. By probing political history at the central level and the grassroots level, in rural areas and urban areas, on campuses and within the army, the book broadens the scope of the study of modern Chinese political history. All thirteen chapters in the book are independent essays with loose connections.

Chapter One discusses how "New Culture" became a movement. The publication of the opening issue of *New Youth* magazine in 1915 is widely accepted as the beginning of the New Culture Movement, with "democracy" and "science" as the banners of the movement. Challenging this classical understanding of the New Culture Movement, Wang Qisheng argues that *New Youth* started as an ordinary magazine. Its status was first promoted when a group of professors from Beijing University joined the editorial team; it was further enhanced by various tactics used by the editors. Wang argues that the New Culture Movement was initiated not by the magazine, but by the May Fourth student protests, with the magazine

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becoming popular only after those events. The movement was therefore focused on “literary revolution” and “anti-Confucianism,” rather than on “democracy” and “science” as is commonly believed.

In the second chapter, Wang explores a change of discourse from “individual liberation” to “social reform” during the May Fourth period, marked by the decline of individualism and statism and the rise of socialism. To reform society through social movement, the socialist intellectuals established Leninist parties to awaken and organize the masses.

Chapters Three and Four discuss the relation between revolution and counter-revolution, a topic that sets the tone for the whole work. Wang challenges a long-standing historiography that treats the political history of the 1920s as a struggle between two political parties, the Guomindang and the Communist Party. Adding the China Youth Party to the scene, Wang argues, instead, for a history of interaction among three parties competing to establish the legitimacy of their respective revolutionary causes. All the parties believed that revolution was the only way to rescue China, though each had its own definition of revolution. The Guomindang called for a “nationalist revolution,” the Communist Party for a “class revolution,” and the China Youth Party for an “all people’s revolution.” According to these revolutionary ideologies, revolution itself became a supreme value representing the good and just, while counter-revolution was depicted as a crime representing the evil and unjust. The three parties condemned their revolutionary rivals as counter-revolutionaries, and counter-revolutionary activities were formally criminalized by the Guomindang and the Communist Party. China’s first law of counter-revolutionary crime was made by the Nationalist Government in Wuhan in 1927. Wang Qisheng reveals that the law had two direct objectives: to punish generals Chen Jiamo and Liu Yuchun of the northern army who had resisted the North Expedition troops for more than forty days in the battle of Wuchang, and to warn General Chiang Kai-shek, who had shown defiant attitude towards the Wuhan government after occupying Nanchang. The Wuhan Crime of Counter-revolution Ordinance failed to achieve these goals, but the name of the law remained in China until 1997.

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In Chapters Five and Six, Wang Qisheng studies the history of the Communist Party at the grassroots level in the late 1920s, focusing on the areas of Shanghai and Guangdong. Challenging the official “party history,” which stresses the triumphant development of the party’s great enterprise, Wang addresses the inner tensions inside the low-level party organizations, tensions between strict party disciplines and expedient local practices, between the party’s stated mission and its members’ personal pursuits, between the party’s emphasis on revolutionary spirits and its heavy dependence on financial support, between intellectual members and working class members, and between party members and their younger comrades in the Chinese Communist Youth League, which was supposed to be the party’s reserve force. In these two chapters, Wang convincingly displays that the disciplinary approach of social history can shed new light on the study of political history.

In an effort to describe the Guomindang as a ruling party trying to consolidate its power, rather than an oppressive and corruptive force to be overturned, the author probes the institutional construction of the Guomindang from Chapter Seven to Chapter Ten. Chapter Seven uses the establishment and evolution of the Guomindang’s Central Political Committee to illustrate how the party’s inner political struggle impeded its institutional construction. Following Mikhail Borodin’s suggestion and taking the Political Bureau of the Russian Communist Party’s Central Committee as model, Sun Yat-sen created the political committee in July 1924 to serve as the party’s highest decision-making institute. After Sun’s death, Hu Hanmin, Wang Jingwei, and Chiang Kai-shek competed for the Guomindang’s leadership and defined the political committee’s status according to their own interests. Using the Zhu Jiahua Papers stored in the Modern History Institute at the Academia Sinica in Taipei as a primary source, Chapter Eight explores the Guomindang’s organizational activities in the Lianda (“Southwestern Associated University”), China’s leading university during the period of Sino-Japanese War. Serving as Minister of Organization of Guomindang’s Central Committee during much of that period, Zhu Jiahua used personal influence and financial support to expand the party’s political influence among professors and students. However, the Guomindang’s success in the Lianda could not be copied by other universities that did not have the same kind of financial support from the Central Committee.

The last three chapters of *Revolution and Counter-Revolution* focus on the political structure in rural areas during the republican period, especially the period under Guomindang rule. Chapter Eleven argues that the quality of rural gentry deteriorated during the republican period, as the scholarly gentry moved to urban areas and people with military background became the “new rural gentry” who dominated the countryside by military and economic strength. Chapter Twelve is a well documented study of county magistrates of the Guomindang regime, usually graduates of various new schools. These magistrates had to survive between a higher-level bureaucracy with ambitious modernizing plans and a deteriorating rural society dominated by the “new rural gentry.” Chapter Thirteen studies the political institutions below the county level, including the district, the town, the *bao*, and the *jia*. These institutions were supposed to be self-governing organizations, but they finally became part of the state apparatus used to recruit soldiers and collect taxes and private tools for local officials to use to serve their own interests.

Wang’s book is a well researched empirical reconstruction of the political history of the republican period. The chapters appear to have been initially written as stand-alone essays. The coherence of the volume derives from the concerted critique that the author mounts in each and every chapter against an established line of the history of the Chinese revolution. This volume stands as a fine example of a recent trend in Chinese studies of Republican history that seeks to examine the Nationalist era from the perspectives of internal issues such as partisan politics and managerial rationality.

*Bin Ye is associate researcher at the Institute of History, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.*

**王奇生 Wang Qisheng**, a former researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, is Professor of History at Beijing University. In addition to the book summarized above, he is author of 中国留学生的历史轨迹 [The Historical Trajectory of Chinese Overseas Students (1872-1949)] (*Hubei Educational Press, 1992*); 留学与救国：抗战时期海外学人群像 [Studying abroad and Saving the Nation: Overseas Scholars during the Anti-Japanese War] (*Guangxi Normal University Press, 1995*); 党员，党权与党

争 : 1924 - 1949 年中国国民党的组织形态 [Party Members, Party Power, and Party Struggle:

Organizational Forms of the Guomindang (1924-1949)] (Shanghai Bookstore Press, 2003); and 国共合

作与国民革命 [National Revolution and the Collaboration between the Guomindang and the Chinese

Communist Party] (*Jiangsu People's Press, 2006*).