

Understanding Revolution

In the end of 2003, amid the war threat from the Bush administration to invade Iraq, I observed, "As any other Islamic people, the Iranians understand Iraq's resentment without almost any access to the Persian Gulf under the British-drawn borders in the Middle East. They also know that without the U.S. support to contain the Iranian Revolution, Saddam Hussein probably could not engage a war with Iran. What is Iranians' attitude of the potential U.S. invasion at Iraq? 'It will put Muslim-Christian relations back one thousand years'."¹

However, it is very difficult to educate the American public to understand the cause of the Iranian Revolution. How many Americans know who in 1952 conspired to overthrow Iran's democratic government of Mosaddeq? (Answer: the CIA) True, America is a free country, so we can find various sources about the Iranian Revolution and the general life of Iran. For example, Baqer Moin's *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*² is quite informative. Early in 1964, on the birthday of Prophet's daughter Fatemeh (which fell on October 27 that year), Khomeini pronounced in his customary sermon to a crowded supporters and seminarians at his home: "...all American military advisers, together with their families, technical and administrative officials, and servants – in short, anyone in any way connected to them – are to enjoy legal immunity with respect to any crime they may commit in Iran....Why? Because they [the government] wanted a loan and America demanded this in return. The government has sold our independence, reduced us to the level of a colony, and made the Muslim nation of Iran appear more backward than savages in the eyes of the world!...If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit this nation to be the slaves of Britain one day, and America the next. If the religious leaders have influence, they will not permit Israel to take over the Iranian economy." (pp.122-123)

The problem is that the American public does not read this kind of information, even after the Iranian Revolution, which was caused largely by America's imperialist policy. Thus I was immediately attracted by a graphic novel **Persepolis**. "Originally published to wide critical acclaim in France, ...**Persepolis** is Marjane Satrapi's wise, funny, and heartbreaking memoir of growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. In powerful black-and-white comic strip images, Satrapi tells the story of her life in Tehran from ages six to fourteen, years that saw the overthrow of the Shah's regime, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, and the devastating effects of war with Iraq. The intelligent and outspoken only child of committed Marxists and the

¹ "A Time for Peace," Comparative Policy Review. October 2002. <http://cpri.tripod.com/cpr2002/iran.pdf>.

² Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Press: New York, June 2000.

great-granddaughter of one of Iran's last emperors, Marjane bears witness to a childhood uniquely entwined with the history of her country.



Persepolis paints an unforgettable portrait of daily life in Iran: of the bewildering contradictions between home life and public life and of the enormous toll repressive regimes exact on the individual spirit. Marjane's child's-eye-view of dethroned emperors, state-sanctioned whippings, and heroes of the revolution allows us to learn as she does the history of this fascinating country and of her own extraordinary family. Intensely personal, profoundly political, and wholly original, **Persepolis** is at once a story of growing up and a stunning reminder of the human cost of war and political repression. It shows how we carry on, through laughter and tears, in the face of absurdity. And, finally, it introduces us to an irresistible little girl with whom we cannot help but fall in love.”³



Somehow I like more its predecessor, **Persepolis 2**, the depiction of the struggles of growing up in Europe and Iran. The influence from the highly radicalized Paris youth (“Long Live Bakunin!”) and the painting study in Iran (where the body of Venus was blocked in the class) are the unique background for her books. When I read the books and watch the film of Persepolis, I cannot help thinking why we could not make similar work of our heroic Chinese democratic movement. Yes, the Beijing Art College erected the Goddess of Democracy in Tiananmen Square right against Chairman Mao’s portrait, but their imagination was limited to their narrow mind. After twenty years, we finally have a drama *Letters to a Student Revolutionary*⁴ to express the feeling of the Tiananmen rebelling. However, the drama can only be played in Los Angeles by the actors. When they asked me to arrange the play in San Francisco to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre, I have to decline since we don’t have enough resource to mobilize.

China is under revolution again, with much wider range and deeper crisis. I just read an article by Lin Yanzhi, a Chinese Communist Party boss in Jilin Province. He described how he goes work daily: through a secret tunnel to the party HQs, because the front doors are always blocked by victim petitioners. If he is recognized by these petitioners as the party boss, he would not escape from the site. He blames the corrupted middle-level officials who caused so huge victim population in China, while every Chinese knows that the root is from top. Lin

³ <http://www.randomhouse.com/pantheon/graphicnovels/satrapi.html>

⁴ http://www.dramaticpublishing.com/p825/Letters-to-a-Student-Revolutionary/product_info.html

certainly knows this far better than others since he himself was expelled from Beijing (as Beijing University's Communist Party boss) for his Maoist tendency by the capitalist-runner Premier Zhu Rongji. Lin is the only elected student association president at Tsinghua's history when in 1980 China had elections in university campuses. At the same Engineering Physics department, I was excited to work for his election, and he was confident to become China's future Premier by a more democratic system. If he still has some ambition, he should abandon the current dictatorship of the Chinese Communist Party and declare the new socialist party. However, he cannot avoid the fate of being washed away by the coming revolution. How couldn't he understand revolution as a son of revolution? How could he understand revolution belonging to the ruling class?

This morning, I visited Amma, the Indian saint again. "For the past 35 years Amma has dedicated her life to the uplifting of suffering humanity through the simplest of gestures – an embrace. In this intimate manner Amma had blessed and consoled more than 25 million people throughout the world."⁵ While sitting closely watching Amma embracing people, her rule of war came to my ears: "When our ancestors fought, they fought bare hands against bare hands, arrows against arrows, elephants against elephants." The British did not follow her rule: with the modern MDW (mass destruction of weapons) they easily colonized India. Now even India equipped itself with aircraft carriers⁶ and nuclear weapons. The total nuclear weapons are estimated 12,000-19,000⁷ but we have only one Amma!

As long as the human being does not reach a common sense of social order to organize our life, there is always revolution to change the status quo.

Jing Zhao

San Ramon, June 9, 2009

⁵ <http://www.amma.org>

⁶ It was reported that China's plan to develop its own aircraft carriers is stimulated by India.

⁷ <http://www.cdi.org/nuclear/database/nukestab.html>