Reading Summary: “France, Russia, China: A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions” by Theda Skocpol

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Three Sentence Summary: Historians and political scientists have generally viewed revolutions as violent, extreme, and otherwise unnecessary political behaviors and reforms; however, social revolutions are more important and consequential than that. By using the comparative method to study France, Russia, and China, social revolutions are shown to be caused by disorganization of a state and its military, an organized agrarian peasant class, and the mobilization of a marginalized elite class. The effects of modernization led to these causes, and the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions all led to a transfer of political power from the upper class to the state and the rest of society.

Three questions you have about the article:

1. Does this article disagree with Herbst by claiming that outright military competition does not lead to the development of a state, but instead needs to be a combination of military competition and a transfer of power from the upper class to the state?
2. If the revolutions in Russia and China were led by university-educated citizens, then does education have a direct impact on both modernization and state development?
3. Have there been any social revolutions that did not start from the peasant class, yet still resulted in a transfer of power from the upper class to the rest of the people?

On a scale of 1 to 10 (one being totally easy/readable – 10 being completely incomprehensible), how difficult to read and understand did you find this article?

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