

THE IDEOLOGY OF INTELLECTUALS AND THE CHINESE STUDENT PROTEST MOVEMENT OF 1989

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Protest and struggle for democracy in China has become an object of international appropriation. The 1989 movement is claimed by Wu'erkaixi and Yan Jiaqi, by Chinese students who were studying abroad when it happened, by overseas Chinese businessmen, by the Guomindang, by the American political establishment, and by a variety of scholars. It is interpreted for one purpose in Hong Kong, where a strident mix of fear and ambivalent insistence on Chinese identity are central. It is interpreted in much of the West as an object lesson on the evils of totalitarian government and more specifically, if insidiously, the virtues simply of being Western. Each scholar or journalist who writes on the movement participates in this struggle to appropriate it. This is not altogether avoidable, but it is crucial to recognize it.

It is crucial also to realize that the movement of Spring 1989 was not monological, did not speak with one voice, did not express one set of interests and did not point in one direction. It represented a confluence of forces as well as persons, and the complexity of that representation is the reason that it can and must still be struggled over. Seeing the easy collapsing of the movement into settled categories is disconcerting for one who observed it first hand and joined in discussions with its protagonists as they struggled to create and define it. The Western media and the Chinese diaspora alike have objectified the movement – or created a simulacrum of it – in international discourse. And if this reminds one of Baudrillard's account of the hyperreal world of modern media it should also caution one against joining in Baudrillard's happy acceptance of the dominance of Disneyland over consciousness. For the difficulty of understanding, and the absence of any single, monological "Truth" need not blind us to the reality and pernicious effects of lying, distortion and oversimplification. And they should not lead us to forget that this movement really happened, amid concrete struggle, joy and bloodshed; it was not a made-for-TV movie.

This preamble signals, I hope, a theme of introducing some complexity and contestation into accounts of the protest movement that render it too easily the result of teleological necessity (as indeed many of its participants claimed at the time), or of some single set of structural circumstances, or of the interests of any particular group or groups. In particular, I want to argue that the protest movement must be seen as internally heterogenous and as the product of active creation and transformation. In this paper I cannot develop a narrative or an analysis of the whole movement.¹ I want to concentrate instead on the different ideological currents among intellectuals which formed a backdrop to and shaped the student

movement. The student protesters were very emphatically shaped by their identity as intellectuals, though their identities were also transformed during the course of the movement. The students were also a different generation from the more established intellectuals whose discourse provided a context for the movement, and they were moved by at least partially different ideas.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to place the 1989 student movement in the context of Chinese intellectuals' struggle for better conditions for themselves and a better future for China. The movement transcended the bounds of this context, to be sure, both by involving other actors and by transforming the identities and identifications of its participants. Nonetheless, the movement was centrally shaped by the constitution and developmental trajectory of the Chinese intellectual field. It was a moment in a long story, stretching back to the self-strengthening movement of the late 19th Century, through Tan Sitong, Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, the 1911 revolution, May 4th 1919, Lu Xun, the participation of intellectuals in the 1949 revolution and forward, with great difficulty, through the four decades of communist rule. Throughout this history, intellectuals have grappled with the challenge of China's relationship to the West and the reconstitution of their role in Chinese society. They have not, of course, been a single, cohesive group, but rather actors in a multifarious and shifting field of relations. Neither have their concerns been easy to pin down. Nonetheless, several themes recur: science, democracy, modernization, cultural crisis, social responsibility. These are not just voluntary concerns. They are imposed, in large part, by China's situation in an international context. The ubiquitous vocabulary of modernization, with all its problems, and intellectuals' seeming obsession with the virtues and failings of Chinese culture, are both products of the basic challenge Western invasion posed for Qing China and international weakness continues to pose for Chinese thinkers and political regimes.

At the same time, protesting students did not simply follow the lead or advice of older intellectuals. They learned much during discussions with those intellectuals during the months and years before the movement took off on April 15. They continued to pay attention to what senior intellectuals said, and were much heartened by support from more established figures. But the younger generation had its own orientation.

In the present paper, I want to suggest something of how the specific concerns of Chinese intellectuals shaped the ideology of the student protest movement. In particular, I will sketch out some of the lines of differentiation in the Chinese intellectual field of the late 1980s, relating different positions in that field to different stances on the question of what protest and/or reform ought to achieve. I will suggest that the basic lines of tension and differentiation are quite long-standing, though various specifics and especially bases of institutional support have changed in the last hundred years. In this sense, I will argue that the concerns of the intellectuals have somewhat less to do with communism – pro or con – than is often thought. The questions of political and economic reform in the 1980s have a great deal in common with the 1920s and before. In both eras, moreover, the most basic question may have been how to deal with a pervasive sense of China's cultural crisis. This concern encouraged many protesters in 1989 to move beyond the narrower, more class-interested programs outlined by Fang Lizhi or reformers

close to Zhao Ziyang, and contributed to the movement's fundamental emotional strength. Space will prevent me from treating the earlier period more than allusively, and indeed will make my account of the recent period more of a sketch based on key personalities than is ideal.

Behind this agenda is the conviction that we must grasp questions such as what the student protesters meant by 'democracy' not simply in the terms of precision or correctness often imposed on them by the Western media. We must even go beyond simply laying out the various contents given to the concept by students in interviews or surveys: civil liberties of various sorts, say, elections, or an end to corruption.³ We need (a) to place what students wanted in the context of an ongoing struggle and see the social relations in which these desires and understandings are embedded, and (b) to replace the collective summaries "the students" and "the intellectuals" with attention to the lines of differentiation and unity of vision. Quite different understandings of democracy, perceptions of the current state of Chinese society, and self-identifications as intellectuals intertwined with each other in Tiananmen Square, on university campuses and on the streets of Beijing last spring. Different visions were the bases of arguments, but also co-existed within individual minds. The retrospective writing of the movement's history tends to flatten these, even when that history is written by protagonists and not enemies. Friends should try to preserve something of this diversity.

Intellectual Class Formation

When Chinese student protesters said in the spring of 1989 that they were acting as "the conscience of the nation," and that this was not just a simple choice but a responsibility they had to live up to, they were speaking in line with a long tradition. Earlier intellectuals had remonstrated with emperors at great personal risk. During the declining years of the Qing dynasty, both students and older intellectuals had been in the forefront of the struggle for reform. They helped to lay part of the foundation for communism in China, by re-evaluating traditional culture, encouraging critical thought, and importing or developing a range of challenging ideas. Many intellectuals played key roles in the revolutionary struggle itself, or returned from safe positions abroad to help build a new China. Under communist rule, they did not fare very well. Yet, paradoxically, the vilification of intellectuals at various points under communist rule – especially during the cultural revolution – reinforced the salience of the category, even while it added a complexity to normative evaluations of its members.⁴ And the events of the last thirteen years, since the end of Maoist rule, only enhanced this sense of a crucial role for intellectuals.

Yet it is not obvious or clear just what "intellectual" means. The category is an ideological construction, a claim about the unity among a variety of people, not simply a reflection of it. The Chinese term, *zhishifenzi*, is usually taken simply to mean all educated people, though that is still a fuzzy definition. During the "anti-rightist" campaigns and the Cultural Revolution, avoiding the label "intellectual" often made political sense. As the idea of expertise took on prestige once again in the 1980s, some provincial cadres began to claim startling numbers of intellectuals in their units because they counted everyone with primary, or perhaps

secondary educations. An official definition includes all those people at the middle level of expertise, equivalent to “assistant engineer” or above. A standard rule of thumb includes all university graduates, and “others of comparable levels.” Intellectuals include writers, professors, scientists and others who make their living by the production or dissemination of “knowledge” or “culture”. But they also include doctors, lawyers, town planners, sanitation engineers and other people with higher education. Especially at the more elite end, this notion of “intellectuals” reflects a process of class formation through which intellectuals have come to share a variety of ideas and interests, and a common sense of themselves and their role in China. The very project of intellectual class formation involves emphasizing the commonality among intellectuals and the importance of the social role they are called on to play.

The traditional understanding of “intellectuals” as Confucian servants of the Emperor and/or local gentry elites began to change during China’s confrontation with the West and the decline of the Qing dynasty. More and more intellectuals began to speak out for reform. Intellectuals figured as interpreters of what the growing influence (and greater strength) of foreigners means. At first these writings remained within the traditional genre of advice to and remonstrations with the emperor. Increasingly, though, especially in the early twentieth century, they escaped those bounds, both in terms of content, which became more difficult to reconcile with the current nature of imperial rule, and especially in form and audience. China was gaining an independent reading public. Scholars could write for someone besides their immediate circle of students, more senior bureaucrats and the emperor.

This is a story I cannot trace in detail here. The point to it is that Chinese intellectuals were not simply opening up a public sphere, but at the same time and through the same actions beginning a process of class formation. This meant, first of all, establishing a web of lateral linkages and lines of communication amongst themselves. This grew eventually into the numerous journals, and literary and political societies of cities like Shanghai in the 1920s. It also, though more loosely, linked most of the urban part of China. Not only were the treaty-ports settings for exposure of Chinese intellectuals to Westerners and Western thought, they provided some level of protection from imperial suppression for publishers, the organizers of dissident schools, etc. (see, e.g., Rankin, 1971; Chang, 1987).

The proliferation of publications not only knit the category of intellectuals into a more meaningful, internally related group. Economically it paved the way for intellectuals to earn their livelihoods by their writing, rather than remaining dependent on landed wealth or a place in the bureaucracy (though Chinese intellectuals were for the most part not able to rival the ability of their colleagues and role models of the European Enlightenment to earn their living by writing). In the early twentieth century, autonomy became a crucial part of intellectual ideology in China, though it was not always achieved.⁵ This process of growing cohesion, autonomy, and sense of purpose laid the foundation for the May 4th student protest movement (touched off by China’s poor treatment at Versailles, where its allies allowed Japan to retain its Chinese territory). This movement became the symbol of nationalist, progressive protest, specifically on the part of students, unified as a generation, inspired by teachers, but willing to be more radical.

Ideologically, the slogan of the May 4th movement – democracy and science – sums up both the importance of the European Enlightenment model for modern Chinese intellectuals and their sense (like that of their European forebears) that they had a crucial role to play in enlightening and improving their country. Though the influence of the European Enlightenment model was pervasive, one should not think that Chinese intellectuals drew content only from those thinkers who were narrowly a part of the 18th century Enlightenment. On the contrary, many figures were influential, including those contemporaries with whom Chinese who studied or traveled abroad came into contact, especially in the early twentieth century. Certain European Romantics, and literary social critics like Ibsen, were among the most widely read (Spence, 1981). The Enlightenment did provide the general model through which the social role of literature and “modern” thought was conceptualized (Schwarcz, 1986). But even what was drawn from the Enlightenment was a variegated range of ideas, including Rousseau, the physiocrats, Bentham, Kant and a variety of others. Chinese intellectuals read heavily also in the anarchist tradition, Marxism, Darwinian evolution, existentialism, the plays of George Bernard Shaw and the poems of Yeats and Rilke. In short, to speak of “Western” influences is to collapse an enormous range of cultural works with very different implications and appropriations in the Chinese setting.⁶ Western influence came no more as a monological, monolithic whole than it met a monological, monolithic intelligentsia in China. China in 1919 had its radical Enlightenment Westernizers, of course, but it also had more ambivalent, ironic internal critics like Lu Xun and Romantic individualists like Xu Zhimo (presaging in many ways Bei Dao and some of the “misty” poets of the 1980s). Western thought was internally contested, in short, a fact poorly represented in many accounts of its impact on China. Its unity under the label “Western” should not be hypostatized, for of course that unity and label represent discursive constructs, however powerful, not simply objects. Moreover, the “Western” thought which reached China was already a part of an international discourse, however, much shaped by colonial domination. Indian thinkers like Tagore, who had his own complex relationship to “Western” thought, were read and briefly had disciples, in China. That the borderline between a colonial and a cosmopolitan discourse is fuzzy should not be ignored in considering either late Qing Chinese relations with the rest of the world or those of the present day. Benedict Anderson (1982) has argued, for example, that the discourse of nationalism, which came to China from the West, was not born in Europe but in its colonies, particularly in Latin America. The May 4th movement in China combined substantial parts both of Chinese nationalism and of Western style discourse on modernization and enlightenment.⁷

From the self-strengthening movement of the 1890s, through the 1919 protests, the ebbs and flows of republicanism, and early stages of Chinese communism, intellectuals took on a stronger and stronger sense of their own crucial role in China’s modernization.⁸ This was joined with the older idea of the intellectual’s responsibility to remonstrate with an emperor (though that responsibility had never matured into a right to be free from punishment for doing so). So when Chinese students this past April, May or June said that they were acting as “the conscience of the nation,” and that this was not just a simple choice but a responsibility they had to live up to, they were speaking in line with a long tradition. The vilification

of intellectuals at various points under communist rule – especially during the cultural revolution – reinforced the salience of the category, even while it added a complexity to normative evaluation of its members.⁹ And the events of the last thirteen years, since the end of Maoist rule, only enhanced this sense of a crucial role for intellectuals.

Chinese students comprised a specific, generationally defined segment of the more general class of intellectuals. They participated in distinctive ways in the long-term project of intellectual class formation. Students were different from other intellectuals not only in their youth and the lesser development of their ideas and skills, but in the fact that they didn't have families to support, or jobs to risk (at least in the immediate sense). They were therefore understood to be freer than their elders to act through public protest as a "conscience to the nation." In this understanding of themselves, the students echoed older Chinese precedents, most notably the student and intellectual movement of May 4th, 1919, whose anniversary they celebrated in the second of this year's really large marches. Of course, the student "fraction" of the intellectual class also had its own complaints: crowded, poorly constructed dormitories, inadequate stipends, a shortage of good jobs after graduation, etc.

More senior intellectuals had exerted an enormous influence on students through their writing, public speaking and teaching in recent years. During the protest movement, they offered advice, tried to protect young activists, and pushed for change in quieter ways (though a special respect was paid to those elders who did put themselves on the line in public protest). But protesting students did not simply follow the lead or advice of older intellectuals. They learned much during discussions with those intellectuals during the months and years before the movement took off on April 15. They continued to pay attention to what senior intellectuals said, and were much heartened by support from more established figures. But the younger generation had its own orientation. Its members – who of course had heterogenous views of their own – absorbed some aspects of the ideology of their elders more than others, and recombined elements in new mixes. In particular, the older generations, what the Chinese call both young and middle aged intellectuals as well as the very senior, was shaped profoundly by its response to the Cultural Revolution. Though these intellectuals did not, for the most part, reach the same conclusion as China's aging leadership, they did share the fear of widespread turmoil. They often argued that students were going too far and should pull back, not just because the government might crack down, as indeed it did, but because order might disintegrate. Many of these older intellectuals, including for example the most prominent among them, Fang Lizhi, were very radical in their critique of communist rule. But their call ultimately was for a kind of reform in which the best trained, most elite experts would advise the government, not for a mass mobilization of the Chinese people. Only a few of these prominent older intellectuals could find anything good to say about the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution during which they had suffered. Liu Binyan (1990) is distinctive in being able to praise the democratic, anti-bureaucratic ideals of the Cultural Revolution at the same time that he shows how these were negated by the party apparatuses and cliques which maintained power during it. The Cultural Revolution was not the same sort of personal experience for most of the younger students in the protest

(and most of the main leaders were quite young – twenty two years or younger). The point is not that they supported the Cultural Revolution, or learned very directly from it; the point, rather, is that memories of the Cultural Revolution did not damn for them the idea of participatory democracy. They were often elitist in their own ways, but they were far more willing to risk turmoil and to call for mass participation as a solution to the evils wrought by established authorities.

“Science and Democracy” in the Late 1980s

In China’s greatest intellectual movement, that of May 4th, 1919, intellectuals developed personifications of science and democracy as part of their effort to spread Enlightenment among the less educated in China (and thereby strengthen the nation both domestically and internationally). “Mr. Science” and “Mr. Democracy” (often presented not through the full Chinese terms but as “Mr. Sci” and “Mr. De”) were widely touted as solutions to China’s problems. These problems were many and varied, but were perceived centrally in terms of modernization and relations with the West. Thus the protest of May 4th, 1919, was sparked off by China’s abuse at the hands of its nominal allies in the Versailles treaty negotiations which ceded large tracts of China to Japanese control. Political weakness was seen simultaneously in traditional terms of a corrupt, declining dynasty and in terms of failed modernization and lack of national strength. Similarly, China’s poverty had become an increasing concern, and the importance of both “Mr. Science” and of political reform lay substantially in paving the way for economic modernization and improvement in material standards of living. Last but not least, as the Enlightenment imagery suggests, May 4th intellectuals worried about the cultural state of the nation. Illiteracy and in general a low level of cultural attainment among the mass of the population formed part of the story. Beyond it, though, there was a critique of traditional Chinese culture, from the binding of women’s feet to the emphasis on stultifying rote learning and the archaic formal essays in the imperial examination system. China, it seemed, needed not only more but different culture.

In the late winter and early spring of 1989, many of China’s intellectuals had resumed the May 4th struggle. They held “democracy salons” and open lectures on university campuses, wrote essays, debated the merits of reform proposals and laid plans for a celebration of the 70th anniversary of the May 4th movement. One group tried to expand the public sphere on a very 18th Century European model by founding a coffee house, the Enlightenment Cafe, though it was short lived. Taking even more risks, leading intellectuals even organized a series of petitions, notably calling for the release of political prisoners from previous pro-democracy movements. One key open letter of February 13 read:

We are deeply concerned with Mr. Fang Lizhi’s January 6, 1989, open letter to Chairman Deng Xiaoping. We believe that on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the PRC and the seventieth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, the granting of an amnesty, especially the release of political prisoners like Wei Jingsheng, will create a harmonious atmosphere conducive to reforms and at the same time conform with the world’s general trend that human rights are increasingly respected.¹⁰

Wei Jingsheng was the most prominent leader of the 1978–80 “democracy wall” movement, a worker-intellectual and publisher of that period’s most exciting new magazine. He has languished in prison, mostly without communication with the outside, since that movement’s suppression.

There had been repeated movements for democracy throughout the post-Mao era, most notably in 1978–80 and 1986–7. The government itself had made some efforts to cultivate the good will of intellectuals, especially more “technocratic” ones, seeing them as central to its attempt to modernize and revitalize the economy. Speech and publication had grown more free; the universities had become centers of discourse about public affairs as well as particularistic concerns. The project of intellectual class formation had been resumed, though each movement forward led to at least a minor government crackdown and temporary reassertion of controls.¹¹

In early 1989, intellectuals were beginning to organize themselves and to speak more forcefully in challenge to the government than at any time in the history of the PRC. The petitions to free Wei Jingsheng and other political prisoners were the focus. As Perry Link comments:

Although the petitions failed to free any prisoners, their very considerable significance was to mark the first time in Communist Chinese history that intellectuals have, as a group, publicly opposed the top leader on a sensitive issue. (1989: 41)

Two initial petitions drew a stern warning that things must go no further; the intellectuals responded with a third petition. This was pointedly signed by forty-three scholars, precisely one more than had signed the second petition. These intellectuals built on the heroic efforts of figures like the physicist Fang Lizhi (perhaps China’s closest analogue to an East European style dissident, a form not generally characteristic of the Chinese scene) and the investigative journalist Liu Binyan. Crucially, though, they defied the government as an organized group, not simply as courageous individuals.

At the same time, many of these more senior intellectuals were speaking to university students in free-wheeling “democracy salons” and open discussion sessions on the major campuses. These discussions built on the previous speeches of national figures like Fang, and the conversations small knots of students held amongst themselves. In this way, they provided a bit of the associational network the protests would need, as well as a forum for spreading ideas. It was important, though, that this diffusion of ideas and awakening of consciousness was not limited to such discussions, to the elite university campuses, to even the most intensely interested of students. Basic concerns about Chinese society and the appropriate stances to take towards it were spread in a variety of ways, and translated from a sophisticated intellectual discourse into a more popularly influential idiom of dissent.

Many of the later student leaders were among those most involved in the discussions of the winter and early spring. They transmitted ideas as they in turn gave speeches to their fellows. They built however on a base. Crucial to the provision of this base was the relative freedom of publication which China had begun to enjoy. Thus the speeches of Fang Lizhi not only reached thousands in his immediate audiences, but were transcribed and published widely. This combined

with increasing freedom of travel to encourage common attitudes on campuses all over China (though not necessarily off campuses, let alone outside urban areas). The publications which played important roles were of several kinds. There were academic journals which printed analyses of China's crisis and proposals for reform. Even many university-sponsored and putatively purely scholarly journals in China were devoted not to "ivory tower" academic pursuits, but concrete discussion of the contemporary situation. Beyond them were intellectual journals like *Seeking Facts* (the former *Red Flag*) and newspapers such as the *People's Daily* and the *Guangming Daily* (the so-called intellectuals' newspaper). Literary magazines carried commentary on current events as well as essays and fiction taking up themes of public concern. This was true not only of elite periodicals but of their more popular cousins.

Popular music was also a very important medium for transmission of political dissent. Singers did not attempt to develop major social analyses in their lyrics, of course, but they did give expression to feelings which moved many others. When Cui Jian, for example, sang "Nothing I Have," he expressed something of the sense of social and cultural bankruptcy which many Chinese students felt. His songs in particular gave encapsulated, often repeated, expression to grievances and desires; the very style of much of the music combined Westernization with counter-cultural critique. Another popular singer's simple lyric, "follow your own feelings" summed up one of the powerful urges, even moral mandates, for Chinese students. Film and performing arts also played similar roles.¹² Last but not least, the proliferation of gathering places from private restaurants to a short lived coffee house provided something of the material basis, the "free spaces" for a nascent public sphere.

Among the intellectual elite, various groupings could be identified. To start with, borrowing typical Chinese categories, there were (1) the scientists and technical workers of whom Fang Lizhi is the most prominent protagonist; (2) the social scientists and advisors to government and party reformers of whom Yan Jiaqi, Su Shaozhi and Li Zehou are the most famous examples; and (3) the literary intellectuals including journalists like Liu Binyan, critics like Liu Zaifu, and creative writers like Bei Dao and Liu Xinwu.¹³ Each of these groups had their distinctive social and institutional bases. Fang Lizhi's main audiences were at Beijing University and the Chinese University of Science and Technology. The social scientists were based especially at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, though some were also scattered through party and quasi-private think-tanks. The literary intellectuals were sometimes on the faculties of universities, or housed in institutions like the Academy for Chinese Culture, but they were most distinctively writers for increasingly open newspapers and magazines, including a host of new, substantially independent publications and book series; they were also engaged in an effort to develop a sort of coffee house and salon culture outside of the official institutions of Beijing.¹⁴ Each of these three groups also had its distinctive views and lines of argument on China's current situation; though these discourses sometimes overlapped, of course, they also had their own internal heterogeneity.

Natural Scientists

Relatively few natural scientists were among the most visible leaders of protest. They tended to emphasize freedom to pursue their own scientific and technical

work, and the economic contributions that work could make to China's modernization and prosperity. Their emphasis was on the first term in the old May 4th slogan of science and democracy. In the same sense, though, the ideology of science colored the notion of democracy far beyond the ranks of scientists. When scientists considered democracy, they tended to identify it very strongly with the rational, efficient management of government by people of trained expertise. Their most general concern was with the project of modernizing China. While most pursued this directly in their scientific careers, a few offered broader critiques or programs for remaking China in the image of science. Thus Wen Yuankai, a former Vice-President of the Chinese University of Science and Technology wrote a widely read book on *Reform and Remolding of National Character*.

Another former Vice-President of CUST, Fang Lizhi, became the most influential of these scientists and indeed of all spokespeople for Chinese intellectuals. His arguments are heavily colored by an ideology of science, but also have a resonance far beyond the ranks of scientists; he thus transcends the category in which he is placed here. Fang will get more attention here than any other individual, both because of his enormous influence and because his speeches are so frequently concerned with the question of what role intellectuals should play in Chinese society. Fang was also unusually radical in his positions. For example, natural scientists in general tended to be strong supporters of Westernization. Fang went further, embracing the government's very condemnation: "Talking about China's modernization, I personally like the idea of Westernization at full scale (1987: 87)." What Fang thematized about the West, however, was quite specific – an idealized notion of science, an empiricist discourse of truth, democracy as embodied in conventional electoral institutions and above all an account of modernity as an evolutionary ideal more or less independent of cultural particularity.¹⁵

Like other scientific and technical researchers, Fang sought institutional arrangements in which to make practical contributions without the distortion or impediment of corrupt and ideological leadership:

As an intellectual, one should be a driving force for society. One major aspect of the effort to push the society forward is to do a better job in our professional field so that we can give more to society. . . . Our social responsibility, so to speak, is for each of us here to work for a better social environment that will allow our intellectuals to make good use of their talent and work more efficiently. . . . One important sign of a developed society is that intellectuals have a say in social development and enjoy considerable influence. (1988a: 68–9)

Fang illustrated the influence he imagined intellectuals to have in the West with the story of attending a scientific conference in Rome at which both the Italian president and the Pope listened to the scientists. The contrast to senior Chinese leaders who never meet with even the most eminent scientists, nor take an interest in scientific work was telling to Fang and listeners on several levels. The Italian president, for example, sat in the front row, not on stage: "the president himself must sit down there because he was a citizen like all of his compatriots" (1987: 127). Even more impressive was the interaction with the Pope:

the following day, we had a scientific popularization meeting with the Pope in a church. We scientific researchers took pains to explain scientific knowledge to him because we wanted him to believe in our research. Since he represents the power of God, . . . we sat before him . . . But we and the Pope sat face to face. Thus, we explained our latest discoveries to him. These two meetings impressed me deeply, very deeply! I learned what position knowledge has attained in the modern age. After we finished with our explanations, the Pope made a speech to thank us . . . what he said concerned chiefly with scientific knowledge. He said he understood our explanations about the Halley's Comet, cosmic dust, black hole, and the universe. His speech contained almost nothing irrelevant to science. . . . After these two meetings, I came to the conclusion that in those developed, democratic countries, knowledge has an independent position. It has its own value and independent position. Moreover, everyone must understand the importance of knowledge. Everyone, from those who occupy high positions such as the president of a nation and the Pope to ordinary people, must understand this. . . . If one wants to be a noble man or a man in a high position, one must not be ignorant. Therefore, I feel that there is truly a great difference between those nations and ours. (1987: 127-8)

Having leaders who couldn't understand their work, and didn't care to, was obviously bad for intellectuals. But Fang emphasized that it was also bad for society as a whole. Repeatedly, Fang argued in a fashion indebted to Daniel Bell and his popularizers Alvin Toffler and John Naisbitt (both of whose books are widely read in Chinese translation) that modern technology has made knowledge, rather than labor or other material means of production, basic:

Marx classified people into different groups according to the means of production they owned. In my view, this was tenable in the last century and the beginning of this. However, in modern society, the development of science and technology, knowledge and information, including high-tech and soft science, have become an important force propelling society forward, and are bound to involve a change in the concept of who leads in the political and economic fields. Intellectuals, who own and create information and knowledge, are the most dynamic component of the productive forces; this is what determines their social status (1986: 17).¹⁶

Like other reform-oriented Chinese intellectuals, Fang spoke frequently of democracy. His emphasis, however, was not egalitarian. Rather than mass participatory institutions, he advocated a government by experts. At the extreme, it seemed as though he would like to see government by physicists. Thus he argued:

It's up to the intellectuals as a class, with their sense of social responsibility, their consciousness about democracy, and their initiative to strive for their rights, to decide whether the democratic system can survive and develop in a given society. (1988b: 85)

Fang did not argue that the decision on whether democracy would survive might more properly – more democratically – belong to the society as a whole. He clearly thought the society was not ready:

You can go travel in the villages and look around; I feel those uneducated peasants, living under traditional influence, have a psychological consciousness that is very deficient. It is very difficult to instill a democratic consciousness in them; they still demand an honest and upright official; without an official they are uncomfortable. (quoted and translated by R. Kraus, 1989: 298, from same speech as 1988c)

Fang's conception of democracy was not essentially participatory. It turned on (a) human rights, (b) the importance of honest, expert officials, and (c) the responsibility and right of intellectuals to criticize the government.

The rhetoric of human rights has been very important and potentially radical in China.¹⁷ Like many intellectuals, Fang Lizhi hesitated before the radical implications of human rights, for example the notion of granting the "uneducated" equal standing in public discourse with the intellectuals. Like most students I talked to during the protest movement, he did not consider democracy to be inherently a process of education through participation in political activity. Education was something intellectuals would offer to peasants, workers and soldiers; democratic discourse was by and large a right of the educated.

This said, Fang did make good points in stressing that democracy should not mean simply a relaxation of controls (as the CCP seemed sometimes to imply) and that it ought to flow from bottom to top (even if he was a bit inconsistent in deciding just where the social 'bottom' lay).

What is the meaning of democracy? Democracy means that every human being has his own rights and that human beings, each exercising his own rights, form our society. Therefore, rights are in the hands of every citizen. They are not given by top leaders of the nation. All people are born with them. (1987: 137)¹⁸

Thus Fang argued persuasively that students ought not to believe the party claim to have "given" them an education. Their education, he suggested, was a right. If it was based on anyone's "gift," the donors were their parents who had labored hard to provide for them (1987: 139; 1988b: 84).¹⁹ On the one hand this scored an excellent point against the party's (in this case highly traditional) claims as authoritarian benefactor. On the other hand, it ignored the extent to which educational opportunities remained class stratified in the China of the 1980s; the university students to whom Fang spoke were virtually never the children of peasants and seldom the offspring of ordinary workers.

Similarly, Fang did recognize the importance of critical discourse to the development of a democratic public sphere:

I hope we may all benefit from this interchanging discussion method. I don't want you to listen to me only . . . I think, if I have said something wrong, you may refute me. Thus, we shall advance toward democracy. I must stress this. I insist on expressing my own opinion. When I see something wrong, I say it. If my criticisms are incorrect, you may always refute me. This [expression of one's own opinion] may be gradually realized when "both sides are not afraid of each other." I think, democracy is still far away, but at least, outspoken criticisms may create a democratic impression. I mean, we intellectuals are able to play a certain role in democratization. (1987: 135)²⁰

One important criterion to measure democracy in a country is whether citizens can criticize those in authority. (1988b: 79)

But, ultimately, Fang linked democracy very closely to science; "science and democracy are running parallel" (1988c: 92). In the tradition of May 4th, 1919, science meant first and foremost rationalism as against tradition. Fang railed against China's feudal heritage as much as against communism; indeed, he saw the two as closely linked. His individualism entailed rejection of both Confucianism and

communism which shared a definition of personhood in terms of social relations and obligations to others (cf. Kraus, 1989: 297).

“Learn truth from facts,” is an old Maoist epigram which Deng Xiaoping made emblematic of the pragmatism of the reform era. For many intellectuals, however, including Fang, it had a more profound if ultimately ambivalent meaning. On the one hand, “learn truth from facts” could refer to the ideology of empiricist science, and in Fang Lizhi’s case this is a powerful part of his rhetorical claim to attention. On the other hand, the same saying could refer not to “external” verification of factual evidence but to an extreme subjectivism by which the “facts” are understood to be those of irrefutable personal experience. This is a more important rhetorical trope for many of the literary intellectuals of the 1980s, especially for creative writers, but it is not insignificant for Fang as well. “I cannot control myself,” he said in one speech, “I feel that if I don’t speak out, I shall neglect my duty as a citizen of this nation” (1987: 125). Frequently, Fang insisted in his speeches on the importance of talking about his own experience. He adopted what Adorno called “the jargon of authenticity.” But this was not just a part of Fang Lizhi’s rhetoric, it was also a powerful component of the intellectual complaint against communist rule. The slogan of Czechoslovakian rebels in 1989 states it clearly: “to live honestly,” that is, to end the thousand daily ways in which protecting oneself from the regime meant compromising one’s values and indeed one’s very identity (see discussion of creative writers below).

Fang saw the need for honest self-expression as especially important for scientists:

Scientists must express their feelings about anything in society, especially if unreasonable, wrong and evil things emerge. . . . Since physicists pursue the unity, harmony and perfection of nature, how can they logically tolerate unreason, discordance and evil? Physicists’ methods of pursuing truth make them extremely sensitive while their courage in seeking it enables them to accomplish something.

Let’s take a look at the events of the postwar years. Almost invariably it was the natural scientists who were the first to become conscious of the emergence of each social crisis. (1986: 16–17)

Here Fang is mobilizing two of his favorite rhetorical tropes at once: his claim to speak from the privileged standpoint of science and his claim to special insight because of his knowledge of the West.²¹ The rhetoric of science is not just window dressing. It is closely linked to Fang’s basic self-understanding and his conception of democracy and modernization. It is important to see how Fang sets his priorities and how he conceptualizes democracy, for his account of the Chinese situation and the role of intellectuals was among the most directly influential on the student protesters of 1989. And in the conclusion to one of his most famous and widely circulated speeches, here is how he orders and sums up his points:

We should have our own judgment about what is right, good, and beautiful in our academic field, free from the control of political power, before we can achieve modernization and true democracy, and not the so-called democracy. (1988c: 93)

This is the call first and foremost of an academic scientist, one who sees democracy primarily in terms of rationality, not participation, and as crucially dependent on the leadership of specialized elite intellectuals.²² There is nothing inherently

objectionable in this. Surely few of us would disagree with statements like this: “What I pursue is a more reasonable society that is pluralistic, nonexclusive, a society that incorporates the best in the human race” (1988a: 73). Yet one has to consider also that Fang almost never mentions peasants or workers as significant or desirable forces in society, that his conception of freedom is couched almost entirely in terms of intellectuals’ rights to carry on their work and criticism of the government, and that his notion of democracy is overwhelmingly a call for rational, scientific leadership, for modernization in the May 4th sense, not for anything like “government of the people, by the people and for the people.”

Social Scientists

Social scientists by and large agreed with Fang’s criticisms. Many went further, however, in developing specific views about market reforms and other economic policies, even advocating increasing private ownership and stock trading (see Schell, 1988: 44–55). Social scientists were also much more likely to add a specifically political argument about reform of the communist party, loosening of central controls, or even free, multiparty elections. Some of the social scientists, like Su Shaozhi (Director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) and Zhang Xianyang (of the same institute), tried to develop a more intellectually serious Marxist theory suitable to China’s reform and modernization.²³ Attempting to revitalize Marxism did not necessarily make these intellectuals less radical (or safer in the eyes of authorities). Su publicly endorsed the students’ protest and is now in exile.

Closely related, but somewhat more prominent in 1989, was a second group which tried to work within the party framework, this time with much less reference to Marxism. Yan Jiaqi, former director of the Institute of Political Science of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, was among the most visible of this group. One of Zhao Ziyang’s closest advisors, he helped to coordinate the activities of the various intellectual “think tanks” which developed policy analysis and proposals for the party reformers.²⁴ Econometricians, demographers and others often saw their roles as essentially applied scientists furthering the cause of China’s modernization. Many had very similar views to Fang not just on the failings of the Chinese government, but on the nature of democracy and on modernization as a process best directed by experts. They might place less emphasis on institutional autonomy than the physical and biomedical scientists, though, and often worked closely as advisors to different parts of the party and government. Social scientists were apt to be more closely involved with concrete reform activities (e.g. rewriting laws on private companies) and were more often vocally critical of the conservative forces in the government.²⁵

Social scientists with technocratic visions were not necessarily moderate in their views on reform. They might want vast changes, but changes in which professionally trained elites played a crucial managerial role, and in which popular democratic decision making was a negligible factor. The one-child family policy of the early to middle 1980s, for example, was a radical reform. It reversed Mao Zedong’s Marxist anti-Malthusianism with an image of inevitable competition for limited goods, and it flew in the face of traditional Chinese values. Its proponents made

extensive use of projections based on Western demographic techniques and argued for the need to gather better statistics and train more demographers to analyze them. The policy could simply be decided upon when expert analysis convinced top government and party officials; it did not require mass democratic consideration and indeed was considered to be too important to trust to such procedures even if they had been considered.

Similarly, many of the major economic reforms involved attempts to transform the economy from the top down. Explicitly, the Dengist vision argued that it was possible to pick various economic reforms from the capitalist world, without needing to add democratic political institutions. Even in the political realm, many reformers were more interested in improving administrative efficiency than popular participation. They focused, for example, on increasing the education and training of middle level cadres. Indeed, many of these intellectuals were themselves the recent recipients of foreign educations who had been promoted over more senior colleagues to positions of considerable influence. Of course there was enormous room for variation here. Arguments for decentralization of economic decision making could be taken as implying the need for private ownership of firms, or not; as implying the need for democratic institutions within those firms, or not; as implying the need for similar decentralization and/or democratization of political decisions, or not. Some reformers argued (not unlike the USSR's Gorbachev) that the strong authority of the party center was necessary to carry out the radical transformation of the economy, even though a policy goal of that transformation was to lessen the reliance on central planning. Gorbachev, however, emphasized the need for political openness and restructuring to coincide with, or even pave the way for, economic change. The Chinese leadership resolutely maintained a strict priority on economic matters. Perhaps as a result, even in its recent crisis, China's economy never was in quite the shambles of its Soviet counterpart. But perhaps the crucial reason for the difference was that Gorbachev saw political reform as the only way for him to bring adequate pressure to bear on factory managers and economic planners entrenched in the Soviet bureaucracy, while China's enterprise managers and planning bureaucrats did not have any substantial basis for resistance or challenge to the central government's directives. Moreover, Deng does not seem to have faced such deep challenges on this aspect of his reforms as Gorbachev has.

By Chinese definitions, many journalists were also social scientists, including notably Wang Ruoshui, former editor of the *People's Daily*. These journalists not only wrote social commentary themselves, they managed the major organs of widespread public dissemination of ideas. Qin Benli (editor of the *World Economic Herald*) achieved fame in the West when demonstrations followed the decision of Jiang Zemin and the Shanghai government to close his paper down a few months before the 1989 student protest movement began. Influential economic analysis was as likely to appear in his paper as in professional journals. Qin also figures among a substantial group of social scientists who had major impacts as purveyors and translators of Western thought for Chinese consumption.²⁶ A number of book series had been founded in the late 1980s, for example, including notably the *Towards the Future* series in Sichuan (edited by Jin Guantao, Bao Zhunxin, and Xie Xuanjin). Bao was also a member of the Institute of History at the Academy of Social Sciences. Jin had become widely known for his saying "the experiment

and failure of socialism is one of the main inheritances of humankind in the 20th Century.” Xie was co-author with Beijing Normal Institute lecturer Wang Luxiang, and journalist Zu Xiaokang of *He Shang (Yellow River Elegy)*, the remarkable television film series which galvanized viewers across China with its portrayal of Chinese culture as trapped in cycles of self-destruction and unable to meet the challenge of international competition (see n. 12 above).²⁷

Counterpoised to these radical Westernizers was a group more dedicated to revitalizing traditional Chinese culture and finding the basis for dissent and reform in a distinctively Chinese heritage. Li Zehou was officially a philosopher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences but best known as an intellectual historian who had written influentially on “the six generations” of modern Chinese intellectuals (see Li and Schwarcz, 1983–4) and on traditional Chinese aesthetics (Li, 1988). Liang Congjie, editor of a magazine called *Intellectuals*, the historian Pang Pu and the philosopher Tang Yijie of Beijing University were also prominent. Their reconstruction of traditional Chinese culture explicitly focused on the important role allocated to intellectuals. The newly founded International Academy of Chinese culture provided them with a base, and brought young scholars from all over the country to its headquarters near People’s University. This last group held perhaps the greatest prestige in the intellectual community, but it was the Westernizers who commanded the most widespread popularity.

Literary Intellectuals

Finally there were the literary intellectuals. This categorization can cover a variety of kinds of writing in China. First and foremost, perhaps, there were creative writers – poets, novelists and some essayists (generic distinctions are not always clear, nor always demarcated exactly as we would find them in the West). Secondly, there were literary critics. Third, but very prominently, came investigative reporters.

Chinese radicals and reformers had long seen literary efforts as central to the basic changes they wanted to produce. As Liang Qichao wrote in 1902:

To renovate the people of a nation, the fictional literature of that nation must first be renovated. . . to renovate morality, we must renovate fiction, to renovate manners we must first renovate fiction. . . to renew the people’s hearts and minds and remold their character, we must first renovate fiction. (quoted by Schwarcz, 1986: 33, following Sato Shin’ichi)

In the Chinese case, reform of the very language itself was crucial, so much was the very classical language tied up with Confucianism and imperial rule. Yu Pingbo, a veteran of the May 4th protest, wrote in a commemorative poem on the sixtieth anniversary in 1979, “We did not worry if our words were sweet or bitter/We just wrote in the newly born vernacular” (quoted in Schwarcz, 1986: 20).²⁸

Poetry and fiction had become controversial again in reform-era China. Authors had experimented with new styles, from a sort of vague, evocative poetry which came to be known as “misty” to stream of consciousness novels. The most important common thread was a new preoccupation with individual experience and especially its distinctiveness – a theme previously forbidden in Communist China. When poets like Bei Dao, Shu Ting, and Jiang He began to write the new

sort of poetry, particularly in the journal *Today*, founded during the 1978–80 democracy movement, it was widely understood to carry simultaneous political cultural and personal messages. In Shu Ting's famous 1982 poem, "The Wall," for example, her opening and closing verses read:

I have no means to resist the wall,
Only the will.

Finally I know
What I have to resist first:
My compromise with walls, my
Insecurity with this world.

(Translation from Barmé and Minford, 1988: 18)

A factory worker as well as a poet, Shu was initially celebrated in part for the particular female strength she brought to her writing. More recently, she has been criticized for making accommodations with the literary and party establishment. This complaint itself suggests the extent to which followers of the new poetry want a radical authenticity from their writers.

Older poets like Ai Qing attacked the new poetry, likening it to an intellectual version of the Red Guards, even calling it the "Beat and Smash Poetic School." Indeed, it did have roots in the Cultural Revolution, in both the intensity of the commitment and later disillusionment of young participants and the wounds with which so many Chinese people were left. It was this poetry, more than any directly political texts, which established the crucial link between the protesting Chinese students of 1989 and their forebears of 1978–80.²⁹ The Beijing University critic Xie Mian became a minor hero for standing up against the old poets and defending the "misty" poems as an authentic and important part of modern Chinese literature. Protesting students in 1989 frequently quoted Jiang He's "Motherland, and Bei Dao's "The Answer," particularly the stanzas reading:

Baseness is the password of the base,
Honour is the epitaph of the honourable.
Look how the gilded sky is covered
With the drifting, crooked shadows of the dead.

I come into this world
Bringing only paper, rope, a shadow,
To proclaim before the judgment
The voices of the judged:

Let me tell you, world,
I—do—not—believe!
If a thousand challengers lie beneath your feet,
Count me as number one thousand and one.

I don't believe the sky is blue;
I don't believe in the sound of thunder;
I don't believe that dreams are false;
I don't believe that death has no revenge.³⁰

One marcher I saw on May 4th carried aloft a sign with no words, simply a piece of paper, a bit of rope and a cut-out shadow.

Novelists and short-story writers of the same era were perhaps less radical and struck less often to the very heart of their Chinese readers, but they were also influential. “Exploring” writers such as Jiang Zilong, Chen Rong and Liu Xinwu (editor of *People’s Literature*) also took up the implicit critique of the Cultural Revolution and remaining “leftist” tendencies, and also tried to rehabilitate a certain individualism. In his famous “Black Walls,” Liu has his protagonist paint the apartment entirely black, only to confront the puzzlement and ultimately hostility of his neighbors. The point is made apparent even by an orthodox literary critic who claims he cannot find it:

A certain fellow by the name of Zhou – a man recognized as being a little ‘odd’ – paints the walls and ceiling of his apartment black without providing the slightest explanation. An egotistical ‘indulgence’ of this nature can hardly be seen as normal or acceptable. . . . the problem, however, is that the author . . . regards the ‘abnormal’ as ‘normal,’ and is critical of the attempted suppression of Zhou’s desire to express his quirky individuality. . . .”³¹

The stifling of individuality was linked to the stifling of artistic and literary creativity. As Wang Ruowang put it, turning a government condemnation on its head, “we should say that those people who opposed the freedom of creativity are themselves the greatest source of contamination in spiritual pollution” (interview in Guan, 1988: 44).

Literary critics like Liu Zaifu and Liu Xiabo (as well as Xie Mian) played important roles in China. Not only did they help to elucidate themes in literature, and act as arbiters of taste and reputation, they engaged in the ongoing project of linking contemporary literature to Chinese culture. Critics were also in the center of debate over that culture. Where Liu Zaifu sought both to reform Marxist criticism from within and to emphasize the continuing importance of the old Chinese literary tradition, Liu Xiaobo was more of an enthusiastic Westernizer and a radical. In this context, “traditional” means seeking a good balance of emotion and rationality, and a stress on the collectivity and the social responsibility of the artist. “Radical,” by contrast, means a focus on the expression of personal feeling, individuality, auratic art (to borrow Benjamin’s term), the autonomy of artistic production and its potential independence of national particularity in the modern metropolitan culture.

Something of this tension was played out in differences between the “creative writers” and the “investigative reporters.” The latter were positioned between social scientists and literary intellectuals (though in China even literary critics were often housed in the Academy of Social Sciences). The Communist party, long holding that social reportage (and sometimes only social reportage emphasizing the morale-building good side of socialist society) was the main responsibility of writers, saw reporters as central to literature. Younger writers were more likely to disagree, wishing to claim that turf for art. In 1989, the younger writers Su Xiaokang and Dai Qing were attracting more and more of a readership (Su was one of the co-authors of “Yellow River Elegy” and had close ties in academic circles; he was also a Lecturer in the Beijing Broadcast Institute). Much more famous, Wang Ruowang and Liu Binyan were the senior statesmen of this group, long-standing communists who wielded considerable influence as writers in official

periodicals. Both Wang and Liu had been attacked repeatedly as rightists and periodically accepted discipline (including in Liu's case temporary expulsion) by the party throughout their careers. Even in their most critical writings, they are remarkable for retaining a commitment to some of the ideals which had made them communists in the first place. In one of his articles, for example, Liu spoke of "another kind of loyalty" to the party, one which put ideals and the interests of the people ahead of the dictates of the bureaucracy and discipline of the hierarchy (see Schell, 1988; Liu, 1990). He tied his efforts very much to the reform branch of the communist party exemplified by Hu Yaobang. After the fall of the Gang of Four, the project of rediscovering the forward momentum of Chinese liberation seemed urgent, and seemed also to depend on uncovering the various ways in which old "leftists" clung to power despite rectification campaigns.

From 1979 on, Wang became increasingly bold and unrepentant in his views, which were, as he admitted, "heterodox" (Guan, 1988). He was one of the few writers willing to look seriously at the implications of Deng's policies following the slogan "to get rich is glorious." Class polarization, he argued, was an inevitable consequence of the policies being pursued. Wang did not argue for reversal of the reforms, but for taking seriously the consequences:

If we go on emphasizing that we don't want inequalities to develop, we may as well attack the economic reforms and turn everything back to the egalitarians. Let them carry on their high authoritarian management. Let them decisively and fearlessly cut down to size those who were so bold as to get rich sooner than others. (quoted in Schell, 1988: 173)

Ultimately Wang was dismissed from the party for his refusal to recant such views; Deng was determined to maintain an egalitarian myth even as he opened up a market economy with hints of capitalism. Yet this was a serious problem. One of the main ideological problems China faced in the spring of 1989 was that the government had neither developed – nor allowed others the possibility of a public discourse to develop – a rationale for economic inequality. Nearly all serious and novel inequalities of wealth looked to many ordinary people like corruption.

Even more famous than Wang was (and is) Liu Binyan. The two played an enormously popular role as gadflies of authority and a sort of conscience of the nation. Liu specialized in documenting the corruption of local communist party officials and the failure of the party hierarchy to do anything about it. As he was himself a party member, and writing in an officially controlled press, his exposés sometimes carried more weight than those in Western papers; people sought him out to try to get their problems resolved. He maintained voluminous files on investigations all over China, often working with teams of assistants. When he felt he had documented a wrong that needed to be righted, he might send a file directly to a senior party official, like Hu Yaobang, as well as (or instead of) publishing an article about it. Of course Liu was not always successful, and often his articles backfired, bringing retaliation rather than redress to those whose grievances he documented (see Liu, 1988, 1990). Liu had been writing much the same sort of report for more than thirty years when he was finally expelled from the party in 1987.

Liu Binyan joined the communist party as a teenager, five years before the

1949 revolution. He was active in underground struggle first for liberation of China from Japanese occupation and then for communist victory over the Guomindang. After the war, he returned to his plans for writing. "I wanted to use my pen to slash the pall hanging over China, to dispel the gloom and open up the mental horizons of the people (1990: 52)." Unfortunately for Liu, he thought that dispelling the gloom depended on honest reporting of the causes of China's problems. In one of his first major articles, Liu had told of two engineers. One had built bridges entirely according to party directives, failing to take emergency measures when floods came early in 1954. The floods washed away the bridge support his team had built. The other refused to wait for orders from above, changed the plans, and saved his construction team's work. The party promoted the first and demoted the second. And so it has been for Liu, though he continues to exhibit the second sort of loyalty, along with his incorrigible optimism. Liu lost some twenty-two years of his life to labor reform among the peasants and other punishments. He had only been rehabilitated a few months from his condemnation as a rightist, when in 1966 the Cultural Revolution broke out and he was again attacked. Yet, the Cultural Revolution began with a promise to democratize China. Even in the midst of his sufferings, Liu could see positive potential in its attack on bureaucratism, corruption, and special privileges for party leaders. Though one of the most resolute and effective opponents of those who came to power during the Cultural Revolution, Liu is set apart from other prominent intellectuals in his ability to see something important in its ideals. In this, as in having genuinely been a revolutionary, Liu is quite different from Fang Lizhi, for example. He still believes in the ideals which motivated him to become a communist in the first place. He is not just a spokesman for intellectuals, but a man who clearly cares about all sorts of ordinary people; he wants their freedom and their democracy as well as his own.³²

Liu maintained his investigative reporting not only in the face of party pressure, but in the face of a changing fashion among writers.

In recent years, with the exception of a very small number, writers with a similar set of experiences as mine have turned their attention to subjects that are less politically or socially sensitive, devoting themselves to the pursuit of art. Consequently, even more than ever I have stood as the odd man out. (1988: 33) . . . fewer and fewer Chinese writers think they should use their writing to help the Chinese people to reorganize society. One common view is that it would destroy the artistic purity of their work and cause it to lose the value of timelessness. (Liu, Ruan and Xu, 1989: 25)

Liu regarded those writers and artists who turned away from "reality" as people whose sense of mission had never been strong, and who turned to commercialism, the ideology of art for art's sake or the pursuit of a Nobel prize partly out of timidity in the face of hostile authority (Liu, 1990: 171). As far as he was concerned, the purpose of writing, for a person of conscience, was social improvement. At a conference in California in April 1989, Liu (already living in the U.S.) clashed with the modernist writer Bei Dao over just this issue. As Perry Link sums up, quoting each man:

“Our job is to tell the truth,” said Bei Dao, “and if we don’t, we indeed *are* inferior to bean curd vendors, who do their jobs quite well.” But there was no consensus on how much an intellectual’s independence should be devoted to social action as opposed to pure scholarship or art. “I see a terrible incongruity,” said Liu Binyan. “On one side, 500,000 people massed in Tiananmen Square, on the other, in our literary magazines, essentially a blank-*avant garde* experiments, read only by a few, understandable sometimes by none.”

Bei Dao bluntly disagreed. “True art does not ask about its own ‘social effects.’ We will understand this problem more adequately only when we understand why foreign writers, unlike Chinese writers, sometimes commit suicide. . . It’s because they’re concerned with life itself, not social engineering.” (Link, 1989: 40)

Liu Binyan’s style is simple and straightforward, often a flat statement of telling facts punctuated by occasional condemnations in the strongest terms. No readers were ever likely to miss the point of his articles, even when references were oblique out of political necessity. And his pieces were simultaneously reports for the party and publications for the people. He was, in a sense, the sort of socially responsible writer that communist activists said they wanted, and praised until they were in power and apt to bear the brunt of the criticism. To label Liu a bourgeois individualist was merely to say that he insisted on civil rights and liberties, including his own right to publish the truth as he saw it, as well as the rights of the victims of party excesses about whom he wrote. The new poets and younger fiction writers, however, have often expressed something much more akin to the “bourgeois individualism of the West”, an emphasis on self-expression as an end in itself and an understanding of art as the product solely of inner consciousness.

It is nonetheless important to realize that the sense of Chinese cultural crisis, and a concern for the fate of the nation, did drive these younger, less political writers as well. Liu Binyan, for example, reports on the young scholar Liu Xiaobo:

Liu Xiaobo was not very interested in politics; in fact, he despised and hated politics. After Hu Yaobang died, Liu published an article in the *China News Daily*, a Chinese-language New York newspaper, in which he said he did not think much of the student movement. His opinions were unusual: For instance, he thought Hu Yaobang was only the leader of the Party, and that we should not honor him so. Instead, we should honor Wei Jingsheng, who had been imprisoned by the Communist Party ten years earlier for fighting in the Democracy movement. (Liu, Ruan and Xu, 1989)

Nonetheless, Liu Xiaobo did return to Beijing, and moreover was one of the intellectuals who caused a stir by announcing a hunger strike of their own at the monument to the people’s heroes only days before the massacre. He was arrested and reportedly tortured.

In terms of the broad mass of the Chinese people, the work of Liu Binyan and similar investigative reporters no doubt loomed much larger than the experimental, often obscure poetry and fiction of the 1980s. Yet in the student movement, the two influences merged. Students responded both to a straightforward account of the corruption of the communist regime and to a more nebulous sense of cultural crisis – and potential. They responded both to simple logical arguments for civil liberties and human rights, and to more mystical literary expressions based on a claim to those rights. They responded also to the physical presence of older intellectuals. As Liu Binyan and Xu Gang remark:

Literary critics could be seen shouting in streets and alleys, calling people to block army vehicles; famous writers ran around in a sweat buying urinals for students. Scholars of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences were also very active. Groups of people from many research institutes came to join the movement. University professors plunged in, also abandoning their usual discreet and retiring behavior. (Liu, Ruan and Xu, 1989: 25–6)

The student protest movement had taken older intellectuals partly by surprise. A few retired to their apartments, but a great many came forward to support the students. Though these intellectuals gave advice, they did not run the movement behind the scenes, as some have charged (and a few intellectuals have claimed). Their greatest influence was through the ideas which shaped the students' consciousness.

Conclusion

Student demands initially reflected their particularistic concerns rather closely: for recognition of an autonomous students' association, improvement of a variety of conditions in universities, and more choice and meritocracy in the assignment of graduates to jobs. Yet once the protest took root, a variety of deeper, longer range ideas also came to the fore. Grievances specific to students and intellectuals flowed together with a discourse about democracy, modernization and China's cultural crisis.

At first, students sounded much like Fang Lixhi. His views both shaped and reflected a very broadly shared orientation. Thus students saw the project of democracy through lenses colored by class. For example, when they spoke of the relationship of education to democracy they always spoke of the need for them, and others like them, to "educate the masses of people." They did not speak of democracy as itself a process of public education as well as of self-government. On the other hand, the basic self-identification of the students in Tiananmen Square – and not just their intellectual self-categorization but their lived identity – was transformed, and was for a time radicalized. Their consciousness expanded beyond class concerns to include national ones and in important ways universal ideals. The movement itself helped to liberate their thoughts from concerns like where they would work after graduation, and turn them towards the question of China's future. This still reflected practical concerns of the kind stressed by Fang and various social scientists. But it also called for a more radical, emotionally inspiring vision. For this, students drew more on literary intellectuals.

It was this only half-explicit vision which made sense of the risks students took, the sacrifices they made. In the same way, when the ordinary people of Beijing rallied to protect the student hunger strikers starting May 19th, this was not only because they saw students speaking for ideals they shared, but because the act of refusing sustenance and courting government reprisals impressed people that the students were not just seeking their personal gains but sacrificing themselves for the people as a whole.³³ In the midst of the struggle it became possible to identify emotionally with a general category – the Chinese people – which under more ordinary circumstances would be rent by numerous divisions. Despite their own elitism, students were in many ways much more committed to democracy

than most older intellectuals. Repeating the old May 4th slogan, "science and democracy," the older generation always seemed to put the emphasis on science, while the younger generation put it entirely on democracy. To them, moreover, democracy meant not just administrative reform or proper respect for expert advice, but at least in many cases genuine participation.

This is the source of the radicalness – and indeed the arrogance – of students' demand for high-level dialogue. From early in the protests, students had called for a "dialogue among equals" with top policy-making officials. They were disappointed that they were able to have this dialogue only with Yuan Mu, the spokesman of the State Council, and that he did not treat them as equals. Later, when Li Peng did speak with students, they challenged him directly for making a (rather haughty) speech and not truly engaging in a dialogue. Yet, from the standpoint of Chinese history, the fact that the students were able to get even this approach to dialogue was quite remarkable. The call for such a dialogue was only apparently a mild demand; in fact, it asked for a very radical act of political symbolism. On the one hand, it reflected the students very high opinion of their own importance as young intellectuals (and directly echoed Fang Lizhi's emphasis on how Western leaders listen to scientists, quoted above). On the other hand, this call for dialogue reflected an egalitarian ideology and offered echoes of young Red Guards interrogating senior officials in the 1960s. Of course the student protesters had no intention of acting like Red Guards, but the similarities were quickly noted by others. Undergraduates thought nothing of summoning the President of my university out to a rather forced dialogue one morning in May, but even some Ph.D. candidates were old enough to be reminded of the Cultural Revolution and slightly chilled by the action. One argued with the students at the edge of the crowd, but his views were dismissed.

Underlying some of these tensions are varying conceptions of the intellectual's role in Chinese society. I met no students in 1989 who were prepared to defend a strong ideal of "redness" and party discipline. The opposition of professional-technical expertise to personal-literary expression carried a good deal of weight, however. Linked to this is the difference between analyses of China's current predicament which focus on purely economic issues, which complement this with emphasis on political reform, and which go beyond either of these notions of reform to emphasize the need to confront a basic crisis in Chinese culture.

This sense of crisis was a crucial ingredient in the concerns of students involved in the spring protests. It is also the ingredient most overlooked by Western observers. And, it linked the China of 1989 back to 1919 as surely as the slogan "science and democracy," the rhetoric of modernization or the concern with how to gain wealth and power in the world. Indeed, the sense of cultural crisis was linked to all these things. It was borne in large part of China's relations with the Western world, the uncertainty about whether China's weakness should be blamed on something intrinsic to Chinese culture or character.

To understand what intellectual orientation, and what strength of feeling lay behind the willingness of so many of China's brightest young people to become martyrs, one has to go beyond the conventional Western focus on capitalism and democracy. Some party leaders, to be sure, wanted economic reform without political change or threats to their power. They pursued the virtually impossible line of trying to

import Western technology, economic thought and bits of business practice without accepting any political or cultural baggage. Many reformers were primarily interested in the same economic goods, but even in pushing for purely technocratic economic solutions saw some need to streamline administration and reform the structure of power. Like nearly everyone, student, professional, intellectual, worker or peasant, many of these reformers saw the need to do at least something about corruption. More radical reformers – and most of the students in Tiananmen Square – added political democracy to their demands. They meant, first and foremost, civil rights and liberties: free speech, freedom to publish, acknowledgment of free associations. Beyond this, elections and other forms of participation were possibilities desired by some with varying degrees of urgency. Having a government truly interested in the will of the people, and willing to listen to the views and needs of the people (especially as interpreted by intellectuals) was a more basic desire.

All of these goals motivated student protesters. But they are not adequate to explain the depth of emotions in the Square, or the capacity of students to identify with the Chinese nation. Behind or beyond these various practical goals was a concern for just what it could mean to be Chinese as the 21st century approached. This was a compelling question of personal identity which was not solved adequately by pursuit of Westernization any more than by appeal to traditional Chinese culture. This question linked the individual to the social in ways few could articulate explicitly. But it is important that all the expressive individualism of youth in the 1980s was not *just* selfishness (though goodness knows it was often that as well). It was also an attempt to rethink identity and options for human action. Students could turn from apparent selfishness to self-sacrifice partly because external conditions changed, but also because their own discourse even at its most individualistic was not just about themselves but about China.³⁴

The students who protested in Tiananmen Square were young or budding intellectuals. They saw China's problems through lenses which focused attention on their own role. But they were concerned with China's fate, and saw the existing government policies as denying them not only privileges and income, but a proper chance to contribute to meeting the country's challenges. Technological improvements and economic reforms certainly required intellectual expertise and students felt that the government did not invest enough in preparing them or paying them for this role. More basically, democracy required a public discourse, and students saw intellectuals as playing the most central role in this arena, as watchdogs for government accountability, proposers of policies, interpreters of the demands and desires of more inarticulate masses. Finally, the sense that China was wracked not just by material underdevelopment but by cultural crisis seemed more than anything else to call for contributions which intellectuals alone could make.

NOTES

1. See Calhoun (1989a, b, c, d) for sketches toward that goal.
2. The various Western media must have reported a thousand times that the Chinese students had only a vague understanding of democracy, or even that they did not know what it really was (as though "we" do). I once coached a Chinese student into turning the tables, asking a Western

reporter what she meant by democracy. She could only stammer something about "well, elections, you know." On other occasions students were quite prepared to discuss the relative merits of Jeffersonian, Tocquevillian and Rousseauian notions. This is not to say that most students had a clearly developed or theoretically sophisticated notion of democracy; they did not. But it is in the nature of democracy that the term itself is open to some contest and usage is not simply to be judged as accurate or inaccurate.

3. I conducted a survey of students participating in the occupation of Tiananmen Square in late May. Various civil liberties and an end to corruption were the most often indicated meanings and goals.

4. On the shifting fortunes of intellectuals, see Goldman, 1981; Shapiro and Heng, 1986; Spence, 1981; Thurston, 1987; White and Cheng, 1988.

5. Schwarcz (1988: 38) sees Chen Duxiu as the first to make the argument for autonomy; significantly he opposed autonomy to patriotism.

6. "For a brief time, China was hospitable to virtually all brands of Western thought: liberalism, pragmatism, vitalism, anarchism, socialism, romanticism, idealism, and nihilism each found a sympathetic and indeed enthusiastic audience" (Tu, 1987: 79). Schwarcz's (1986) account, one of the strongest in English, is marred by its tendency to assimilate early twentieth century Chinese reformers to an overly simple, monolithic rather than internally contested, view of the European Enlightenment.

7. These could go hand-in-hand, but Chinese intellectuals often found themselves painfully split in the attempt to reconcile the evident material power of Western culture – e.g. science – with what they felt to be its spiritual poverty by contrast to the Chinese culture it challenged. As Tu Wei-ming summarizes the agony of Wang Guowei:

The painful recognition that the culture of the past, with its richly textured history, philosophical insight, aesthetic sensibility, and literary taste could not be entrusted with the urgent task of "saving the nation," that Western ideas of science and democracy, functionally necessary for making China wealthy and powerful, did not in fact move the heart or inspire the soul, made many a Chinese intellectual both emotionally frustrated and intellectually unfulfilled. (1987:81)

8. There is a substantial, but still not adequate, literature on the collective history of Chinese intellectuals during this period. See, among many, Chang, 1987; Gasster, 1969; Grieder, 1981; Li and Schwarcz, 1983–4 (this gives a brief English summary of some of Li's major work in Chinese); Rankin, 1971; and Schwarcz, 1986.

9. On the shifting fortunes of intellectuals, see Goldman, 1981; Shapiro and Heng, 1986; Spence, 1981; Thurston, 1987; White and Cheng, 1988.

10. Translated and published in *Issues and Studies*, vol. 25 No. 3, March 1989, p. 1. Chang comments that this letter "marks the first time since the founding of the Chinese Communist regime that mainland intellectuals have dared to publicly raise their collective voice despite the possibility that they might be subjected to persecution as a result. It signifies a growing independent political activity among mainland intellectuals" (1989: 1). Individuals had previously dissented, of course, and sometimes paid a high price for it, but the collective sponsorship of this letter is noteworthy. It is worth noting also that the letter was signed by intellectuals of all three of China's main generations, "old, middle aged and young."

11. Though analytic orientations differ substantially, Cheek, 1988; Goldman, 1987; Goldman, Cheek and Hamrin, 1987; Link, 1986; Schell, 1989; Su, 1988; and Suttmeier, 1987; all fill in parts of the general picture of Chinese intellectuals in this period. Useful selections are translated in Barmé and Minford, 1988.

12. In 1988, perhaps the most remarkable instance of this was the television series *He Shang* (*Yellow River Elegy*; see Wakeman, 1988; Calhoun, 1989d). This was a stylish meditation on Chinese culture organized around a montage of footage on the Yellow River. Instead of praising the Yellow River as the cradle of Chinese civilization, the film criticized its frequent floods and the soil erosion which gave it its color. Implicitly, Chinese culture was shown to be flawed at its roots and in need of radical reform. It was visually likened to primitive Africa and such "dead" cultures as that of ancient Egypt. Glamorous shots of skyscrapers represented the attractions of the West, and a recurring motif was the muddy Yellow River flowing into the bright blue sea. This was an even more radical – and remarkably popular – critique than the series of recent films, including most notably *Red Sorghum* and *Yellow Earth* which had presented implicit or explicit critiques of either the Cultural

Revolution or more general and ongoing aspects of the Chinese system. The authors of *He Shang* were prominent younger to early middle aged intellectuals.

13. And at the same time that, for convenience, we may see the intellectual field organized into the traditional categories of natural scientists, social scientists and literary intellectuals, we must realize that this draws on folk constructs which may misrepresent much of the actual organization. See, for comparison, Pierre Bourdieu's (1987) arguments about the need to break with such folk categorizations of the French academic field, and with the self-interestedness of most of the analysts who deploy them about their own academic field.

14. The best known effort in this area, the "Enlightenment Cafe," was a project especially of the more radical Westernizers. Its main protagonists were literary intellectuals, but it included Fang Lizhi among its sponsors and somewhat cross-cut occupational categories.

15. This was distinctive in a discourse where nationalism played a major role. Fang spoke out against nationalism as a guiding force in Chinese reform, arguing that "patriotism should not be our top priority," and that feelings of national pride were apt to block the way to progress. Liu Binyan and others objected, arguing that patriotism was still one of China's most precious resources (Link, 1989: 40). On this point, Liu seems to come closer to sensing where the strength of feeling motivating radical protest came from in 1989.

16. Elsewhere, Fang made a similar argument for "white-collar workers," explicitly appropriating that Western term, but changing its connotation substantially: "By white-collar workers, we refer to people who have attained a comparatively high cultural level and are well-versed in art, knowledge and technology" (1987: 129). On the other hand, in a later speech, Fang made the distinction (relatively rare in China) between narrow expertise and broader social consciousness – a distinction actually closer to the typical claims of the literary intellectuals, "[Westerners] believe those who know nothing but their own professions are not intellectuals but technicians or experts, and they think that intellectuals must bear some social responsibility. I think we as intellectuals should also have such a belief, because at least we still want to see China as a winner in the fight for its survival instead of a loser to be phased out by human history" (1988d: 101–2). The way scientific and technological advance has made intellectuals (in the broad Chinese sense) the leading force in society is a theme Fang repeats in many speeches; it is quoted in the text here from an interview he gave to Dai Qing (a well known critical intellectual, see below). That the interview was published in the government-run *Beijing Review* should remind us that Fang's views were not isolated, and not without some support in at least the reform branches of the communist party. This interview was published only a month before Fang was relieved of his post as Vice-President of the Chinese University of Science and Technology and expelled from the CCP. In several speeches, Fang suggested that a good Marxist account could be given for why intellectuals were the most advanced class (e.g. 1987: 128–9); this obviously did not make his arguments substantially more appealing to the authorities.

17. One wall poster I saw during the 1989 student protest saw this as the essential contribution of Western thought to the discourse; after a listing of more authoritarian views from Chinese tradition and the communist party, it concluded simply:

Believe in human rights

– foreigner

18. "Democracy has a very clear definition, which is different from just relaxing a little bit here and there in a controlled society. What democracy means is the basic rights of the people, or human rights" (1988c: 89).

19. "The government's operation depends on the taxes paid by the people. The government uses such money to handle all its administrative operations. Then, the government does not give us our educational opportunities; we ourselves pay for them" (1987: 139). "We should recognize that it is our basic right as citizens to be educated. Education is not an opportunity given to us by others. That is a feudal conception." (1988b: 84)

20. I am not fluent in Chinese. By way of caveat about the significance of working from texts in translation, let me give another published version of most of the passage just quoted:

My stand is clear: I have the right to criticize you, and you can respond if you don't think I am right. Democracy does not mean to impose someone's views on others. It means that people can express their views. That's why I say now it's time for us to be afraid of no one. Although we can't call it democracy yet, it has at least shown some signs that may lead us in that direction. To that extent I would say I have fulfilled my social responsibility. (1988b: 80)

Chinese lends itself to – virtually requires – non-literal translations on many occasions. The point about an “interchanging discussion method” is important, though. This is one of the major rhetorical shifts which accompanied (and helped to pave the way for) the student protests of 1989. See Lee and Lee (1989).

21. Fang’s claims about the West are often jarring, as in the exaggeration just quoted. Elsewhere, he reports in several speeches, for example, how impressed he was to receive letters from the congressman representing the Princeton district while he was in New Jersey.

In a word, they were telling me their political positions on those issues. They sent me the report, even though I was there only temporarily as a nonresident, to let me know what and how they were doing, and to show respect for anyone who lives in their constituent state. They want to know if you agree or disagree with their positions so that they will know how to take their stand next time. (1988c: 90).

Of course, the contrast with China *is* striking, yet Fang is either naive or disingenuous in suggesting that this was a personal communication and that congressional letters to constituents really lead to a close citizens’ control over their representatives.

22. As Richard Kraus sums up, perhaps a bit harshly, “I find that Fang is less an advocate for democracy than a spokesman for a group of intellectuals who are resentful that they do not have greater privileges in China today” (1989: 295). Of course, Fang has a very high view of these intellectuals:

Generally speaking, people, who have internalized the elements of civilization and possess knowledge, have hearts which are relatively noble, their mode of thought is invariably scientific and they therefore have a high sense of social responsibility or even self-sacrifice. . . . Their point of departure is not their personal interests, but social progress. (1986: 17)

23. Among other contributions, Su encouraged a return to serious study of Marx’s original texts, as distinct from the Soviet-style summaries reflecting the party positions of any particular moment (see Su, 1988).

24. Now in exile, Yan has emerged as a key leader of the democratic movement among the Chinese diaspora, working closely with Wu’erkaixi. Wan Runnan, General Manager of the Stone Computer Corporation (China’s largest private company) and Cao Shiyuan, President of the Stone Corporation’s Institute of Social Development (a remarkable private think tank) also fit into this group, as did a great many of China’s economists. The last was arrested after the June massacre and remains in prison.

25. Very few social scientists of any note actually spoke out against radical reform. Certain conservatives in the government did try to promote the work of He Xin, a youngish but prolific researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences precisely because he was critical of radical reform; after June 4, he became even more visible, but not more popular or typical.

26. Many of the social scientists, not unlike Fang Lizhi and natural scientists, were concerned not just with using Western ideas or procedures in practical affairs, but with opening up a joint academic-professional discourse with their Western colleagues. They edited series of works in translation, they traveled to the U.S. and other Western countries, they brought “foreign experts” to their Chinese institutions. For many of these scholars, links to overseas Chinese academics were important. Several pressed for closer ties to social scientists working in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Various periodicals supported these efforts, including *Overseas Chinese Voice (Hai Nei Wai)*, published in the U.S.; *Jiuzhou*, published in Hong Kong; and *Intellectuals (Zhishifenzi)*, published initially in the U.S. with Liang Heng as editor, then transferred to mainland China under Liang Congjie (no relation to Liang Heng, but a descendant of Liang Qichao), then brought back to the U.S. after June 4. Each of these magazines published articles by Chinese scholars from the mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong the U.S. and elsewhere; overseas PRC students were particularly prominent in the first and last. In the latter case, Chinese scholars did not always advocate “wholesale Westernization.” Many were instead seeking an alternative “Chinese path,” which would draw on certain elements of Western learning, but also rediscover and revitalize resources in traditional Chinese culture.

27. Two other particularly influential members of this grouping were Ge Yang, editor of *New Observations*, and Liu Xiaobo, a popular Beijing Normal University lecturer who was among the intellectuals who began a hunger strike near the end of the occupation of Tiananmen Square in May.

28. Yet this is not altogether unique to China. Writing in the vernacular, rather than in Latin, was one of the crucial developments which paved the way for the European Enlightenment; it is worth reminding ourselves that a figure as modern as Hobbes was a pioneer in this regard. And in the European Enlightenment, and the development of modern consciousness more generally, literature played a central role. Similarly, in nationalist and other radical movements throughout the Third World, literary production may be *the* central means by which elite intellectual ideas are circulated and introduced into broader discussions.

29. The 1978–80 “democracy wall” protests were the most important of the previous popular struggles of the reform era. They were mounted largely by intellectually alert young workers and veterans of the Cultural Revolution, including most famously Wei Jingsheng, Wang Xizhe and Xu Wenli. One dimension of their protest was a call for China to live up to some of the democratic ideals which had been promulgated in the early years of the Cultural Revolution itself, but which seemed betrayed by both the later history of the Cultural Revolution and successor regimes.

30. Barmé and Minford (1988: 236). Bei Dao’s poetry was only occasionally political, though its iconoclastic individualism made it nearly always fairly radical and moving to young people. Though he was not personally flamboyant in the same way, and his style is not the same, his artistic stance is in some ways reminiscent of Xu Zhimo’s seventy years before.

31. The story is translated in Barmé and Minford, and the criticism reprinted on p. 29. The critic goes on to suggest that in this story Liu “has revealed that he lacks a firm basis in life, and that he is out of step with the world around him.”

32. Nonetheless, Liu can be self-promoting in his own way. His rhetoric is that of “a simple writer,” but his message is that he has struggled against mighty odds to make things right. Many younger Chinese intellectuals mistrust him as someone ultimately still too close to the party, one who believes in the same sort of monological truth that the party promotes, albeit different in particulars.

33. As so often, 1989 directly echoed 1919. In the first article to speak of the May 4th protest as a “movement,” Luo Jialun wrote, on May 26th 1919:

This movement shows the spirit of sacrifice of the students. Chinese students used to be eloquent in speech and extravagant in writing, but whenever they had to act, they would be overly cautious. . . . This time, and only this time, they struggled barehanded with the forces of reaction. . . . The students’ defiant spirit overcame the lethargy of society. Their spirit of autonomy (*zìjue*) can never be wiped out again. This is the spirit which will be needed for China to be reborn. (quoted in Schwarcz, 1986: 22)

34. I do not want to imply that I support the radical individualism of many Chinese students; I found myself frequently in arguments on this score while in Beijing. I think the individualism they adopted rather uncritically from the West, and/or built on indigenous foundations, is a very problematic ideology, not least of all because it reproduces rather than overcomes the dualism of individual and society. What I want to stress is that however problematic the rhetoric, the concern was still substantially social. This individualism led in many cases to a focus on negative liberty to the exclusion of positive; it could sound very much like the “possessive individualism” of the West, and perhaps it could have ended up there. But the individualism did not rest on Western social foundations; it was a position which gained its definition in struggle with others; and it was crucially valorized by the crisis in Chinese culture which undermined all more manifestly social definitions of self. A version of this problem had existed in 1919. Far from solving the problem, the communist regime exacerbated it, and in the process discredited Marxism so that it could not act as a viable counterbalance to Western individualism. The protest movement itself offered nobler possibilities for personal identity, at least for a time but I think also in ways permanently transformative for some participants.

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