# 5 Reviving reform
## Correcting revolutionary errors (1976–1995)


Fig. 5. Raising a banner which reads "Lift Martial Law and Protect the Capital," journalists from the Communist Party's official newspaper, *People's Daily*, march with a copy of the masthead of their paper in Beijing, May 22, 1989

*Wang Ruoshui begged to differ with his colleagues at a dinner in a Fuzhou hotel on the southeast coast in May 1986. They were there to honor the memory of Deng Tuo, a mentor to Wang and several other Party intellectuals and journalists present, including Hu Jiwei, a leader now in the National People's Congress, and Li Zhuang, current editor of* People's Daily. *The disagreement was over who should be counted as an intellectual. A foreign scholar had proposed a "value-neutral" definition that would include Deng*

*Tuo but also his tormentors in the Cultural Revolution, such as the radical Zhang Chunqiao. Hu Jiwei demurred: "How can we put a villain like Zhang in the same category as Old Deng?" Wang disagreed, citing the norms of international social science. While the conversation amongst old comrades was congenial, his colleagues were not convinced. For this generation of establishment intellectuals the first job was to reform the Party so the political turmoil that had dragged them down in the Cultural Revolution could never happen again. Bringing back the best men and women of their generation from the "old regime" was their first act.*

*Six months later Fang Lizhi, reinstated at the University of Science and Technology now as a vice chancellor, was in Shanghai chatting with students from Jiaotong University. They had come to hear his lecture on democracy and the responsibility of intellectuals. They knew Fang advocated democracy on the Western model. They were worried, wasn't capitalism bad? "Actually," replied Fang, "we're finding that many of our old beliefs about capitalism no longer apply." He invoked the experience of a colleague currently studying in Sweden who took to reading Lenin's work on corruption and decline of imperialism. In all honesty, concluded Fang, he had to wonder, which system is in decline today? He called on the students to help China change and make their universities the vanguard of democratization by embracing the "spirit of science, democracy, creativity, and independence." The model for democracy, Fang concluded, was science.*

The Party leadership set the reform agenda. Zhang Chunqiao, Jiang Qing, and the radical leadership were ousted shortly after Mao's death; the Party set about self-healing through rehabilitation of cadres who had been purged in the Cultural Revolution, and this included intellectual cadres. Fang Lizhi returned to his university; Yue Daiyun worried about the fate of her husband, Tang Yijie, who had served in the writing group of the disgraced radical leaders. At the same time, the society that had been both strictly repressed under ubiquitous Party "leadership" and left to the depredations of social violence and a resurgence of local toughs explored what the end of forced political campaigns might look like. Everyone (bar a few radicals) was glad to see the end of the Cultural Revolution, but after that interests diverged. Party leaders wanted to "go back" to the pre-Cultural Revolution order, with modifications based on experience. The floodgates of intellectual reform were opened, with scathing accounts of the Cultural Revolution and renewed criticisms of Chinese cultural limitations. Wang Ruoshui, now an editor at *People's Daily*, broached the unnameable: the alienation of the socialist state from the people. Others joined in. Fang Lizhi re-emerged as a strident advocate of democracy and professional

autonomy. Calls for even greater political reform percolated up through a series of important think tanks advising top leaders. Universities revived, some scholars were able to travel abroad, and a small cohort of foreign students returned to China. Criticism began to get close to the bone with "scar literature" denunciations of the Cultural Revolution that strayed from the officially designated culprits (Jiang Qing, et al.), implying something was wrong with the CCP. All this came to a head in the demonstrations of spring 1989 and the repression of June 4. It would be a trauma for all concerned—the protesters, the intellectuals, the Party, and the Western nations that were appalled and imposed sanctions on China. In the photo above, the alienation of the Party's own propagandists is clear—editors of *People's Daily* were demonstrating in support of the students and against the recent Party declaration of martial law (Wang Ruoshui is holding the banner, sixth figure from the left). Tiananmen was a crisis for the Party and the intellectuals. Nonetheless, Deng Xiaoping, who had called in the tanks on Tiananmen in 1989, would go to Shenzhen in southern China in 1992 to declare that economic reform and opening to the world are here to stay; so, too, he insisted, is the CCP. Throughout, China's working people showed their face as never before, reflected in the spontaneous demonstrations by Beijing workers in support of the students in 1989. The people—the object of a century of Chinese intellectual activism since Liang Qichao's call for new citizens, Liang Shuming's invocation of noble village yeomen, or Cultural Revolution propaganda on stalwart revolutionaries—began to appear in their own right and it was no longer clear in the 1990s if intellectuals could speak on their behalf.

## Voices from the late 1970s and the 1980s

### WEI JINGSHENG (b. 1950): "THE FIFTH MODERNIZATION" (1978)

What is true democracy? It is when people, acting on their own will, have the right to choose representatives to manage affairs on the people's behalf and in accordance with the interests of the people. This alone can be called democracy. Furthermore, the people must have the power to replace these representatives at any time in order to keep them from abusing their power to oppress the people. Is this actually possible? The citizens of Europe and the United States enjoy precisely this kind of democracy and can run people like Nixon, de Gaulle, and Tanaka out of office when they wish and can even reinstate them if they so desire. No one can interfere with their democratic rights. In China, however, if a person even comments on the "great helmsman" or the "Great Man peerless in history," Mao Zedong, who is already dead, the mighty prison gates and all kinds of unimaginable misfortunes await him. If we compare the socialist system

(*cont.*)

of "democratic centralism" with the "exploiting class democracy" of capitalism, the difference is as clear as night and day.[1]

### JIN GUANTAO (b 1947): *BEHIND THE PHENOMENA OF HISTORY* (1983)

Why has Chinese feudalism persisted for more than two thousand years?

This is an endlessly perplexing question, and one which has become all the more pressing at this time of renewed interest in Chinese history and of intense soul-searching at a time when China stands once more at the crossroads of history.

In 1973 our group of young intellectuals began probing into the causes for the perpetuation of Chinese feudalism. Previous studies of Chinese history and society were all based on single-factor analysis. Some were extremely plausible and commendable. But single-factor analysis at best offered a static, partial truth, only exposing a few isolated bones of the buried dragon. History is a living whole. Historical facts are interrelated and interact. The key lies in finding a methodology which can penetrate and illuminate the living wholeness of history, integrating economics, politics and ideology.

We were excited to discover cybernetics, information theory and systems theory . . .[2]

### STATEMENT BY STUDENT HUNGER STRIKERS ON TIANANMEN SQUARE, MAY 13, 1989

We commence our hunger strike in the lovely May sunshine. In the full bloom of youth, however, we leave beautiful things behind, but with great reluctance.

Yet the condition of our country is one of rampant inflation, economic speculation by officials, extreme authoritarian rule, serious bureaucratic corruption, a drain of products and people to other countries, social confusion, and an increase in the number of criminal acts. It is a crucial moment for the country and its people. All compatriots with a conscience, please heed our call:

The country is our country.
The people are our people.
If we do not cry out, who will?
If we do not take action, who will? . . .[3]

[1] This is from the text of the "big-character poster" Wei Jingsheng posted on Beijing's Democracy Wall, December 5, 1978, in Wei Jingsheng, *The Courage to Stand Alone*, trans. Kristina M. Torgeson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998).

[2] Jin Guantao, *Zai lishi biaoxiang de beihou* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1983), trans. in Geremie Barmé and John Minford, eds., *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1989), p. 130.

[3] Taken from Mok Chiu Yu and J. Frank Harrison, eds., *Voices from Tiananmen Square: Beijing Spring and the Democracy Movement* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1990), pp. 95–6.

## The ideological moment: reforming the revolution

The Cultural Revolution was shattering not only to intellectuals in China, but also to the Party leadership. As soon as the radical leadership was purged in October 1976, the process of undoing the excesses of Mao's last revolutions, while not quite admitting it, began in earnest. A new ideological moment emerged for Party leaders and intellectuals alike with a new key question: *how to reform China's socialist system* so that, first, the Cultural Revolution could never happen again and, second, the Party and socialism could avoid the sclerosis of state socialism in the Soviet Union and bring the prosperity and cultural richness that seemed so apparent in Japan, America, and Europe. It was clear that China was far behind the West. Debates focused on *reform*: what to reform? How to reform? How much reform was enough?

In 1974 Li Yizhe had voiced something of the demands of an angry youth wanting "socialist democracy" and Deng Xiaoping had returned to the top leadership to restore Party order. Now older scholars returned to public life and younger ones started their careers in the revived university system. This brought forth a resurgence of the May Fourth critique of the faults of Chinese culture. Throughout the next years one factor dominated the public role of China's thinkers and writers—the astonishing resilience of the intellectual cadre role. While signs of professional autonomy emerged and a few notable intellectuals purposively avoided becoming entangled with the party-state, most of China's intellectuals, including the students of the famous Tiananmen demonstrations of 1989, operated within both the assumptions of the broadly Marxist ideology and the expectations of cadre service—they simply argued for a greater or lesser change in the terms of engagement, mostly pushing for more individual autonomy and protection from arbitrary political repression. They did this for very sensible reasons: the Party dominated society in general and the lives of intellectuals in particular. The directed public sphere of the propaganda state still controlled all effective avenues of public life. As well, the work unit system which housed, fed, and cared for employees—as well as the state allocation of jobs for new graduates—was still in effect.

We turn first to the Party faithful. The leadership set about reinstating Leninist norms and rehabilitating loyal cadres purged over previous decades. Under these conditions, reformist Party intellectuals sought to address deeper causes for the excesses of Mao's later revolutions. This was the "humanistic Marxism" of Wang Ruoshui and other Party theorists leading to the early 1980s debates on alienation under socialism. Reformist Party journalists like Liu Binyan, one of the rehabilitated, used

"reportage" stories in the press to document the recent abuses of the Cultural Revolution and to advocate Party reforms.

Amongst the establishment intellectuals who pushed reform the furthest were survivors of the Cultural Revolution who wanted democratization of the Party now, and of the entire country as soon as possible. Fang Lizhi, the astrophysicist we saw struggling with ideological control of science, became one of the earliest and most articulate speakers for democratization from the ranks of the establishment. Academics like Li Zehou used the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and even classical Chinese aesthetics to break the monopoly of Marxist–Leninist ideology. In literature, "scar" literature exposed the outrages of the Cultural Revolution on an individual level. Older writers like Wang Ruowang carried on the critique of Party excess where Wang Shiwei and Ding Ling had left off. Writers of the 1950s, also purged and rehabilitated, chimed in with stronger stuff: Bai Hua's film script, *Bitter Love*, in 1981 outraged Party elders and thrilled rank-and-file survivors. By 1989 parts of the Party establishment had gone rogue. Qin Benli, editor of Shanghai's *World Economic Herald* and responsible for vetting material, began to publish news not cleared by the higher authorities.

The newest generation of youth, coming into university in 1978, and popular culture, now somewhat freed from total direction by the Party, created a third group of voices. Political agitation between 1979 and 1981 flowered but was quickly suppressed. The 1978–9 Democracy Wall movement and related publications in Beijing, and the first tentative public elections in 1980 for some local district People's Congress seats in Beijing, both came to an early end. Steering clear of overt politics, most young intellectuals let loose a "culture craze" in the mid-1980s that sought to explore and explain the cultural roots of China's problems. They did this through a series of books and through television and film, most notably the controversial 1988 television series *River Elegy* and new films that explored the dark side of Chinese history, and through new fiction that retold twentieth-century Chinese history from the perspective of individual experience and social tragedy. By the early 1990s, and despite the crackdown on Tiananmen, it was clear that these voices were losing interest in Party-led reform; they wanted something more.

## From Party revival to market socialism

The post-Mao reforms can be viewed in two periods, before and after the trauma of Tiananmen in 1989 and the infamous June 4 massacre of students and demonstrators. Before was a time of hopeful, even idealistic, reform. Political reform was in the air and establishment intellectuals

led the debates. After Tiananmen was a time of serious economic reform but no longer were there grand hopes among intellectuals. Many then instead turned to the new universities and professional identities. Most of China's establishment intellectuals would become disestablished through the 1990s.

The Chinese Communist Party's first twenty years of reform, from the 1970s to the early 1990s, shaped the political world in which China's intellectuals operated. The CCP's initial reform policies were announced at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978. The Party and its top institutions—the Party Congress, the Plenums of its Central Committee, its Politburo and Standing Committee—set government policy in China. The Third Plenum set Deng Xiaoping's reform goals. First, it made economic modernization the central goal of Party work. Second, it began to address the wounds of the Cultural Revolution by reversing verdicts on Party cadres who had been purged by Mao. Third, the plenum approved experimentation with market forces, beginning the transformation of the planned economy. The slogans from that time emphasized "practice"—"practice is the sole criterion of truth"—and "liberation of thought," and most importantly, "seek truth from facts." Reform policies were implemented over the next few years in a series of administrative changes designed to decentralize power to the provinces; "open" China to the world and to the market; and to extricate the CCP from daily management of farming, factories, and business.

The issue of democracy became one of the first challenges to the leadership, rising up from the unanticipated consequences of reform. In 1978 the "Democracy Wall" in Beijing caught worldwide attention. Could "Communist China" be going democratic already? For some heady weeks in the fall of 1978 Beijing residents could stroll down to the Xidan district and read astonishing posters pasted on this wall that talked about the (until recently) unmentionable: the abuses of the Cultural Revolution. These were the same "big-character posters" that Red Guards had used in the Cultural Revolution to denounce "capitalist-roaders" and "Soviet revisionists" inside the Party, but now this form of Maoist "great democracy" was turned on the abuses and suffering of the Cultural Revolution and pointedly called upon the CCP to make amends. The Party had announced the revival of the Four Modernizations in the economy. "Democracy," declared a wall poster by an electrician at the Beijing Zoo, Wei Jingsheng (b. 1950), "is the *fifth* modernization!" China seemed, in the words of one international journalist, to be "coming alive."[4]

[4] Roger Garside, *Coming Alive: China after Mao* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981).

During his visit to the US in early 1979 to celebrate recognition of China by the world's dominant economy and power, Deng Xiaoping let the press wonder about Democracy Wall. Domestically, the revelations of abuses of power by the radical leadership also served to discredit the remaining leaders in the CCP who were closely associated with the Cultural Revolution and who were standing in the way of Deng's reforms. America had recognized China at the end of 1978. By March 1979 the leaders of Democracy Wall (most notably Wei Jingsheng) were arrested. Public advocacy of political democracy of the liberal or parliamentary sort came to an end then, as the Four Cardinal Principles announced by Deng Xiaoping in March 1979 (which insisted that all public acts should uphold socialism and support Party leadership) became the new law.[5] It became clear from this example that Deng Xiaoping's tolerance of political free speech was tactical rather than substantive. Like Zhao Ziyang's toleration of the Li Yizhe group in Guangzhou in 1974, the deal was short-lived and did not end well for the intellectuals involved. In October 1979 Wei Jingsheng was tried and imprisoned. In winter 1979, Democracy Wall was unceremoniously moved to a small park in western Beijing and those who wished to put up posters had to register their name and address with the authorities. It became clear that the Party could and would shut down inconvenient public speech or assembly, with force. Intellectual agitation for change moved to the safer channels of the Party press, think tanks, and universities.

Resistance to reform inside the Party coalesced around a leadership fight against Deng's presumed successor, General Secretary Hu Yaobang. Demonstrations by students in December 1986, which Hu failed to suppress with sufficient vigor, frightened the Party elite and provided the opportunity to eclipse Hu Yaobang in January 1987 and to slow down reform. This success for the Party traditionalists also saw the public "Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization" campaign that, amongst other things, expelled Liu Binyan, Fang Lizhi, and Wang Ruowang. Hu Yaobang was criticized and purged. However, unlike the practice of earlier years, Hu was not demonized, humiliated, and imprisoned (or killed). In fact, he maintained his Party membership and comfortable living situation, but he was politically neutralized. In his stead, Deng Xiaoping moved the

[5] For an account of Wei Jingsheng's efforts that places him in a narrative that emphasizes dissidents and democrats in China, see John Gittings, *The Changing Face of China: From Mao to Market* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 140–63. The *sige jiben yuanze* are still in force in China today: keep to the socialist road, uphold the people's democratic dictatorship, uphold the leadership of the Communist Party, and uphold Mao Zedong Thought and Marxism–Leninism. See He, *Dictionary*, p. 435.

premier, Zhao Ziyang, to become the new Party leader (general secretary). The tensions between Party traditionalists and Party reformers did not lessen; they increased. While Zhao Ziyang was a reformer, his successor as premier (at the top of the NPC and state government structure) was Li Peng, a Party conservative. Deng Xiaoping was playing his balancing act.

The compromise did not hold, mostly because the social consequences of reform sharpened. On the one hand, Party traditionalists were increasingly worried that the Party was losing control of changes in society. Ideology and what intellectuals wrote mattered to leaders such as Party elder Peng Zhen and Propaganda Department director Deng Liqun. And they did not like what they saw, nor what they heard from China's intellectuals. Throughout the 1980s the Party leadership would struggle and the intellectuals would debate. Resentment among the general public turned to outrage in the face of inflation that cut into the daily lives of urban residents who still lived on fixed work unit (*danwei*) incomes. The events of 1989, centering on the Tiananmen demonstrations and their violent repression, divide our story, but not this ideological moment. The question in 1992 remained the same: how to reform socialism?

## Liu Binyan and Wang Ruoshui: reforming propaganda and theory

Propaganda and theory are two of the mainstays of the propaganda state. In the post-Mao period, establishment intellectuals set out to reform these basic tools of Party rule. Liu Binyan (1925–2005) was an establishment intellectual for whom the experience of the Anti-Rightist Movement and the Cultural Revolution demanded that he push Party reform further than simply as a return to the status quo of the early 1960s. Liu's biography from 1957 parallels the lives of many other Party intellectuals. He spoke up in the Hundred Flowers Movement, publishing a notable critique of Party journalism, "The Inside Story of Our Paper"; was made a Rightist; and spent most of the next two decades in labor camps. Rehabilitated in 1978, Liu was readmitted to the Party. Like Yue Daiyun, Liu still believed. But he also believed that the Party needed to make big changes. His most famous writing in China is his 1979 reportage (*baogaowenxue*)—a genre that combines investigative reporting and imaginative narration. He published "People or Monsters?" as a novella-length report on local corruption in Heilongjiang province. It recounts the results of his interviews, trolling through county archives, piecing together information. The story of Wang Shouxin, a corrupt local official

in a distant county of that northeastern province, riveted readers around China because Liu Binyan had put into print, and in a major establishment journal, *People's Literature*, what they all recognized from their own experience. The power of "People or Monsters?" lay in putting their experience of Cultural Revolution corruption in black and white. One of Liu's observations became famous nationwide: "The Communist Party regulated everything, but would not regulate the Communist Party."[6]

Liu Binyan made his clarion call for reform in 1979 at the Fourth Congress of Chinese Literature and Artists in Beijing. This state-run national association of writers and artists reminds us that writers like Liu Binyan were intellectual cadres. Liu sought to address the need for reform through his professional work, in this case propaganda and journalism.[7] Liu's speech was a rousing call to criticize the Party to make it better serve the people. His title is "Listen Carefully to the Voice of the People." This speech is, indeed, emblematic of Chinese intellectuals' engagement with Marxism and the Party because so many of Liu's themes echo those of the establishment intellectuals we have met in our story so far. Liu reflects the success of Mao's efforts to get intellectuals back into touch with the common people. "Fate brought us into intimate contact with the lowest levels of the laboring masses; our joys and worries became for a time the same as their own. Our hopes were no different from theirs." And yet what Liu draws from going deeply among the masses sounds more like Wang Shiwei's revolutionary artist: "This experience allowed us to see, to hear, and to feel for ourselves things that others have been unable to see, hear, or feel."[8] Yet Liu is confident that if writers had been allowed to speak the truth of their experiences "they would have helped the Party to see its mistakes while there was still time to make changes."

The problem, Liu declares, is that writers have not, in general, been permitted to write freely. The Gang of Four carries the blame for muzzling writers, but, like Li Yizhe, Liu notes that the Gang's "residual perniciousness" persists; "it has its social base." The problem is in the Party and it is not only "evil" players like the Gang of Four. Too many comrades, says Liu, fall into protecting bad people. "Superficially they are all Communist Party members or Party cadres; but every action they take serves only their vested interests and comes only from their own habits of thought." This brings to mind Liu's opposite (politically),

[6] Liu Binyan, "People or Monsters?", in Liu Binyan, *People or Monsters? and Other Stories and Reportage from China after Mao* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 43.

[7] We saw in Chapter 3 that Liu's mentor, Deng Tuo, spelled out the Party approach to journalism as a tool of an integrated propaganda program of the Party.

[8] Liu Binyan, "Listen Carefully to the Voice of the People," in *People or Monsters?*, p. 2; later quotes from pp. 4, 109.

Zhang Chunqiao, who had declared during Mao's revolutions that many cadres born and raised under the Party were really bourgeois Rightists. The difference, of course, is the content: Liu sees material corruption, while Zhang saw ideological heresy, but both admit that Party membership is no sure guarantee of good behavior. Zhang promoted Mao Zedong Thought, and Liu offers investigative journalism.

The reform journalism that Liu Binyan advocated in turn brings to mind Deng Tuo's ideal for Party journalism in 1937: as a guide to the people. "Supply them with scripts," says Liu. "But before we provide answers, we first must learn. We must understand more about social life than the average person does." To do this Liu re-embraces the faith of Chinese intellectuals across the twentieth century: to speak for the people. "Our readers," Liu affirms, "need writers who will serve as speakers for the people, writers who will answer their questions and express their demands by confronting the major issues of the day." This sounds very much like investigative reporting in Europe or America, but a key difference is the final audience. Since power resides in the Party and not the electorate, the purpose of Liu's work, of these scripts for the people, is to influence the Party. "Without the supervision of the people, a good person will turn bad," Liu declares, "and an honest official will turn corrupt." In 1979, with Deng Xiaoping promising "openness and reform," Liu Binyan dared to hope that a reformed Party journalism could play this regulatory role.

We met Wang Ruoshui earlier as a radical student in the 1940s and a rising leftist who caught Mao's eye in the 1960s. Wang became an intellectual cadre in the Communist system. He had prospered during the early years of the PRC and survived the Cultural Revolution. Wang Ruoshui's role in our story is his work in the post-Mao period. He was a government servant and a teacher of the people in the Communist system. He was not a fiction writer like Ding Ling, but a theorist, more in the mold of his mentor at *People's Daily*, Deng Tuo. He represents the efforts of establishment intellectuals, or intellectual cadres, to reform Maoism, to correct the errors of Mao's policies from the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. As a guilty member of the generation that partially supported and partially endured the Cultural Revolution, Wang was among those who sought to set things right in the years after Mao died. By the early 1980s, Wang was famous as the voice for "socialist humanism."

Wang offered his suggestions not in big-character posters on Beijing's streets but in the establishment media of the Party—*People's Daily* and *Guangming Daily*, as well as Party theory journals. These orthodox channels frightened the Party much less than public posters. Indeed, various Party leaders hurried to gather together their own think tanks

and scholars to "research" their policy preferences. In the early 1980s reform intellectuals backed by one or another Party leader pushed for a latitudinarian interpretation of Maoism that focused on the need to protect individual and collective rights against the abuses of those in power.[9] The language was that of the young Marx and the Marxist conception of alienation. Beyond the intricacies of Marxist theory (rendered into Chinese philosophical vocabulary), the bottom line of advocates of Marxist humanism was to push for some form of accountability and to strengthen the norms of inner-Party democracy. The debate over alienation and Marxist humanism raged in the official press in 1983 and 1984. Some even dared to suggest popular elections, at least at the grassroots level. This brought on official repression in a warmed-over political campaign, the Campaign against Spiritual Pollution in 1983 and again in 1987, as the "Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization" campaign. These were more than the purge of irritating or inconvenient intellectuals. These theorists were not dissidents, they were Party members and in positions of influence. Many were employed, supported, and protected by the Party's reformist general secretary, Hu Yaobang, and, to a lesser degree, the head of the state administration, Premier Zhao Ziyang. These debates were the public face of inner-Party divisions over the nature and directions of reform: was the state plan to remain? Were markets to take over? What would be the role of the CCP? Of Maoism?

These debates were also national in character. The public sphere of the propaganda state was still in operation, and all publications had to clear the CCP Propaganda Department. The press, radio, and very soon television were centrally controlled and heavily censored. The major newspapers were limited in number and their content carefully controlled. However, *People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, and *Liberation Daily* were available more or less for free everywhere, nationwide. As the central leadership experimented and argued over reform, these tools of propaganda became avenues for public discussion that was much livelier and more varied than had been the case under Mao. In short, if an intellectual or policy adviser, such at Wang Ruoshui, could get an article on Marxist alienation into *People's Daily* (as he did), then not only intellectuals and professionals across China could read it, but also workers and farmers and cadres in the villages. This was not a free public sphere, but it was a coherent national public space. While the proposals and suggestions that survived the censors' pen were incremental rather than revolutionary, they reached the broadest possible audience and built

[9] Goldman, Cheek, and Hamrin, *China's Intellectuals and the State*; and Brugger and Kelly, *Chinese Marxism in the Post-Mao Era*.

a public presumption that reform was good and necessary and required being open to taking chances. The increased press latitude since the late 1990s, we shall see in the next chapter, has come at the cost of a Balkanization of the public sphere in China—today there is no media outlet that is truly national in the same sense. In the 1980s there was still the one national public sphere of the Propaganda Department.

Wang's signal service was to provide the political platform for the most daring ideological reforms of the post-Mao period, reforms that promised to create "communism with a human face." Since he was a theorist for the Party, Wang wrote theory, but it was theory for a general reader (including Party leaders), not professional philosophers. The key term in Wang's reformist Marxist analysis was "alienation." In Marxist theory this is the "alienation" of labor that workers experience under capitalism—commonly referred to as "exploitation"—that drives their struggle for socialist revolution. Under Stalin and Mao, the Communists declared that this alienation was a thing of the past under the glorious rule of the Party. Wang spoke for a generation of Party theorists who survived the Cultural Revolution and they disagreed. Wang wrote,

> In the past, we did many stupid things in economic construction due to our lack of experience . . . and in the end we ate our own bitter fruit; this is alienation in the economic realm . . . [T]he people's servants sometimes made indiscriminate use of the power conferred on them by the people, and turned into their masters; this is alienation in the political realm, also called the alienation of power. As for alienation in the intellectual realm, the classic example is the personality cult . . .[10]

Wang's critique of the "personality cult," of course, pointed to Mao. Wang saw the personality cult as the willing transfer to the leader of powers and dignities that rightfully belonged to "the people." Referring to the Cultural Revolution adoration of Mao, Wang confessed, "Many people, including myself, also propagated the superstition, out of adoration, totally out of adoration then."[11] Wang Ruoshui was no dissident at this time. He was part of what Peter Ludz calls the "counter-elite," in-house critics within the Communist parties of Eastern Europe in the 1980s.[12] Indeed, as David Kelly notes, Wang Ruoshui and his colleagues were aware of developments in Eastern Europe and cited their writings.[13] We often think of communism as monolithic, but this was not.

[10] Wang Ruoshui, "Tantan yihua wenti," *Xinwen zhanxian*, No. 9 (1980), quoted in Kelly, "The Emergence of Marxism," p. 173.
[11] Wang Ruoshui, "Tantan yihua wenti," p. 167.
[12] Peter C. Ludz, *The Changing Party Elite in East Germany* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), p. 62.
[13] Kelly, "The Emergence of Humanism," pp. 159–82.

Intellectual life in the 1980s may not have been monolithic but it was not free. Wang Ruoshui was criticized in 1983 and lost his job at *People's Daily*, and though he was not jailed he was finally expelled from the Party in 1987—all for these writings. This was a fight between reform Communism and "conservative" or orthodox Communists that came to a head in Tiananmen Square in 1989. In short, the reformists lost. Wang Ruoshui was silenced and other critical establishment intellectuals like Liu Binyan and Fang Lizhi had to flee or were exiled to the West, to live out the rest of their lives in exile.[14] Yet the Party, still under Deng Xiaoping, took on board some of the ideas of this counter-elite.

## Fang Lizhi's science and democracy and Li Zehou's academic assault on orthodoxy

The reforms that Wang Ruoshui tried to develop in theory and Liu Binyan modeled in propaganda work (Party journalism) were echoed in scientific fields. Some, like Qian Xuesen, the patriotic rocket scientist, were content to be quite orthodox, sounding vaguely reformist when that was the line, and stepping up as loyally radical when that was required—just so long as they could continue doing what they had been doing professionally and enjoying the privileges of service. Others, like some of the members of the Ye family chronicled by Joseph Esherick, simply sought to recover, return to professional work, and, more or less, pick up their lives where they had left off in 1966 when the Red Guards had come crashing in.[15] However, some took the cultural fervor and shifting definitions of reform of the 1980s as an opportunity to press for more. No one was more important for connecting science and democracy than Fang Lizhi (1936–2012).

We followed Fang's earlier life in Mao's revolutions of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s and saw that based on his experiences in the Cultural Revolution Fang had lost faith in Marxism, the science of society, and in the Party, the scientific vanguard. He had come to embrace the search for truth in the scientific method of the natural sciences and the open exchange and peer review of international professional scientific associations as a better path to good governance as well as to sound science. In this, Fang Lizhi was one vector in Chinese society bringing

[14] Wang Ruoshui continued to live in Beijing, though under surveillance. He visited Harvard in 1992–3 and returned to Boston with his wife in 2001. He was already very ill and died in Boston in January 2002. For details on and writings by Wang, see www.wangruoshui.net, accessed June 25, 2015.

[15] Esherick, *Ancestral Leaves*, Part III.

back the submerged developments of China in the Republic between the 1910s and 1940s—the growth of professions separate from the state (and thus an identity separate from the intellectual cadre) and the separation of science from politics. In this, Fang produced a fundamental challenge to the ideology (Maoism) and organization (Party rule) of China in the 1980s. What is particularly interesting about Fang's promotion of democracy is that he neither picked up the threads of Chinese liberalism nor cited Jefferson, *The Federalist Papers*, or Friedrich Hayek; rather, he developed his propositions on first principles (scientific method) and laboratory testing (his sorry experiences in the recent twenty-five years), insights that he later found confirmed in his first travels to Europe.

Returned to professional work and, he hoped, relieved of ideological criticism, Fang continued and expanded his research work in cosmology. Like Liu Binyan's, Fang's Party membership had been restored in 1978. His work was well respected internationally and he traveled a number of times beginning in 1979, particularly to Italy and elsewhere in Europe, home of his heroes, Copernicus, Galileo, and Bruno. Writing on his return to China in October 1979 in *Beijing Science and Technology News*, Fang spoke forthrightly on behalf of his profession and with broader overtones. Italy reminded him, Fang begins, of "the cultural traditions and habits of the mind that govern research work." Invoking the troubles that Galileo and Bruno faced (Bruno was burned at the stake for his views by the Church), Fang reflects, "the great storm whose fury broke the stranglehold of medieval religion and made science into what it is today occurred in Italy ... In those days people insistent on the truth faced mutilation, incarceration, and ultimately the Fire." Fang's topic is science, but his point is broader: "Freedom of thought is the friend of science, and any kind of deity, pseudo-deity, or spokesman for a deity is the mortal enemy of science."[16] Fang quickly turns back to China:

> If we are only enamored with the concrete results of scientific research and don't seek to understand the conditions under which those results are produced, such as the spirit guiding the research and the philosophy inspiring it, then our understanding will be very skewed ... We can bridge material gaps with purchases and acquisitions, but not so with shortcomings in cultural traditions, scientific attitudes, and philosophical approaches.

[16] Fang Lizhi, "A Hat, a Forbidden Zone, a Question," trans. James Williams, "The Expanding Universe of Fang Lizhi: Astrophysics and Ideology in People's China," *Chinese Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Summer 1988), pp. 29–31. Also Fang Lizhi, *Bringing Down the Great Wall: Writings on Science, Culture, and Democracy in China* (New York: Knopf, 1991), pp. 56–9.

Here Fang joins the chorus of thinkers and writers in the 1980s who returned to a May Fourth auto-critique of Chinese culture, such as we will see in the television series *River Elegy*. Fang's solution is likewise open to Western models: "What we need most of all would seem to be humility; that is, the humility to learn from others."

However, while Fang's *goals* conform to those of his younger compatriots in the "culture craze" of the 1980s and their critique of Chinese culture, in form his *approach* bears a striking resemblance to the work of Wang Ruoshui on Marxist humanism, even if his content is decidedly non-Marxist. Like Wang, Fang, too, is looking for correct thought, for a "guiding spirit" and "philosophy" to guide his work, but in his case Fang draws from international natural-science methods and practices. Once again a Party member, Fang knew full well that to work in China he was going to have to deal with the Party. A year after his trip to Europe Fang spoke to a national conference on "the science of science" held at his university in Hefei, Anhui, in 1980. In the speech he criticizes the canonization of Europe's scientific developments in the nineteenth century as the "three great discoveries" lauded by Engels to prove the dialectical laws of nature (i.e. the conservation laws of physics, biological cells, and biological evolution). These are not scientific method, Fang reminds his listeners; they are products. Fang does not beat around the bush: "There is a crisis of faith in Marxism ... because Marxism has become fossilized. It is composed of obsolete conclusions that have led to failure." His conclusion is startling for so early in the post-Mao period: "Therefore, the emancipation of our thought means a search for new theories, not the so-called restoration of Marxism's original face." The task today, he says, is "to develop and reconstruct Marxism by taking a scientific look at the future."[17] Reflecting on Fang's years of political persecution and the mass-style criticism to which his papers on cosmology were subjected in the 1970s, James Williams concludes that Fang was "a scientist forced by circumstances to think carefully about science, Chinese society, and the relationship between the two."[18]

By 1986 Fang was even more forceful on what the relationship was and what Chinese, and especially intellectuals and students, should do about it. Speaking at Jiaotong University in Shanghai in November 1986, Fang delivered what would become his most famous speech, one that was considered a call to arms for the student movement that exploded the

[17] Fang Lizhi, "To Enter the Future, We Must Cast off Old Ways of Thinking," trans. in Williams, "The Expanding Universe of Fang Lizhi," pp. 32–3.
[18] Fang Lizhi, "To Enter the Future, We Must Cast off Old Ways of Thinking," trans. in Williams, "The Expanding Universe of Fang Lizhi," p. 4.

next month. It led to Fang's expulsion from the Party in January 1987 and his transfer to research work at the Beijing Observatory—away from students and under the watchful eye of the leadership. Even for the heady days of reform in 1986, Fang's lecture is dramatic in the force of his criticisms of the Party.[19] "Why is China so backward?" he challenges the students. He gives the May Fourth answer: because China's culture is feudal and backward. The solution? "I personally agree with the 'complete Westernizers'." By this he means "complete openness, the removal of restrictions in every sphere." He gives examples of openness, such as Japan, which has prospered over the past thirty years, and examples of closed control, such as East Germany, which has not prospered compared to West Germany. Fang concludes forthrightly, "orthodox socialism from Marx to Lenin to Stalin to Mao Zedong has been a failure." Yet there is good socialism: Sweden. They have a large degree of public ownership and the gap between rich and poor, he reckons, is relatively small there. Fang's conclusion is that "we need to look at what other people are doing ... Isn't 'practice the sole criterion of truth'?" As in science, so students should do in society, and bravely observe everything and strictly assess what works and what does not. Thus Fang recommends going abroad. His trips abroad, he admits, have awoken him to the fundamental flaws of China's system.

A key theme of Fang's talk on democracy is the role of students and intellectuals. "If you want to understand democracy," Fang advises, "look at how people understand it in developed countries." What you will find, according to Fang, is that the root of democracy is "the rights of each individual." What absolutely infuriates Fang is the Party's talk of "extending democracy" to the people through "loosening up." To Fang this top-down approach is the opposite of democracy. Fang implores the students to stand up for themselves and for the good of China: "The most crucial thing of all is to have a democratic mentality and a democratic spirit." He wants the students to apply the scientific attitude—one we saw coined by Hu Shi in the 1920s as "diligently hypothesize, carefully verify." But now Fang Lizhi extends his model from science to society, holding up European universities as bastions of intellectual freedom preserved both from government meddling and from pressures from big business. This is the environment that intellectuals need to do their work. "The intellectual realm must be independent and have its own values." Fang now applies the model of professional self-management to the role of public intellectuals. This is a frontal attack

[19] Fang Lizhi, "Democracy, Reform, and Modernization," in Fang Lizhi, *Bringing Down the Great Wall*, pp. 157–88.

on the intellectual cadre role. To those used to deference to the Party, Fang amazingly mocks the leading theorist of the Party and a senior leader in 1986, Hu Qiaomu, saying, sure you can debate with us about physics, "but if you don't know physics, then step aside!" Fang is insistent: "We must refuse to cater to power. Only when we do this will Chinese intellectuals be transformed into genuine intellectuals."[20]

One can only imagine the effect of this tonic on students frustrated with the emerging tensions and contradictions of life under reform—inflation, seeing "connected" students get plum jobs and scholarships to study overseas, discovering that crude street peddlers were earning more money than intellectuals. Fang's was a clarion call to the vocation of the intellectual as the conscience of society, the defenders of truth. While not as direct as Liu Binyan in claiming to speak "for the people," Fang is certain that the students need to get the ball rolling, to awaken first, then younger intellectuals, then older intellectuals, then all of society. Heady stuff, but we can sense limits in what Fang proposes. At the end of his rousing challenge, Fang concludes, "And if there is no change, the country would have to get rid of the Party." This is still a call, albeit a radical, even rude, bitterly critical call to improve the Party. And if the Party can't muster the energy to start its new exercise regime, the students can be its exercise coaches.

Meanwhile, in the research institutes, academic philosophers returned to their libraries, offices, and classrooms. One self-described introvert and loner, Li Zehou (b. 1930) nonetheless became a main voice of the "culture craze" of the 1980s and the object of official criticism for his "bourgeois liberalism" after 1989. Li was born to a struggling middle-class family and raised in Changsha, Hunan province. Early in the 1950s Li entered Peking University, graduated in 1954, and thereafter has worked at the Institute of Philosophy at what has become the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Like other figures of his generation he was an intellectual cadre and an establishment intellectual in both Mao's China and in this ideological moment of reform. Since the 1950s Li Zehou has written on aesthetics and the history of Chinese art, literature, and philosophy. Most of his works are scholarly and theoretical, and yet for a time these writings captured national attention. This was precisely during the time of the "socialist humanism" debate in which Wang Ruoshui participated.

[20] In the crackdown after Tiananmen Fang's efforts ultimately brought him to a year in the American embassy and then exile; he lived out the remainder of his life as a productive astrophysicist in Arizona.

Li Zehou became famous—or, in the eyes of the Party hardliners, infamous—for three ideas: subjectivity; a recasting of the May Fourth legacy as "national salvation over enlightenment"; and a new cosmopolitanism cast as "Western substance, Chinese application." Li Zehou addressed the first topic, human subjectivity, through a weighty 400-page tome on Immanuel Kant. Entitled *A Critique of Critical Philosophy: An Assessment of Kant* and first published in Beijing in 1979, Li's study is a far-ranging philosophical treatise engaging that seminal European philosopher from both a Chinese and a Marxist perspective.[21] What struck the emerging new public of university students in the post-Mao era, as well as Li's colleagues and Party minders, was that Li was grounding Kantian aesthetics in a materialist analysis that gave agency to the individual through the mechanism of labor as art with the goal of creating beauty. This immediately rang bells in his audience because these were issues dear to Maoism—who was the subject of history, "people" as a group or as individuals (both as topic and as agent)? Did human thought drive history, and where did that thought come from? What was the purpose of history, then?

Li Zehou answered these questions through a novel recasting of human subjectivity as "subjectality" (*zhutixing*), or embodied intelligence. It soon became clear that the purpose of Li's philosophical work was, indeed, political. By grounding Kant's ideas of human reasoning in a materialist interpretation of the origins of human intelligence, Li sought to correct the vulgar materialist views of the Cultural Revolution that simplified consciousness to class status. Though his reasoning was complex, the implications were clear (and he spelled them out in later writings). Li has described his basic approach:

> And for me the foundation of human existence, and also the difference between human beings and other animal species, is not explained by consciousness or language, but by the universal, necessary practice of making and using tools. Tools are artificial extensions of human limbs; thus the human being, together with these tools, forms a supra-biological body, and its activity becomes supra-biological behavior. It is precisely this kind of behavior that constitutes the basis of humankind's supra-biological existence. Therefore I call this making and using of tools the "primary practice" of human beings.[22]

Li's writings on aesthetics go on to extend such "tool making" to the creative processes of art, particularly the joyful, sensuous role of music. Li Zehou was invoking the authority of Immanuel Kant in the familiar

[21] Li Zehou, *Pipan zhexue de pipan: Kangde shuping* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1979).
[22] Li Zehou, "Subjectivity and 'Subjectality': A Response," *Philosophy East & West*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (April 1999), pp. 174–5.

Marxist language of socialist China to propose that the joyful creations of individuals are the motor force of history, and not class struggle. Woei Lien Chong, a major anglophone interpreter of Li's highly theoretical writings, calls this Li Zehou's "aesthetic Marxism."[23]

Li's second notable thesis was that the emancipatory goals of personal and intellectual enlightenment of China's May Fourth period in the 1910s and 1920s were suppressed by the focus on national salvation in the 1930s and 1940s. This became known as the "national salvation over enlightenment" thesis. Of course, this reading by Li of the history of those years neither is unreasonable, nor was it unwelcome in the renewed critical conversations of the "culture craze" in the 1980s. In his 1987 study of modern Chinese intellectual history Li devotes a chapter to this topic. He traces the development of enlightenment thought in the early 1900s. Consistent with his philosophical approach, Li finds that changing behavior patterns from everyday life drive conceptual changes—from women cutting their hair and resisting arranged marriages to conceptualizing a criticism of Confucian patriarchy.[24]

Li goes on to parse the Chinese term for democracy, *minzhu*, to point out that *minzhu* does not mean the same thing as "democracy" in the West:

> Traditionally, *minzhu* in China meant "to take responsibility on behalf of the people" (*wei renmin zuo zhu*), not that the people were in charge . . . Mistaking the idea of "the people taking charge" for that of "taking responsibility on behalf of the people" is to confuse the ancient and the modern.

Here Li is very much in the mode of May Fourth Chinese thought—old is bad, new is good. And Li's reasoning continues his historical-materialist approach: "The free democracy of the modern age, like Marxism, is the fruit that gradually matured upon the foundation of large-scale industrial production." He likewise deconstructs Chinese ideas and offers clarifications of the Western meanings, of both "liberalism" (it only works with laws) and "freedom" (likewise properly bounded by law). However, Li's historical perspective is clear in his long chapter

[23] Woei Lien Chong, "History as the Realization of Beauty: Li Zehou's Aesthetic Marxism," *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Winter 1999–2000), p. 9. Li's work is available in English in Li Zehou, *The Path of Beauty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Zehou Li and Jane Cauvel, *Four Essays on Aesthetics: Toward a Global View* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006).

[24] Interestingly, and reflecting the greater engagement with Western scholarship by the mid-1980s, Li Zehou uses an American sinologist, the great Joseph Levenson, as a negative example of a one-sidedly "conceptual" interpretation of the rise of enlightenment thought in China. Li Zehou, *Zhongguo xiandai sixiang shi lun* (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1987), pp. 7–49, with the example of women on pp. 19–20.

on the rise of national-salvation ideology over these enlightenment ideals. China in the 1930s was a violent place, and the people he quotes in his history bemoan the hopelessness of anarchist co-operatives, patient scientific research, or peaceful social change in the face of warlords and armies. "Today we are no longer in the warring years," concludes Li, "when absolute obedience to the commander-in-chief was emphasized, but are in an era of construction in which socialist democracy confronts us with an urgent timetable."[25]

Li Zehou's answer to this historical problem—of bringing enlightenment out from under the thumb of national-salvation ideology—invokes his third idea, a new cosmopolitanism. Li immediately follows his point about the role of large-scale production in creating the social basis for Western democracy with this declaration:

> This [modern democracy] has nothing to do with China, since it was imported from the West. But once imported, how to combine it with China's original collectivist attitude in regard to the importance of the people in order to develop it further, is an issue that requires our attention both in theory and in practice.

Li does not leave his readers with such a vague admonition. His cosmopolitan stand and materialist approach come together in his concrete recommendation:

> In this area, the Western capitalist societies have accumulated centuries of experience in regard to political–legal theory and practice, such as the separation of the three powers, the independence of the courts, the parliamentary system, and so forth, which we should regard as the common assets of humanity worthy of emulation. The idea that the improvement and reform of the political–legal system can be replaced by the resolution of ideological issues via the preaching of morality is not in agreement with the basic principles of the materialist view of history.[26]

This is the heart of Li Zehou's "Western substance, Chinese application" thesis, which forms the last chapter of Li's history. For his Chinese readers, Li was inverting a famous thesis of a conservative Confucian reformer, Zhang Zhidong, of a century earlier. Zhang had proposed in *Exhortation to Study* in 1898 that Qing reformers take Western technology as the application or tool to serve a Chinese essence or substance, sometimes rendered as "Chinese learning for the fundamental principles, Western learning for practical application."

[25] Li, *Xiandai sixiang*, pp. 25–6, and quote from p. 45. Quote is also translated (slightly differently) in Chong, *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, pp. 40–1.
[26] Li, *Xiandai sixiang*, pp. 45–6; trans. in Chong, *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, pp. 41–2.

Zhang was looking to use some Western technology and institutional innovations to buttress the Confucian order of his dynasty. By turning this slogan on its head, Li Zehou cleverly implies that Maoist denigration of "bourgeois" Western accomplishments, including liberal democracy, has been a xenophobic and atavistic stand closer to those old Confucians in the late Qing than to true, modern, Marxism. To emphasize "Western substance" in this way, he makes clear, is not to denigrate Chinese culture. Rather it is to improve it. After all, Li notes, Marxism is one part of Western learning. Furthermore, "'Chinese application' includes the application not only of 'Western substance' in China but also of traditional Chinese culture, and 'Chinese learning' should be the path and manner of realizing 'Western substance' (i.e., modernization)." Li gives an example that brings his history and his politics back to aesthetics:

> As China has no religious traditions, such as Christianity [which Li had invoked as providing a moral restraint on capitalism in the West], will it be possible to take aesthetics from our own traditional culture and turn it into the highest pursuit of human existence? Is this not precisely what "Western substance and Chinese application" is all about?[27]

Li Zehou not only had a readership in the 1980s and early 1990s; he also had critics. Liu Xiaobo (b. 1955), a young and iconoclastic literary critic (who twenty-five years later won the Nobel Peace Prize), made his name denouncing Li Zehou in 1988 for lacking the requisite absolute skepticism and courage to make the necessary break with tradition. In fact, Liu Xiaobo finds Li disappointingly full of compromise, "cheap idealism," and "false optimism." Whatever the merits of Liu Xiaobo's critique, even Li Zehou acknowledged that his work did not really address the mood of anger, dissatisfaction, and frustration among the younger generation of the 1980s. This highlights generational divisions within China's intellectuals. Li Zehou was still speaking to older intellectuals and Party leaders, while Liu Xiaobo and many colleagues were both more impatient and less interested in talking primarily to the Party. A more influential critic at the time was Gan Yang (b. 1952), one of the young leaders of the "culture craze" we will meet below. Gan Yang criticized Li Zehou for his philosophical monism, for seeking a holistic or comprehensive answer to the problems of a diverse and complex world, and for believing that there can be a perfect stage of human society. Finally, Gan Yang finds Li Zehou far too closely integrated into the power structures of China's

[27] Li, *Xiandai sixiang*, pp. 331–41; trans. in Chong, *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, pp. 32–8, quotes from p. 35.

highly imperfect society.[28] Both Liu Xiaobo and Gan Yang point to what a third critic, Gu Xin, names: Li Zehou still believes in Marxism. Gu Xin reads Li Zehou to say that material production is still the motive force of history and thus concludes that Li's aesthetics is but a twist on the Hegelian–Marxist dialectic that really does not take one very far from the worrisome ideology of the CCP.[29]

In fact, Li Zehou agrees that he is Marxist, or post-Marxist. This is part of what made him important during this ideological moment, as he spoke the language of the day and took it to a new place—finding in Marxist language that what was congenial to the assumptions and style of the CCP compelling arguments for an emphasis on the rights of individuals, law, and democratic institutions. No wonder Li was denounced in *People's Daily* in May 1991. While subject to public criticism, removed from teaching, and with his publications withdrawn from circulation, Li Zehou was not jailed. With the return to a more limited reform in 1992 he was allowed to visit America to teach (at Colorado College). Li Zehou has lived in Colorado ever since, returning to China from time to time without incident.

Though different in their style and their fates, Fang Lizhi and Li Zehou reflected the profound challenge to Maoism that came out of some of the best minds among establishment intellectuals during this ideological moment of reform. Fang took up Einstein's relativity and modern scientific empirical method to hammer the dated conceptions of a bounded universe in Engels and the ex cathedra authority of the Party. Li Zehou used Kant's aesthetics to put the individual agent back into history by humanizing the Hegelian–Marxist dialectic and thereby removing the need for an authoritarian vanguard party of some supra-individual History. Together they gutted Maoism's claim to scientific and philosophical legitimacy.

## Students: from culture craze to Tiananmen 1989

The new generation of university students around 1980 populated the emerging popular culture and created a third group of intellectual voices in this ideological moment of reform. These young intellectuals led a loose "culture craze" in the mid-1980s that sought to explore and discuss

[28] Liu Xiaobo's and Gan Yang's criticisms are carefully reviewed in Lin Min, "The Search for Modernity: Chinese Intellectual Discourse and Society, 1978–1988: The Case of Li Zehou," *China Quarterly*, No. 132 (December 1992), pp. 994–5.

[29] Gu Xin, "Subjectivity, Modernity, and Chinese Hegelian Marxism: A Study of Li Zehou's Philosophical Ideas from a Comparative Perspective," *Philosophy East & West*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (April 1996), pp. 208–9.

the cultural roots of China's problems. While popular in the sense of nongovernmental, these groups of intellectuals were largely speaking to themselves, and to Party sponsors behind the scenes. The new mood reached the mass media in part through the book series published by these groups, which turned out to sell quite well, and through television and film, most notably the controversial 1988 television series *River Elegy* and new films like Chen Kaige's (b. 1952) *Yellow Earth* in 1984 and Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* in 1987. These films drew from the developing mood of critical fiction (Zhang Yimou's film is based on Mo Yan's 1986 novel). Writers such as Su Tong (b. 1963), Yu Hua (b. 1960), and Mo Yan (b. 1955) probed the psychology of their generation's experiences through the Cultural Revolution. Their popular novels, like Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum*, were made into movies in China.[30] Together they retell the story of China's revolution in dark and complicated terms, focusing on individuals, families, and ironic twists of fate rather than the drama of class struggle and the "shining road" of socialism. Su Tong's and Yu Hua's short stories offer a voice for the children who grew up when the Cultural Revolution came to their town. Their stories will remind English readers more of *Lord of the Flies* than of *Tom Sawyer* or *Catcher in the Rye*.[31] Su Tong's 1990 novel that became the film *Raise High the Red Lantern* takes the critique of Chinese culture to gender politics in the story of four concubines in an unnamed (but modern) time that focuses on culture and gender oppression rather than on national politics. Meanwhile, Wang Shuo (b. 1958), most famous for *Playing for Thrills* (1989), scandalized the reading public with irreverent and pugnacious stories of working-class life, introducing "hooligan literature."[32] This was the backdrop of youth and popular culture when a series of events would catapult a million students into Tiananmen Square in defiance of the Party in spring 1989.

The "culture craze" bubbled up from 1980, came into its own by mid-decade, and dominated the intellectual public sphere from 1987 until Tiananmen. This was the "new May Fourth" and a self-conscious return to many of the themes, and the writers, of the 1910s and 1920s. The craze was not led by senior Party intellectuals, such as Wang Ruoshui, Fang Lizhi, or Li Zehou, but rather by a collection of younger scholars.

[30] Paul Clark, *Reinventing China: A Generation and Its Films* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2006).

[31] Hua Li, *Contemporary Chinese Fiction by Su Tong and Yu Hua: Coming of Age in Troubled Times* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). Li makes a sensitive comparison of Su Tong's work, in particular, with J.D. Salinger's novel.

[32] Wang Shuo, *Playing for Thrills*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (New York: Penguin Books, 1998).

These were the hardiest and brightest of the *zhiqing*, the sent-down youth of the Cultural Revolution, mostly in their thirties, who had clawed their way back to the cities and universities. Several developments shaped their public work. As Chen Fong-ching and Jin Guantao have chronicled, the experiences of these sent-down youth of Mao's revolution had taught the future leaders of this culture craze to disregard prevailing rules within the Party bureaucracy and to think for themselves. Despite their years of doing labor in the countryside, they still felt special for being selected by Mao then and for passing the extremely competitive first round of university exams in 1977. They bore a sense of responsibility toward China that would have been familiar to Liu Binyan.[33] The failure of direct political agitation during the Democracy Wall movement prompted them to seek a safer avenue for public intellectual engagement. The "scar literature" and "exposé literature" of the late 1970s, on the other hand, had flourished alongside the investigative reporting of Liu Binyan, even though detailing the abuses of the Cultural Revolution. Stories like Bai Hua's screenplay *Bitter Love*, and the last-minute banning of the film version (after previewing by Party elites), put the story of the frustrated patriotism of an artist and his daughter's question on the public mind: "You love your country, but does your state love you?"[34] "It indicated" to the students, write Chen and Jin, "that so long as the cultural activity in question was nonpolitical in nature and within legal bounds, the party would be likely to tolerate ... up to a certain point."[35]

The young intellectuals formed editorial boards to publish book series. Three were particularly notable. The Toward the Future book series was edited by Bao Zunxin and Jin Guantao. They had backgrounds in the natural sciences and were organized around a group of intellectuals on the journal *Dialectics of Nature* (the same journal in which Fang Lizhi published his cosmology research). Toward the Future took a distinctly scientific perspective, popularizing cybernetics and the new sciences of society. The Academy of Chinese Culture was headed by Tang Yijie (Yue Daiyun's husband, who had earlier become involved with the radical left writing group Liangxiao) and other senior figures, including

[33] Chen Fong-ching and Jin Guantao, *From Youthful Manuscripts to River Elegy: The Chinese Popular Cultural Movement and Political Transformation, 1979–1989* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1997).

[34] Bai Hua's switch from "country" (*zuguo*) to "state" (*guojia*) suggests a distinction between the nation and the party-state that the authorities did not appreciate. The Bai Hua case is well covered in Richard Kraus, "Bai Hua: The Political Authority of a Writer," in Hamrin and Cheek, *China's Establishment Intellectuals*, pp. 185–211.

[35] A good summary is given in Chen Fong-ching, "The Popular Cultural Movement of the 1980s," in Davies, *Voicing Concerns*, pp. 71–86, quote at p. 74.

honorary roles for none other than the famed new Confucian reformer from the 1930s, Liang Shuming. Nonetheless, it was filled with young professors from Peking University's Philosophy Department. They organized influential lectures in Beijing and courses on Confucian culture. The third group published a book series called Culture: China and the World under a loose editorial group that was headed by Gan Yang. This group was grounded in the study of Western philosophy and specialized in translating classics of Western philosophy, humanities, and social sciences. Chen and Jin note two important institutional factors in this intellectual publicity. First, the young scholars had to rely on open-minded Party patrons to get access to publishers and permission to get titles past the censors. Personal contacts were key. Second, each editorial board (or, in the case of the academy, conference and long-distance-course planners) had to affiliate with a state institution. Working within these establishment constraints, the lectures organized by the academy were, by reports, electrifying to students. The three book series sold well, too. Even titles like translations of Heidegger's *Time and Being* and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* sold between 50,000 and 150,000 copies within a year. Clearly there was an audience among urban university youth.

The culture craze moved from intellectual circles to mass media with the six-part television series *River Elegy*, produced and aired in 1988. It provoked a swift official response, but in the heady days of early 1989 there was a public debate in a number of newspapers. *River Elegy* was produced by a half-dozen *zhiqing* intellectuals but is most associated with its lead writer, Su Xiaokang (b. 1949). From Hangzhou in southeastern China, Su is the son of a high-ranking cadre in the Party official press (first in Hangzhou and then at *Red Flag* in Beijing). When the Cultural Revolution came, Su Xiaokang joined a radical Red Guard faction and survived the chaos, and by the late 1970s he was a reporter at the *Henan Daily*. Like Liu Binyan, Su turned to "reportage" and investigative reporting. He trained at the Beijing College of Broadcasting, where he settled to teach in 1987. From there he continued to publish and then joined the team writing *River Elegy*. Su gave voice to the youthful anger we saw in the relatively decorous criticisms of Li Zehou by Liu Xiaobo and other young scholars. In January 1988 Su wrote on "A Sense of Mission":

> Although we have come to our senses a little late, at least we are no longer continuing in ignorance. Their awakening has made Chinese so upset as to stamp their feet, to want to settle accounts with their ancestors, to find fault, and to get mad at any trivial event—to tell the truth, for an ancient people whose vitality has declined so badly, to dare to get mad, to dare to laugh and to scold, to dare to look our ancestors in the eye, is a good thing. It's a pity that in this past century there have been too few people daring to laugh and scold like Lu Xun.

Ding Ling had invoked Lu Xun's pungent *zawen* critical essays in 1941, now some four decades later Su Xiaokang reverts to Lu Xun's dire image of the "Iron House" from the early 1920s, but at least seems to think there is some purpose in having "awakened." Su set out to deliver that message to the masses of television viewers in China in *River Elegy*. By one estimate, there were 112 million television sets in China in 1987 reaching a total viewing audience of 600 million.[36]

*River Elegy* condemned China's traditional civilization—as symbolized by the Yellow River, the Great Wall, and the dragon—for stifling China's creativity. The series had vivid imagery that conveyed the sense that China, like the Yellow River, once at the forefront of civilization, had dried up because of its emphasis on stability, isolation, and conservatism. By contrast, it showed flowing blue seas as symbolizing the exploring, open culture of the West and Japan. The programs also used documentary footage from the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. According to Geremie Barmé and Linda Jaivin, the juxtaposition of images and statements created a subtext equating Maoist–Stalinist orthodoxy with state Confucianism and traditional culture—and both were disasters. The solution to China's problems, it suggested, was to abandon this "yellow earth" and embrace the "blue world" of the sea, commerce, and contact with the outside world. According to CCTV statistics, over 200 million people watched the series.[37]

Television was not the only new resource open to intellectuals in the late 1980s. The beginnings of independent organizations emerged, weakening the model of the intellectual cadre. A notable example is Chen Ziming (1950–2014), who emerged from the Cultural Revolution without incarceration only to be jailed for criticizing Jiang Qing in 1975. Nonetheless, Chen participated in the 1976 Tiananmen demonstrations known as the April 5th Movement. He published in *Beijing Spring* of 1979 but went to university in chemistry, finishing his training at the Biophysics Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Throughout, Chen stayed politically engaged and he tried to interest his university and political leaders in reform. He was rebuffed and for his pains they punished him by not giving him a good job placement. Chen was unable to find suitable work and became one of the first disestablished intellectuals, an accidental intellectual entrepreneur. In 1985 Chen and his wife,

[36] Su Xiaokang et al., *Deathsong of a River: A Reader's Guide to the Chinese TV Series Heshang* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1991), p. 30, quoting from Su Xiaokang in *Qiushi*, No. 2 (1988), p. 40.

[37] Geremie Barmé and Linda Jaivin, eds., *New Ghosts, Old Dreams: Chinese Rebel Voices* (New York: Times Books, 1992), p. 140.

Wang Zhihong, set up two private correspondence schools that taught business skills to administrators. It was successful and lucrative. In the fall of 1986, Chen established the Beijing Social and Economic Sciences Research Institute, the first nonofficial political think tank in Beijing. In 1988, Chen and Wang bought a trade magazine, *Economic Weekly*, which nonetheless came with official registration—giving them a legal outlet for publishing. With their long-time colleague, Wang Juntao, Chen and Wang Zhihong turned the pedestrian magazine into a forum on a broad range of topics that, Merle Goldman notes, "soon rivaled the highly regarded semi-official *World Economic Herald*" in Shanghai.[38] Chen and Wang were in the big leagues. While they were nonestablishment, they nonetheless sought to publish establishment intellectuals working for reformist think tanks to get the ear of Party reformers. Nonetheless, Chen Ziming's independent think tank and magazine were a first for Chinese intellectuals since the demise of liberal organizations and the nationalization of their periodicals in the early 1950s.

## Tiananmen 1989 and after: hope, repression, and a return to reform

The efforts of China's intellectuals to address the challenge of post-Mao reforms were part and parcel of the political and social tensions that led to and defined the Tiananmen demonstrations and military repression. Contingent events shaped what happened—the fateful coming together of Hu Yaobang's death on April 15, 1989, the opportune practice of public funerals for leaders plus the customary spring Qingming festival to honor the dead, and the arrival of international television crews in May to record the Gorbachev visit. Together these provided the spark to inflame the social resentments over Party corruption and the insecurities from the changing economy. Deadlock among the Party leadership over how to handle the demonstrations let this conflagration become a prairie fire. This invoked the post-Mao Party's prime directive: never tolerate *luan* (the social chaos of the Cultural Revolution). At great cost to his own ambitions for reform, which he knew required stable and open foreign relations, Deng Xiaoping would order a merciless repression of the public demonstrations and hunt down and punish anyone associated with them.

[38] Merle Goldman, *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China: Political Reform in the Deng Xiaoping Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 339 ff., quotation at p. 340.

The students who came to represent the protests on Tiananmen in 1989 were even younger than the "culture craze" intellectuals, and they took their cue from the daring criticisms of their elders. Student leaders emerged quickly in the massive demonstrations, but this was a social movement unplanned and spiraling out of any one group's control. Students from Peking University and other major universities in Beijing (and soon in other major cities across China) took advantage of the funeral of Hu Yaobang to gather and to protest current problems, just as their elders had a dozen years earlier in the April 5th Movement of 1976. Added to the complaints of the 1986 student demonstrations over corruption and the unfair privileges of high cadre children were added broad social anxieties about inflation. Life was getting harder for ordinary urban residents and they supported the students' efforts to call the government to account. As the government dithered and then on May 19th declared martial law, urban society resisted. Elders wrote public letters in support of the students, taxicab drivers brought them food and supplies. Workers delivered supplies by motorcycle. Ordinary people came out to join the demonstrations for "democracy." The students called a hunger strike, they delivered a petition to the top leadership, they even scolded Party leaders on television when the leadership tried to negotiate with them.[39]

While the students articulated broadly felt concerns of urban Chinese, they were young, completely sure of themselves, and hotheaded. The presence of foreign media for Gorbachev's historic visit to Beijing in May 1989 (healing the Sino-Soviet rift) put all this on international television. Westerners were electrified. Chinese urbanites around the country were thrilled and hit the streets as well. China's elder intellectuals were worried; they knew what was coming and they increasingly counseled caution. The young rebels brushed their concerns aside. The Party leaders saw new Red Guards and they were not about to countenance such *luan*. The popular protests talked about "democracy," famously building a statue of the Goddess of Democracy, but the movement reflected only a vague idea about what this was and how it was to be achieved. Wang Dan (b. 1969), one of the student leaders, had a clear sense of the Solidarity movement in Poland and saw independent unions of students as a key step toward this democracy. Yet the impromptu student associations

[39] The history of the Tiananmen demonstrations is vividly captured in the documentary *Gate of Heavenly Peace*, by the Long Bow Group (1995); and the associated website "The Gate of Heavenly Peace" (at tsquare.tv). An early account of these events is given in Tony Saich, ed., *The Chinese People's Movement: Perspectives on Spring 1989* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1990).

were riven by factionalism and an unfortunate tendency to re-create the Leninist chain of command within student organizations. Still, the students had a sense of their historic role as inheritors of the May Fourth Movement and as intellectuals. They demanded the right to speak up. Wang Dan wrote on April 5,

> In the current movement for a New Enlightenment in China, the intellectual elite must place first priority on freedom of speech and have the courage to criticize injustice, including unjust decision making and actions by the party and the government. For the only social role intellectuals have is to speak out, and if we lose our freedom of speech and are unable to aid the progress of China's democratization or take an independent critical stance, we will continue to be expendable dependants on the party and the government, and our fate will be no better than it has been for the last forty years.[40]

The emerging student leaders showed their youth. Wu'er Kaixi, the student who brashly confronted Party leaders on television, also strutted around Tiananmen like a big shot. Chai Ling, one of the few women leaders, likewise came to see herself as a martyr, leading students in an oath to sacrifice themselves for China as the confrontation with the authorities reached its climax on June 3 (though she managed to escape the violence unsacrificed). They had media attention that probably would have turned the head of anyone and for a moment they were the darlings of Beijing. However, they were too young to have the skills to navigate a national movement with high stakes. They ridiculed their elders who warned them that the Party would strike back, and hard. They rebuffed overtures from entrepreneurs (independent street merchants, or *getihu*) and newly formed autonomous workers' unions in Beijing to join forces.[41] From inside Zhongnanhai this all looked like a resurgence of the Red Guard terror that had struck down Deng Xiaoping's generation twenty years earlier. This time the youth did not have Mao Zedong behind them. On June 4 the troops went in and cleared the square.

The world was aghast at what appeared to be the needless brutality of the repression in June 1989. Why use tanks and armored troop carriers to gun down unarmed student demonstrators?[42] China has justifiably been denounced for this state violence. For the historian, the question is, why did they do it? Why did Deng imperil his own reforms by this brutal show

[40] Wang Dan, "On Freedom of Speech," trans. in Barmé and Jaivin, *New Ghosts, Old Dreams*, p. 32.

[41] Elizabeth J. Perry, "Casting a Chinese 'Democracy' Movement: The Roles of Students, Workers, and Entrepreneurs," in Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom and Elizabeth J. Perry, eds., *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 74–92.

[42] Brook, *Quelling the People*.

of power? First, the political threat of the students was very real. It was a threat to Party legitimacy because of the issue and the advocates. The issue is the Achilles heel of the CCP—corruption among Party officials. Already in the 1980s, there was popular resentment about the perquisites and personal enrichment of Party functionaries. It was so patently unfair. The students' charges of unfairness echoed resoundingly among the urban population in Beijing and other major cities—similar instances of garnering of economic benefits for themselves were rampant among local officials across the country. To make matters worse, the advocates, the students, were inheritors of the disproportionate respect in Chinese political culture for the educated, from the Qing through the Mao years.[43] Scholars carry social capital in China. The students knew it; the Party feared it; the urban population believed it. It was a serious contest for public legitimacy. Guns were easier for the Party to handle. Given that the Party was already on shaky ground with the public as the implications of Deng's de-Maoification program were still working out and given the serious divisions within the Party leadership over how much reform was enough, this frontal assault on the Party's claim that it was the only possible legitimate public voice of China and that Deng Xiaoping had the "correct line" for the Party was very threatening indeed.

What made the threat intolerable was the prospect of an alliance between the student demonstrators and workers. Informal (and officially illegal) workers' unions were beginning to appear in spring 1989 and they began to support the student demonstrations logistically. To the Party leadership this smelled of a Polish-style Solidarity movement. More so, the cardinal rule of CCP power has been never to tolerate alternative forms of political organization—never let the other side organize. It was the prospect of an alliance between radical students and workers that was intolerable for Deng Xiaoping. This was for the simple and obvious reason that it was precisely as a union of radical students and working Chinese that the Chinese Communist Party itself had come to power. Added to this deep lesson was the more recent lesson of the Cultural Revolution: student demonstrations had led to *luan* in socialist China. The organizational side of the Tiananmen demonstrations, combined with scholarly status and the ideological challenge of "fairness" (*gong-ping*), made these teenage activists and their new labor union friends a threat in the eyes of the CCP leadership that had to be exterminated.

[43] This respect explains why Chiang Kai–shek and Mao bothered to persecute critical intellectuals—such intellectuals' ideas mattered politically and so had to be controlled.

By July 1989 it looked like economic reform was dead in China. The Party mounted yet another propaganda campaign, this time denouncing a second "Counterrevolutionary Incident in Tiananmen Square"; hounded and arrested the student leaders and related intellectuals; and reimposed strong Party control in all areas. The reaction of other nations, particularly in the Western world, isolated China as sanctions were imposed in response to the carnage all had seen on television. For a moment it looked as if China would return to the isolation and radical policies of the 1960s. However, it soon emerged that as far as reform was concerned it was too late to turn back.

While the unintended consequences of reform made trouble for Deng Xiaoping's plan of economic openness without political liberalization, the social forces released by the reforms, and in particular the creation of a broader economic elite that derives its wealth from market activity, along with varying degrees of privilege within the Party, guaranteed the continuation of those plans. In addition to a tiny new tycoon class, Deng's reforms were creating a middle class that would not accept a return to the frightening politics and strict government supervision of the Mao era. Deng Xiaoping made grand use of his charismatic power in 1992 to cement his reform plan and mobilize this new social base. Deng's "Southern Tour" to the special economic zones in south China, and particularly Shenzhen—next to Hong Kong—made it politically impossible for his third successor, General Secretary Jiang Zemin, to turn back. Deng, the last charismatic leader from Mao's revolution, put his authority on the line and his policy in every newspaper: reform and opening is good. In a clear message to Party traditionalists, Deng announced that it was now "leftists" who opposed further reform, and not "Rightists" such as the students of Tiananmen, who presented the greatest challenge for China. The Fourteenth Party Congress in October 1992 relaunched reform. The post-Tiananmen retrenchment was over. At the Congress, Jiang Zemin used Deng's authority as a font of Party ideology to certify Deng's theory of "building socialism with Chinese characteristics," which amounted to a mix of capitalist economic relations under Party political control. Further economic reforms were ratified at the congress under the slogan of a "socialist market economy."

The state media captured both the policy change and the continuity of political language in China. Geremie Barmé notes the resurgence of the intolerant language of the Cultural Revolution—even among the official supporters of reform and opening. He gives the example of a 1992 book that is critical of old-style leftism in the Party. The preface praises Deng Xiaoping's famous "Southern Tour" that supported continued reform, but the preface's style reflects the continued force of Maoist moral extremism even as it criticizes "left" resistance to Deng's economic reforms:

At the crucial moment when the powers of extreme "leftism" and their in-house theoreticians, swollen with arrogance, had set their sights on striking out wantonly against reform, Comrade Deng Xiaoping resolutely toured the south. He issued speeches in which he stated categorically: "We must guard against rightism, but more important, we must prevent 'leftism'!" One simple sentence, but each word bears the weight of greatness ... Oh, how fortunate the reforms! How blessed are our people![44]

Deng Xiaoping's "Southern Tour" marked the watershed for reform China. From then on the forces released by the economic and administrative reforms taken by the CCP built a momentum that has continued ever since. This was economic reform, as well as a lessening of Party control of daily life, but it was also a firm recommitment to Party dominance in political life.

## The post-Tiananmen intellectual establishment

A window on the intellectual world in China that emerged in the year after the Tiananmen incident is the pronouncements that establishment intellectuals of the day made in 1990. These reveal a continuity of many of the features of the old deal between intellectuals and the state, but also shed light on the problematic and enduring tensions in that service. A year after the violent repression of June 1989, three leading Party intellectuals appeared in a major interview in the national paper *Guangming Daily*.[45] Su Shuangbi, an editor of *Qiushi* (Seeking Truth), the Party's theory journal that replaced *Red Flag* in 1988, and the theorists Ru Xin and Xing Bensi (all proponents of fundamental reform in the 1980s), re-emerged to discuss "Continuing the Policy of Letting a Hundred Flowers Bloom and a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend." The life histories of these three intellectuals, as well as the ideas and issues they raise, can help us understand how and why the "priestly" role of administrative generalists (in the model of Deng Tuo or Wang Ruoshui) rather than the secular role of professionals (as advocated, unsuccessfully, by earlier liberals such as Hu Shi) was able to attract these thoughtful men to continue to "fix Marxism" even after the crisis of Tiananmen.

Su Shuangbi was a student of Wu Han, whom we met as the notable historian, leader of the Democratic League, and Beijing official in the 1950s until the Cultural Revolution. In the post-Mao period Su was a

[44] Zhao Shilin, *Fang "zuo" beiwanglu* (Against the "Left" Memorandum) (Taiyuan: Shuhai chubanshe, 1992), trans. in Barmé, *In the Red*, p. 334.

[45] Trans. in Foreign Broadcast Information Service: China (FBIS-CHI), 90–134, July 12, 1990, pp. 25–9.

speaker for rehabilitating his mentor (and similar colleagues) and attacking their critics, the Gang of Four.[46] Su was a product of the 1950s generation, and like Yue Daiyun he felt the Party gave him, a working-class kid, the chance for an education and advancement. Like Xing and Ru, Su's public announcements on reform over the 1980s swung back and forth, following the shift in central Party pronouncements. Thus, in spring 1986, during the heyday of Hu Yaobang, the liberal general secretary, Su was speculating—under the very same rubric of the "Hundred Flowers"—that Marxism would have to be modified and the system opened for total reform, and that non-Marxist views should not be attacked as anti-Marxist.[47] Ru Xin, director of the Institute of Philosophy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences since 1983, more closely followed the career pattern of Wang Ruoshui, *People's Daily* theorist, both of them favoring the idea of Marxist humanism at least up to the mid-1980s.[48] Unlike Wang Ruoshui, however, Ru Xin could not bring himself to risk a break with the establishment, and so he turned on Wang in the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign of 1987, making the classic rectification "self-criticism and mutual criticism." Xing Bensi, who served on *Qiushi* magazine with Su and Ru, fell somewhere between Su's apparent acceptance of the Party line and Ru Xin's apostate humanism.[49]

All three strike a similar tone in a June 1990 *Guangming Daily* interview.[50] The question of the day is, says Su for the group, "How should China build socialism?" Ideology is an important arena in that effort, and the three men address the question on many intellectuals' minds: "How should we provide correct guidance for the struggle in the ideological field?" That is, what are the rules of the game now? The overt answers are not encouraging: the words of Deng Xiaoping, enunciated by Party resolutions and the new, post-Tiananmen general secretary, Jiang Zemin, provide the guidelines. Early in the interview the three denounce both the "Leftist" errors of (unnamed) earlier periods and the "rightist" errors of bourgeois liberalization.

On second reading, however, the interview is not so depressing. These men were participating in the negotiation of a revised deal

[46] See, for example, his collection of essays, Su Shuangbi, *Jieji douzheng yu lishi kexue* (Class Struggle and Historical Science) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1982).
[47] Su Shuangbi, "Guangyu kaizhan 'baihua zhengming' de jige wen" (Several Questions on the Promotion of "A Hundred Schools Contend"), *Guangming ribao*, April 30, 1986, p. 3, trans. in FBIS-CHI, May 19, 1986, pp. K7–K11.
[48] Brugger and Kelly, *Chinese Marxism in the Post-Mao Era*, pp. 139–40.
[49] Xing Bensi was still living in 2013, having served as both editor of *Qiushi* and vice president of the Central Party School.
[50] Quotations taken from translation in FBIS-CHI, 90–134, July 12, 1990, pp. 25–9.

between intellectuals and the state in post-Tiananmen China. These intellectuals were not free agents with many viable alternatives, but neither were they helpless. Although they made their peace with the system, they made several assertions at the same time. Repeatedly, each man stressed the need for explicit standards as to what is or is not legitimate debate: the Party should announce and stick to such standards. Arbitrary political attacks on intellectuals turn out to be the underlying object of criticism in the interview. "It is necessary," says Ru Xin, "to formulate policies to protect and encourage those who are willing to study new problems." A separate class of theoreticians, they argue, should not be held to the more disciplined standards of the publicists (i.e. propaganda work). "Theoretical study is different from propaganda work," says Xing Bensi, "in theoretical study we have to proceed from what is known to what remains unknown ... You take risks when you make explorations ... We have to protect those comrades who make mistakes when making explorations ... [otherwise] science and culture will be unable to develop." Indeed, despite the nods to current Party policy, Su Shuangbi maintains precisely the themes of his more reformist writings of 1986: exploration and development are needed and intellectuals must be free to explore, albeit with limits, but non-Marxism should not be equated with anti-Marxism. What was less clear in 1986, however, was much clearer by 1990: there is but one truth, and that truth is Marxism. Su Shuangbi in this interview demonstrates rhetorical skill worthy of his mentor, Wu Han. Su shows the dexterous flexibility of Party intellectuals that so enraged Mao. Although "upholding" Deng Xiaoping's Four Cardinal Principles of Party dictatorship and "attacking" bourgeois liberalization, Su maintains the heart of his reform goals from 1986.

Nonetheless, these goals were limited. What these intellectuals were demanding was instrumental reform, not fundamental reform. "We can only distinguish correct ideas, which conform to Marxism," writes Su, "from erroneous ones, which run counter to Marxism, through calm discussions." Ru Xin goes a bit further, offering that "Marxism itself should be an open-ended theory ... [Able] to absorb useful research results of other non-Marxist schools of thought." These were precisely the ideas pushed in the 1980s by the reformist (and, by 1990, dissident exile in the US) Su Shaozhi, when he was director of the Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought Institute at Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.[51]

[51] On Su Shaozhi's work, see Brugger and Kelly, *Chinese Marxism in the Post-Mao Era*, pp. 33 ff.

The ideas and values as well as the role of leading intellectuals assumed in this interview maintain the priestly (read "theoretical") role for establishment intellectuals, or that subgroup that wished to attend to national ideological policy.[52] By way of metaphor, we can call it Vatican II Maoism, with the socialist equivalent of folk masses and the vernacular liturgy. There is instrumental latitude, but the underlying dogma is not changed. This was first broached in the post-Great Leap period of 1961–4. Democracy, pluralism, a release of key moral and political questions to a wide range of social groups—none of these are suggested (in fact they are rejected as "bourgeois liberalization"). Instead, instrumental themes are addressed, such as regularity and predictability. The goal of philosophical inquiry, true since the days of Confucius himself, remained good government policy. Intellectuals, particularly theorists (called "theory workers") are qualified by their mastery of Marxism to speak for the people on these questions by following the traditional Maoist pedagogical politics of collecting and synthesizing the ideas of the masses. "We can make a success of formulating policies," says Su Shuangbi, "if we pool the wisdom of the masses, hold conscientious discussions, and adopt a scientific approach." Given the lack of a viable institutional alternative to the Party in 1990, the deal outlined by Su, Xing, and Ru to continue the intellectual cadre role was good enough to keep a large number of intellectuals willing to work with and through the party-state—so long as they, too, could continue to "interpret" the mandate.

That work included participation in top-level policy debates. In 1996, Liu Ji (a vice president at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) organized young establishment scholars to compose *Heart-to-Heart Chats with the General Secretary* to promote Jiang Zemin's vision for further economic reform and to rebut leftist intellectuals making public announcements at the same time in opposition to further reform. Establishment intellectuals were serving as stalking horses for reformist and conservative leaders within the Party, but they were also, as Joseph Fewsmith points out, engaging "an emerging sphere of public opinion." The 1996 public debates around reform, writes Fewsmith, "reflected the greater role intellectuals play in policy formation in contemporary China; on the other hand, they suggested the increasing need to respond to, refute, and encourage views growing up independently among the intelligentsia and the broader public."[53] The emerging public was fanned with

[52] Timothy Cheek, "From Priests to Professionals: Intellectuals and the State under the CCP," in Wasserstrom and Perry, *Popular Protest*, pp. 104–205.

[53] Vividly discussed in Joseph Fewsmith, *China since Tiananmen: From Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 192.

popular nationalism in the Party's patrioti education campaign during the 1990s and would transform into the social media world of the next ideological moment in the 2000s.

While Xing Bensi, Ru Xin, and Su Shuangbi and their junior colleagues writing for Jiang Zemin in *Heart-to-Heart Talks* gave voice to the continuing role of the intellectual cadre and its efforts at reforming the Party, for many Chinese intellectuals Tiananmen broke the Maoist deal between intellectuals and the CCP. By the mid-1990s China's intellectuals were increasingly *disestablished* intellectuals with no clear alternative public role.[54] Intellectuals returned to print, in journals such as *Reading* (*Dushu*) that carried sway in intellectual circles, but no longer did they parade their newest thoughts in the national media as Wang Ruoshui and Liu Binyan had been able to do before Tiananmen. Meanwhile, the unified public sphere of the propaganda state became fragmented as hundreds of new newspapers, magazines, television shows, and films proliferated. By decade's end there no longer was a "national audience" for intellectuals. The post-Mao liberties they enjoyed came at the price of lost influence. Some literary critics in China in the mid-1990s declared a new period, a "post-new era," or Chinese postmodernism. This new world was crass, commercial, cynical, and a thousand times more entertaining than Party pap or intellectual angst. This was the birth of China's raucous and commercial public culture, captured in the "New Ditty on the Ten Kinds of People":

> The first class of citizens are the cadres;
> Young and old alike, they enjoy idle fortune.
> The second class of citizens are the entrepreneurs,
> With their portable telephones tucked into their belts.
> The third class of citizens are the compradors,
> Who help the foreigners make big bucks.
> The fourth class of citizens are the actors,
> A wiggle of their butts earns them a thousand dollars.
> The fifth class of citizens are the lawyers,
> Who gouge both defendants and plaintiffs.
> The sixth class of citizens are the surgeons;
> They cut open your belly, then ask for a bribe.
> The seventh class of citizens are the pedlars;
> In one night their pockets bulge with coins.
> The eighth class of citizens are the propagandists;
> Every three or four days they gorge themselves at banquets.

[54] Merle Goldman adopts this model of disestablished intellectuals in her account of the 1990s, *From Comrade to Citizen: The Struggle for Political Rights in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 4.

> The ninth class of citizens are the teachers,
> Whose tastebuds never experience any delicacies.
> The tenth class of citizens are workers, peasants, and soldiers,
> They bend their backs and bust their asses, learning from Lei Feng.[55]

The ditty captures the social changes, such as the return of professions like lawyers and doctors, as well as the ironic inversion of order with workers, peasants, and soldiers—the heroes of the Cultural Revolution—at the bottom, "busting their asses" following the pathetic example of Lei Feng, the PLA's boy scout model soldier. Not far behind are teachers and propagandists, the exhaled roles for intellectuals under Confucian and Communist orders. Commerce and popular culture, as well as a distrusting Party, sidelined intellectuals. "The masterminds truly had a great fall," concludes Jing Wang. "And despite all the wishful thinking, no task forces nor the Party's men can restore the privileged position of literature and the literati again."[56]

Intellectuals noticed the change. Some bemoaned the descent into consumerism, and a few hankered after the good old days when Party-led culture gave them a stronger role. Most just carried on. There were two major options in the early 1990s: diving into the sea of business (*xiahai*) or returning to the groves of academia. The newspapers buzzed with stories of university professors opening up bicycle repair shops or restaurants. Luckier ones accepted posts on boards of directors of new companies, and all could start writing for money in the commercial press for the emerging infotainment market. Some, as well, forwent the guaranteed income (iron rice bowl) in state bureaucracies to try their hand forming their own companies.[57] However, state plans and intellectual proclivities joined to send most of the intellectual elite back to the newly expanding university system. From their posts as professors, academic intellectuals continued to write, some for the renewed professional journals in a scholarly and technical vein, but others contributed to a lively, indeed often vitriolic, public debate in the now fragmented public sphere of intellectual journals. These intellectual squabbles will define the next ideological moment, but at the end of the reform moment some of these new voices caught the change. Xu Jilin, a young Shanghai academic in the late 1980s and early 1990s, concluded that modernization inevitably

[55] Trans. by Victor Mair, in Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 263.
[56] Wang, *High Culture Fever*, p. 266.
[57] Xiuwu R. Liu gives a lively oral history of three such scholars who threw away their state jobs to start their own electronics company in the 1990s, in *Jumping into the Sea: From Academics to Entrepreneurs in South China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

entails "the erosion of the central position of intellectuals," and Wang Ning, another younger scholar, invoked the description of the theorist Zygmunt Bauman of the involuntary transformation of European intellectuals from cultural "legislators" to the more humble role of "interpreters," and enjoined Chinese intellectuals to do the same.[58]

Meanwhile, similar social changes and student protests had marked life in Taiwan. Throughout the 1980s, the grip of the ruling Nationalists (the Guomindang, or, in their preferred romanization, Kuomintang) had loosened in response to the demands of a rising middle class and a restive student population. A year after the Tiananmen demonstrations in China, students from Taiwan National University staged a sit-in at Memorial Square in Taipei. The students wanted direct elections for Taiwan's president and the National Assembly. Their protest, which grew to some 20,000 in number, coincided with the inauguration of Lee Teng-hui, the Guomindang's choice for president who had been elected only by the National Assembly. The students wore the white Formosan lily to show their identification as Taiwanese, and so the movement has become known as the Wild Lily Student Movement. Conditions in Taipei and Beijing, however, were different in important respects. While Lee Teng-hui had not been popularly elected, the opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party, had been legalized a few years earlier and Taiwan was clearly on the path to democratic reform. Indeed, Lee Teng-hui's response to the student demonstration was to invite fifty students into the presidential building and to promise democratic reforms in the months ahead. Good to his word, and clearly able to make the transition to campaign politics, Lee allowed open elections for president, which were held in 1996, and Lee Teng-hui won, becoming Taiwan's first democratically elected president.[59]

Taiwan, too, had its share of contentious public intellectuals, notably Bo Yang (1920–2008), a novelist, journalist, and political commentator who had moved to Taiwan in 1949 when Chiang Kai-shek's forces had retreated there. Through the early 1960s, Bo had become increasingly critical of the Guomindang's political domination. He was arrested for defaming Chiang and imprisoned for a decade, most of the time in Taiwan's infamous penal colony on Green Island off the southeast coast. Released after Chiang's death in 1975, Bo Yang, like his mainland compatriots, turned his ire on Chinese culture itself. In 1984 he gave lectures in Iowa that became the book *The Ugly Chinaman* (*Choulou de*

[58] Xu Jilin and Wang Ning, quoted in Wang, *High Culture Fever*, p. 265.
[59] Linda Chao and Ramon H. Myers, *The First Chinese Democracy: Political Life in the Republic of China on Taiwan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

*Zhongguoren*). It caused an uproar not only in Taiwan, where Bo Yang continued to live until his death, but also in China. Not since Lu Xun's biting commentaries and satires in the 1920s and 1930s had the Chinese character been subjected to such a forthright critique.

Bo Yang did not mince words:

> Even among the Chinese in the United States you will find the absurd situation wherein leftists, rightists, moderates, independents, left-leaning moderates, moderate-leaning leftists, right-leaning moderates, and moderate-leaning rightists can't seem to find a common language and are constantly at each other's throats. What does this imply about the Chinese people? ... How is it possible for such a great people to have degenerated to such a state of ugliness?[60]

Bo Yang is unequivocal: "My answer is that this is not a problem of any particular individual but rather of Chinese culture as a whole." Bo Yang enumerates the faults of his people: infighting; the inability to admit error and the propensity to blame others; inveterate bragging and boasting; and the inability to treat themselves, or others, with respect. Yet, Bo Yang concludes, "With so many loathsome qualities, only the Chinese people can reform themselves." His solution is to develop a personal sense of judgment:

> The only way to improve the situation of the Ugly Chinaman is for each of us to cultivate our own personal taste and judgment. If we're poor actors, we can at least enjoy going to plays. Those who don't understand what's happening on stage can enjoy the music, lights, costumes and scenery, while those who do understand can appreciate drama as an art form. The ability to make such distinctions is a great achievement in itself ... I have my freedom and rights, whether the government gives them to me or not. If we had the capacity to make proper judgments, we could demand elections and be rigorous in our selection of candidates. But without this capacity, we'll never be able to distinguish a beautiful woman from a pock-marked hag.

Many of the themes Bo Yang raised, such as the grounds for effective democracy, would come to dominate intellectual debates in the next ideological moment of rejuvenation.

### Enduring ideas, 1985

The idea of the **people** was rescued from the idealized collective images of the Cultural Revolution in this ideological moment of reform after Mao. From the wall posters of former Red Guards in the late 1970s to

[60] Quotations from Bo Yang, "The Ugly Chinaman," trans. in Barmé and Minford, *Seeds of Fire*, pp. 170–1, 175–6.

Party theorists like Wang Ruoshui to students on Tiananmen Square in 1989, "the people" became individuals, *ren*, and not the collective *renmin*. Chinese citizens, as well as the intellectuals who still felt they could speak for the general public, demanded that individuals and personal values become the focus of politics, not class struggle, not group identity. Intellectuals explored how this newly emphasized individual ought to relate to public life, but class and national definitions of "the people" were not the focus during these years. Li Zehou was representative of the moment in his search to find, describe, and cultivate individual subjectivity. At the same time, China's raucous popular culture was allowed to enter a more relaxed version of China's "directed public sphere" as the post-Mao propaganda state stepped back from total control to strategic management of communication. Thus ditties like "The Ten Kinds of People" could mock the re-emergence of social class stratification among "the people" that kept political and economic elites sitting pretty and workers, peasants, and soldiers out in the cold.

**Chinese** remained as *Zhongguoren* (people of the state of China) or *Zhongguode* (pertaining to the state of China). However, discussions of China in the 1980s focused on *culture*, Chinese culture or *Zhongguo wenhua*. During these years of painful reflection and reform, this focus took the form of critique of the character flaws of Chinese *civilization*—seen more in terms of "feudal" characteristics of political despotism and social irresponsibility than of Confucian heritage per se. While this echoed similar criticisms of Chinese culture in the May Fourth period in the 1910s and 1920s, by the 1980s the conditions of this criticism were crucially different. China in 1980 was not occupied by foreign powers and its state was, if anything, too strong and not too weak. The criticism of Chinese character thus played out differently in the 1980s compared with the 1920s. The reform moment began with real self-doubt about a civilization that could inflict upon itself something like the Cultural Revolution. The beginning of economic success by the mid-1990s and a concerted effort by the Party to peddle *nationalism* as the glue in a new nationwide education campaign had an impact, particularly on the next generation.[61] By 1996 the national best-seller was the anti-foreign screed *China Can Say No!*.

**Democracy** for Mao and the CCP was democratic centralism. Even in his most liberal speech, the original version of his "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People" in February 1957, Mao

[61] On the patriotism campaign, see Geremie Barmé, *In The Red*; and Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

declared, "Democracy is democracy with leadership; it is democracy under centralized leadership, not the democracy of anarchism."[62] Deng Xiaoping in his Four Cardinal Principles in 1979 had reiterated this. Yet during this reform moment this official conception was challenged from two directions—from within the Party and from society. Party intellectuals cited Marxist theory and Party experience to demand that political power be decentralized; that democracy required first regular procedures, then a procedural voice for individuals, and finally the protection of individuals through law. Some, like Fang Lizhi, went fully to the position of liberal democracy, and were kicked out of the Party. Outside the Party, younger scholars and radical students all embraced the idea of democracy and individualism, though they had fuzzier ideas of how a legal regime regulates democratic politics. The West, however, was the model for democracy—to imitate or to beat. The Party unequivocally reinstated control in the summer of 1989 with "shock and awe" tactics very much directed at its own people. And so a sullen political truce on the question of democracy held as economic growth and a more vibrant and colorful life of consumerism blossomed through the 1990s.

[62] MacFarquhar, Cheek, and Wu, *Secret Speeches*, p. 133.