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Wei Jingsheng and the Democracy Movement in Post-Mao China

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**WEI JINGSHENG AND THE DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT IN
POST-MAO CHINA**

by

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B.A. May 1995, College of Charleston

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

WEI JINGSHENG AND THE DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT IN POST-MAO CHINA.

Merle David Kellerhals, Jr.
Old Dominion University, 1998
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The hypothesis tested in this thesis was whether there has been an evident evolution in the democratic thought of those engaged in China's Democracy Movement in the post-Mao era. Chinese democratic activists today have been greatly influenced by the tradition of remonstrance of the ancient minister and poet Qu Yuan, who gave his life out of remorse for his king and the loss of the kingdom. Liang Qichao introduced democracy to China in 1895, only to have to flee the country or face death for his views. The activists of the Democracy Movement of 1978-79, following the tradition, were among those substantially influenced by the events of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The activists initiated big character posters on Democracy Walls throughout China – but among the most influential was Beijing's. Though many of the numerous democracy activist groups that emerged as the movement gained momentum held differing philosophical positions, they held some quite common concerns over democracy, civil liberties, employment, and basic economic needs. Wei Jingsheng represented the more vocal and extreme democratic position in his wall poster *The Fifth Modernization: Democracy*, which first appeared in late 1978 and which brought to the movement an aspect of the liberalism controversy that had not been expressed or defined previously. Wei, who spoke to the reasons why China must democratize, was not the only voice or only perspective to emerge. Fang Lizhi and Yan Jiaqi each took the argument for

democracy steps further in expressing the means and the outcomes to be achieved. Finally, students from major universities in Beijing began six weeks of demonstrations from mid-April to 4 June 1989 touched off by the sudden death of Hu Yaobang, who was the Chinese Communist Party General Secretary. The June Fourth Movement involved similar aspects of remonstrance that included petitions, banners, and an attempt to speak directly to governmental authorities. It ended with the deaths of hundreds or thousands, but it also set in motion the culture of reform.

To Sandy and Jenny

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Chinese people have been “alive in a bitter sea” for nearly 8,000 years of recorded history, so my efforts here can not begin to match all that has gone on before. Nevertheless, I am grateful to a wondrous people and their tenacity to struggle in this bitter sea. Likewise, I can not help but admire the diligence and fortitude of China’s remonstrators, old and new, who give a meaning in their sacrifice to the pursuit of democracy for their civilization that most American’s, who take it all for granted, will never understand. Government, as the French intellectual historian Michel Foucault indicates, is not primarily concerned with sovereignty and territory, but the relation of the efficient management of “men and things.” In 8,000 years the Chinese people have consistently served and paid homage to one central leader who has possessed all power, they still do.

The writing of this thesis has taken place largely on the Old Dominion University campus, but the ideas behind this undertaking have been in my mind for the past fifteen years waiting to come out. Any shortcomings are entirely mine.

Professors Jin Qiu, Chen Jie, and David Putney have served eloquently on my committee and I am grateful. I am also deeply indebted to Professor Douglas G. Greene, director of the Institute of Humanities at Old Dominion University, and Mrs. Ruth Bradberry for the opportunity to study and work among some of America’s finest scholars. The integrated approach to post-graduate studies is an extremely valuable means of attaining an advanced level of learning – expanding the mind in many ways that a more traditional single discipline can not accomplish. While it may not meet everyone’s educational needs and goals, it has met mine in every way.

Finally, I am grateful to Professor Thomas Palmer and Professor Earl O. Kline, both emeritus of the College of Charleston Department of Political Science, who have been enduring influences on my academic life and the pursuit of post-graduate studies.

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NOTE ON ROMANIZATION

Pinyin is used throughout this thesis without tone or diacritical marks for the transcription of Chinese names and terms. This system of romanization, introduced in the 1950s, is officially approved by the People's Republic of China. Where the older Wade-Giles equivalents are used, it is because they may be better known to the reader or because of the use of some references that were published before the current system of romanization had been employed, accounting for possible inconsistencies in spelling and punctuation. In some instances the older system of romanization has been used because it is difficult to recognize in *Pinyin*. Additionally, all Chinese names referenced in this thesis follow accepted usage of the family name coming first followed by the two-syllable given name without commas and hyphenation.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The ancient minister and poet Qu Yuan (*Ch'u Yuan*) committed suicide by drowning in the Milo River out of remorse for the death of his king and the loss of the great southern Kingdom of Qu in 278 B.C.E. during the Warring States period. Qu died willingly despite his controversial views over how the Kingdom of Qu was governed. He had consistently pleaded in protest, or dissent, even while in exile after losing favor at court. His life and death represents the complex nature of remonstrance, or the way of dissent in Chinese political thought. Qu Yuan held loyalty to his king and state in such high regard that he was willing to die out of a sense of righteousness.¹ The mythology of Qu Yuan illustrates quite succinctly the plight of those political activists who in 1978 defied convention and launched the Democracy Movement to bring political liberalization and reform to the Chinese government. Following the ancient tradition of Chinese activists who practiced remonstrance, Wei Jingsheng – who became a leading activist in 1978 – posted his big character essay *The Fifth Modernization: Democracy on Beijing Democracy Wall*. Wei placed himself in direct conflict with the prevailing regime of Deng Xiaoping and established a radical tempo in the ensuing ideological struggle. This ideological struggle of the Democracy Movement followed an ancient tradition based on the notion that every official – regardless of the consequences – was bound to inform the imperial court, or government, with honest advice for necessary reforms intended for the

Note: The style manual followed in the preparation of this thesis was the sixth edition of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*.

¹Laurence A. Schneider, *A Madman of Ch'u: The Chinese Myth of Loyalty and Dissent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 1-3, 201.

betterment of the state. The advice is given in an unselfish manner with complete loyalty.

My thesis examines the evolution of some critical democratic thinkers in the post-Mao era to determine the scope and direction of their political thought and analysis. They were selected not necessarily because they were active leaders of the Democracy Movement or because they were the most well known, but because of the pivotal time of their writings in the movement and the critical juncture with government policy making. All of the activists stressed one critical feature – reform but not revolution of government in the spirit of loyalty and unselfishness. They did not want to tear down China’s political institutions, but wanted to see reforms put in place based on existing features such as the Chinese Constitution. Wei Jingsheng’s benchmark essay that appeared on Democracy Wall that cold night in December 1978 may speak clearer than anyone has about democracy in China and its potential realization. Though Wei is among the more influential political activists of his time, he is not alone and I would not suggest in this thesis that he is the paramount leader of that vibrant Democracy Movement. He did not launch the movement, but in fact spent most of the past twenty years in prison for his writings, which weakened his immediate and timely influence on the movement’s subsequent direction. Others who have been influential include Fang Lizhi, Yan Jiaqi, Chen Erjin, and the countless editors and writers of numerous study societies, journals, and newspapers published by seemingly crude means during the short-lived Democracy Movement and the pivotal Tiananmen Square demonstration of 4 June 1989, which showed the world in graphic terms the twenty-year democracy struggle inside China. These years of political activism have produced a body of thought, though highly diverse

in perspective, that demonstrates a clear evolution and new intellectual dynamic.

More clearly than any other essay, document, or political journal of that time, Wei Jingsheng's essay defined the democracy sought by modern Chinese political activists. Where Confucius (*Master K'ung*) traveled in pre-imperial China promoting his priorities of ritual, humanness, and education, along with the furtherance of a morally just government – in the tradition of remonstrance, Wei's essay was in response to the new government policies of the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping. Deng had consolidated power and control of the massive Chinese government two years after the death of Chairman Mao Zedong and the arrest and incarceration of the Gang of Four. Deng Xiaoping had proposed to guide China into modernization through a program called the Four Modernization's – modernizing agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defense. The program has not been as smooth a transition into modern world economics as many had envisioned, though the Chinese have made great strides in achieving the goals that first surfaced about 1965 in speeches by Deng and Premier Zhou Enlai. Wei argued that Deng's programs would not reach fruition without a fifth modernization – democracy that was based at its most fundamental on the protection of individual civil liberties.² His position was not all that radical given the context within which he made his argument. Every Chinese constitution since the Sun Zhongsan (*Sun Yat-sen*) inspired 1911 Republican Revolution that ended the Imperial dynastic cycle has recognized the people as sovereign, though almost no political leader or government since has been able, or more often willing, to define that sovereignty.

² James D. Seymour, ed., *The Fifth Modernization: China's Human Rights Movement, 1978-1979* (Stanfordville, N.Y.: Human Rights Publishing Group, 1980), 1.

The Chinese regularly use the terms “democracy,” “citizen,” “constitution,” and “sovereignty,” but lack a conceptual framework for their meaning as in Western political thought – creating a dichotomy. Wei Jingsheng and many other voices have expanded the concept in much broader terms and taken the evolution of democratic thought to a higher dimension, exposing basic political rights, equality, and the power to elect and remove officeholders. Chinese democratic thought can only be understood in the historical tradition, and the questions and reforms being posed now have little difference from those first posed in 1895 by the Literati Liang Qichao, who first introduced the concept of Western democracy to the Chinese people. To understand how far China has come since 1978 when the modern Democracy Movement began requires a somewhat broader perspective in understanding how democratic thought has been adapted to Chinese political thought. This evolution in thought is an illustrative intellectual history that is a dynamic dimension to a post-Confucian society. Though it should be understood that actual Imperial Confucianism was in reality an amalgam of Legalism and Confucianism, which should be distinguished from the original teachings of Confucius as well as the personal Confucian philosophy that emerged in the Song Dynasty. Imperial Confucianism was employed by the emperors to contain, control, and manage the state. The despotic statecraft of the Qin Dynasty embraced Legalism, and the Han – which followed – added to that a set of ideas derived from Confucianism to eventually create a total state philosophy. The emperors liked Legalism and the bureaucrats liked Confucianism, which created an interesting political mix.³ The Imperial Confucianism that emerged as state ideology, however, was not classical Confucianism but an interpretation by the Han

³ John King Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1992), 62.

Dynasty scholar Dong Zhongshu (*Tung Chung-shu*, 179-104 B.C.E.) – whose concept was strongly theistic and metaphysical.⁴

Democracy in the Western context has come to mean rule by or of the people. Government obtains authority to govern so long as the people give consent, the fundamental application of the theory of the Social Contract defined by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. As a corollary, citizenship has been understood as the inherent right of participation, but even more is the expectation of participation. Democracy has taken on in the modern context many principles and practices including popular sovereignty, voting, representation, jury duty, equality, and majority rule – all requiring active citizen participation. Finally in the Western context democracy has become highly diverse in its various forms as seen in the United States, Canada, Japan, Taiwan, and Europe. Democracy as such in China is both socialist and Chinese. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) perceives democracy as a socialist democracy which represents the interests of workers and peasants in a harmonious relationship of the citizen and the state and public interest is placed higher than citizens' rights, but it does not mean absolute power is held by the people. Its system features one-party dominance and the state power to make laws necessary without judicial review. It is a political system not at all similar to Western-based political systems. The authority to rule in the Second Republic does not stem from the consent of the governed with one person and one vote at the national level, but rather from democratic centralism. In China, problems are derived more from the operations of the political system – which is a one party system in a totalitarian regime rather than the

⁴David S. Nivison and Arthur F. Wright, eds., *Confucianism in Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), 182-84.

ideas or perceptions.

Democracy first appeared in China in 1895 through the writings of the intellectual Liang Qichao. His writing came during demonstrations in front of the Imperial Censorate in Beijing, a site which later became Tiananmen Square, when Chinese intellectuals protested the Treaty of Shimonoseki following the disastrous Chinese defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. It marked a major shift in the political thought of the Chinese people and a complete revolution in traditional political interaction between the people and the imperial government.

Never before had the people been allowed to address political issues directly or indirectly to the throne. Previously the only means for addressing issues to the throne was by memorials from high-ranking officials submitted to the emperor through a system of official posts within the elaborate bureaucracy of the imperial court in Beijing. The emperor would study each document and make comments in the traditional vermilion ink reserved for his use. Each decision returned as an edict that had to be recopied, registered and eventually sent back to the bureaucracy through the same course of posts by which it arrived. High-ranking officials were allowed to address the throne in memorials that specifically concerned them. In times when the nation was at severe risk, the emperor would “widen the road for speech” and permit lower-ranking officials and some unofficial intellectuals to address specific issues through the memorial system. It was in those very rare times when the road had been widened that unofficial opinion-makers could hope to reach the emperor’s attention.⁵

⁵Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), ix-x.

Change in thought and politics, though, were shifting away from the ancient imperial system toward greater liberalism. It has become a pattern that has characterized Chinese politics to the present. The imperial totalitarianism established by Qin Shi Huangdi, China's first emperor, began to lessen with the establishment of the First Republic in 1911, though it was supplanted with renewed warlordism and authoritarianism after the death of Sun Zhongsan. With the arrival of the Second Republic in 1949 and the leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong, the socialist state imposed a similar authoritarian system of government. Deng Xiaoping began expanding political liberalism incrementally during his tenure as paramount leader with some subtle but expansive measures that have gone almost unnoticed in the West.

Liang Qichao first appeared on the national stage during the Beijing revolt in 1895 along with his liberal mentor Kang Youwei. They sought reforms from the Qing Court that were intended to transform China from a feudal society into more of a democracy along the lines of Meiji Japan, Britain, and Germany – all of whom represented political systems based on a constitutional monarchy. Eventually, their efforts produced the “hundred days” reform movement, but failed ultimately when the Dowager Empress Ci Xi rescinded reforms enacted by the rather weak Emperor Guangxu and resumed direct rule of the disintegrating empire. Liang and Kang Youwei were forced to flee China to Japan when the Dowager Empress attempted to have them arrested and executed, an interesting pattern for political activists that has not changed radically ever since. Although Liang's objective of converting China to a Western-style democracy never fully materialized, he continued to influence political thought from the Qing Dynasty to the Republican period – both Nationalist and Communist. Liang's influence has been made entirely from his

extensive writings of more than forty volumes which reflect a blend of traditional Confucian orthodoxy and Western political thought. Confucian orthodoxy required a natural harmony of social roles. In this scheme, the political energies of the citizens would contribute to the collective welfare – not for the pursuit of personal interests – but as a duty much like those of the bureaucrats appointed to office might perform. Liang's writings, some forty volumes, became a window on all that was modern and foreign and might be used to save China. He studied Western political thought through Japanese translations of Western works and he visited the United States briefly, touring the country for six months before returning to his exile in Yokohama. His visit to the United States convinced him that China probably could never develop into the democracy he had seen in the West. It may well have been a mistake for him to equate democracy in the United States with what China could develop, because almost no other country in the world could transform itself into a political system like the United States. The political system in the United States is more the exception than the rule in democratization.

Liang preferred economic growth for China to class warfare. Mao, who had read both Liang and Kang Youwei while a youth, went to the opposite extreme. Liang's concept of growth, however, was embraced by Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping in their design of the Four Modernization's – which to work would require a massive economic development program. In 1979 the Enlightenment Society of Huang Xiang – one of several major Democracy Movement societies to develop between 1978-79 – paraphrased Liang in saying that China must have a stable democratic government to become strong. It would take that to be able to mobilize the support and wisdom of every member of the country. It was also understood that modernization through democratization was still

unrealized.⁶

The initial Democracy Movement began in October 1978 when activists began questioning how a powerful government such as China's could rule by consent of the governed. When Deng's government emerged in 1978, he began permitting democracy activists to place big character posters – a vestige of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution – on democracy walls across the country. The most widely known democracy wall in China was Beijing's on Xidan Street near the intersection of Changan Avenue. The legendary wall, often referred to simply as "Xidan Democracy Wall," is a 200-yard gray brick wall surrounding a bus yard a few blocks from Tiananmen Square, near the Great Hall of the People, Zhongnanhai, and the Imperial City. By 6 December 1979, authorities ceased permitting the posting of unofficial materials on the walls, ending the movement in its most unrestrained form. After that Beijing activists continued to place posters on walls and signs at several universities and in Yuetan Park, which is in a residential area three miles west of the center of the city. In January 1980, Deng essentially ordered no posting of wall posters of any type. Deng was following in essence the pattern set by the ancient emperors who opened the channels for opinion and then closed them when the voices exceeded unspecified limits set by the emperor's expectations, a pattern deftly practiced by Mao who often encouraged others to speak their minds on key issues – but only within limits set by Mao. An example of Mao's deceptive notions of widening the road came at the 1959 Lushan Conference, which was called by the party leadership to discuss the conditions of the country following the failure of the Great Leap Forward economic program. At that meeting in July 1959, Mao called for open discussion and criticism.

⁶Nathan, *Chinese Democracy*, 64-65.

Defense Minister Peng Dehuai rose to explain to Mao the deteriorating condition of life in the Chinese countryside, but Mao interpreted it as an assault on his leadership and the ill-fated speech by Peng Dehuai ultimately cost him power and position in the government. Peng had been with Mao for more than thirty years, since the 1920s and was the military marshal who led Chinese troops in the Korean Civil War. Peng's efforts to speak from the heart about the problems of the people were a disaster, and illustrated that Mao did not really mean that when he widened the road, and there were limits – though opaque. For a time at least, Deng had allowed the wall posters and expanded public comment, holding the view that at times the government needed to be urged by the activists. Though it is equally true the wall posters and the fledgling Democracy Movement needed Deng's hidden political agenda as much as he needed their wall posters to help subdue his opponents, the dichotomy created a kind of symbiotic relationship between the paramount leader and his political remonstrators.⁷

The Democracy Movement – like in the time of Confucius, Qu Yuan, and Liang Qichao – grew out of the turmoil, chaos, humiliation, suffering, and desperation created by the Cultural Revolution. It was, to be sure, a negative aspect of the movement. While the activists were in their 20s to 30s, they had vision of political change for China, but not dismantling of the government, which is an aspect of the notion of Chinese democracy that Westerners fail to grasp. They wanted freedoms for the individual – a contrary perspective from the traditional orthodoxy but not at the cost of the state. No one advocated overthrowing the Chinese government, but they called for greater popular participation and control over events within the system – a distinction between rebellion and

⁷ Seymour. *The Fifth Modernization*. 12-13.

remonstrance. One of the more negative aspects of the Cultural Revolution was that many of China's youth failed to get the basic and advanced education they needed for being productive – they were simply never given a chance.⁸ They simply were not able to support the programs that Deng Xiaoping had initiated. The communist party had effectively alienated the students of the Cultural Revolution and the aging Marxist doctrines were failing to keep pace or maintain the interest of the new political activists.⁹ It is certainly true in this instance that the young minds of China wasted on Mao's obsession with class struggle was a horrendous tragedy. Wei Jingsheng arrived at his place in the movement from the dark side of the Cultural Revolution that literally wrenched him from junior high school and from his experiences and service in the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Wei Jingsheng, a son of two party members, was sixteen when he was drawn in to the Cultural Revolution, “which forced people to abandon the superstitions and prejudices that had dominated their minds for so long and made them begin to scrutinize their own attitudes and beliefs.” He loved literature, but also developed a strong interest in philosophy which led him to read every extensive work by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao. His readings in part were also encouraged by his father, who wanted all his children to develop a strong sense of Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought. Until his illusions were later shattered, Wei says he became a fanatical Maoist. His mother, though, also encouraged her children to soften their political ideology with readings about the lives and struggles of everyday Chinese in the People's Republic and their sacrifices.

⁸Ibid. 14.

⁹Fairbank. 421-22.

Wei said the Cultural Revolution actually began as an explosion of rage over the gap between official policy and reality. It was a period of chaos brought about by years of communist despotism. However, the explosion of rage took the form of tyrant worship. People actually struggled to support despotism, which illustrated the “blindness of the mass struggle and the extent to which the people’s minds remained shackled by feudalistic ideas.” It was this experience that set Wei on the course he took to join the Democracy Movement, not unlike many others who became political activists.¹⁰

Wei first saw the futility of Mao’s socialist empire after joining the Red Guards in 1966, ostensibly because of dissatisfaction with the lack of social equality. Wei postulates that the movement failed finally because it began with the ideology of despotism. Nevertheless he joined the Cultural Revolution believing that Mao was right and that class struggle still existed and needed to be expelled from Chinese society. He, like many others, believed that class enemies were responsible for all inequality and unhappiness in China. After spreading across China and fomenting more class struggle and almost no class redemption, Wei said the enthusiasm of the moment wore off as doubts about their purpose began to emerge. The Red Guards youth from Beijing who returned to the capital after their tours in the countryside began splitting into smaller factions as doubts and dissatisfaction with the results of their efforts surfaced. Many of their party heroes and mentors had been purged, which left many in the movement completely confused. He and friends went in to the Northwest region to find out for themselves what was happening in China. What Wei and his friends saw was abject poverty, and that socialism as an

¹⁰Wei Jingsheng, *The Courage to Stand Alone*, trans. and ed. Kristina M. Torgeson (New York: Viking, 1997), 229-31.

economic system had failed the people in the outlying areas. He was seeing reality for the first time without the filters of Maoist ideology, and he saw what Beijing had been saying was not possible – that socialism was not superior to capitalism though it is not clear Wei understood completely what a capitalist system was at that time. Later when he was fleeing authorities for belonging to a group of former Red Guards that were opposed to the Gang of Four, Wei says “I saw for myself how Mao’s theory of ‘class struggle’ was actually played out in real life; and when I went on to do a stint in the army, I saw once again how the theory of class struggle had seeped into every corner of life.”¹¹ He was finally arrested after a year and spent four months in prison on a relatively minor charge. After his release he was assigned to the Beijing Zoo as an electrician, which was possible because of his family’s cadre status in the CCP. That experience changed his life and he began studying politics and was able to gain some insight into international affairs through reading the *Reference News*, which was only available to a certain level of party cadre. In 1969 Wei joined the Chinese Army and was able to travel around the country and see conditions for himself. Being able to join the PLA at such a critical time in Chinese internal affairs is another indication of the status his family held, something many others simply could not do. He was discharged after four years and rejected a chance to become a low-ranking official to return to the Beijing Zoo and his former job. He witnessed the 5 April 1976 demonstrations at Tiananmen Square and became aware that China needed to change. By then Wei began spending time at the home of his Tibetan girlfriend in Beijing where he began writing essays on democracy. His sharpness of style and daring in his essays won him instant attention in the movement, though he never enjoyed a broad and

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 232-33, 248.

solid base of support within the Democracy Movement.¹²

Though many of the numerous democracy activist groups that emerged as the movement gained momentum held differing philosophical positions, they held some quite common concerns over democracy, civil liberties, employment, and basic economic needs. Some of the organizations were at best loose coalitions as a result of their diverse backgrounds and levels of education, which created periods when they often did not seem to be connected with other elements which weakened them instead of projecting a united front. While the initial movement was suppressed in 1979 when the crackdown came, the literature and writings have survived to fuel the evolution in political thought. When the crackdown did begin the democratic groups fractured even more.¹³

The movement was related in 1978 to the rapid political and economic changes taking place in the country, and became entangled in the power struggle that ensued after Mao's death. When Deng launched his drive to implement the Four Modernization's, which signaled a break with the ideological left and the politics of the Cultural Revolution, democratic activists believed a new era had emerged and supported him. Deng reinforced his commitment to a new, more liberal reign when he initiated the rehabilitation of China's political outcasts from the previous regime going back as far as 1957 and the Anti-Rightist Campaign. These people were generally more liberal and possessed the skills Deng needed to push his modernization programs. He also wanted to show the Chinese people that he wanted a modern China founded on law with citizen's rights. It has been speculated that Deng also wanted the rehabilitation of political outcasts because he, too, had been one and

¹²Seymour. 16.

¹³Ibid. 2. 14. 23.

had spent considerable time in exile. This included those who had been purged along with Deng, but not those purged before the Cultural Revolution or after it.¹⁴ It is important to understand that Deng Xiaoping was as much a victim of the Cultural Revolution as many others, and it helped to shape his own perspectives on the kind of government he would lead.

Deng's rehabilitation campaign focused on the cases of approximately 100 million Chinese. He appointed Hu Yaobang to conduct the campaign. Deng, himself, ordered the review of 388 cases involving demonstrators who had been arrested 5 April 1976, the traditional Grave-Sweeping Day, in a demonstration to memorialize the death of Premier Zhou Enlai in Tiananmen Square. In every case, the Chinese government reversed the verdicts and formally announced it on 15 November 1978. Democracy Wall on Xidan Street emerged. Ten days later the first modern democracy demonstration was held in Tiananmen Square to hold public comment on government and public officials. It was an extraordinary break with China's past political relationship with its people. Remonstrators of the fourth century B.C.E. were from China's elite classes, while the twentieth century counterparts came from every class, including the most politically conscious – students, workers, and party members. Interestingly in the remonstrators cases that were later rehabilitated, all were judged correct at the time of their rehabilitation. None were reported to have criticized Mao, only his close supporters. The CCP had said that these people had remonstrated – not rebelled.¹⁵

The 1978 Chinese constitution promoted popular control of government with

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁵ Nathan, *Chinese Democracy*, 7-10, 26.

guarantees of freedom of speech, correspondence, the press, demonstration, and freedom to strike by workers. The constitution also promoted the right of citizens to speak freely, air their political views, hold public debates on issues of the day, and write big-character posters for all to read. The Democracy Movement spurred on by these changes and the end of the Mao era and the rise of a more liberal Deng Xiaoping asked the same age-old question of how the central government could reconcile power sharing with the people. It was in a real context a question that was derived from three other questions – why was China backward, how to invigorate the state with the people’s energy, and finally, how to reconcile popular participation. It was the “riddle of backwardness.” The concept of emperors remains strong in Chinese culture despite two revolutions in the twentieth century to eradicate the ancient feudal system.¹⁶

As the wall poster campaigns began fading and activists began turning to the next stage in the movement – the political journal. The political journals, not overly sophisticated or lavishly produced, provided a key element wall posters could not and that was a much easier venue for greater readership. While many journals never produced mass copies of an issue, some as few as a hundred and at least one – *Masses’ Reference News* – produced a January 1979 issue of 20,000 copies, they all reached a much wider reading audience by simply being passed around hand-to-hand. Among the leading organizations and publications were *Exploration (Tansuo)*, the Chinese Human Rights League, *Beijing Spring*, *April Fifth Forum*, the Enlightenment Society, the Thaw Society, *Today*, and the *Masses’ Reference News*. *Exploration* was the most militant of the journals and was published by Wei. His journal was critical of Marxist ideology, the Chinese government

¹⁶*Ibid.*, xiii, 6.

and Deng Xiaoping directly, though it also included articles on democracy and modernization, and the primitive conditions of political prisons.¹⁷

Publications that were published by the political activists came to be known as “people’s publications,” not wanting to be associated with official government publications nor those regarded as dissident and underground. Most people’s publications were actually published out of someone’s apartment or home, which is amazing when you consider how small apartments are in Beijing. Usually publishing costs were paid by staff who took from meager wages to pay the cost of publishing.¹⁸ Wei started publishing his journal – *Exploration* – while living at his father’s home at 118 Lane Four North, Fuwai, Beijing. When he constructed the journal, he was aiming at several things that included improving the material and spiritual life of the Chinese people and creating the most rational social environment for the Chinese people. He proposed in his 9 January 1979 issue to do those things within reasonable limits. The key to understanding Wei and his quest is in understanding that he wanted this evolution “as provided by the constitution.” He actually took the Chinese constitution at face value. He had an unfailing belief that if the constitution granted these individual rights, then he intended to avail himself of them and encourage others to do so. It was his blessing and his curse. He said the Democracy Movement “has developed out of the anti-bureaucracy movement of the Cultural Revolution and the anti-dictatorship movement centered around Xidan Democracy Wall.” Wei’s *Fifth Modernization* and *Explorations* marked him as more militant than moderate in projecting the democratic changes for modern China.¹⁹

¹⁷ Seymour. 15.

¹⁸ Nathan. *Chinese Democracy*. 15-17.

¹⁹ Seymour. 34.

As a consequence of the diversity of the Democracy Movement, no one actually suggested how to democratize China in specific terms. Nearly all of the writings dealt with liberalization more at the theoretical level than the functional level. It was a subject of considerable discussion in the *People's Daily*, *Worker's Daily*, and *China Youth*. They discussed secret ballots by voters, choice among candidates for public office, and the ability to recall corrupt officials. Wei's concept of human rights has been compared to that of Luo Longji, leader of the Democratic League before and after the 1911 revolution, who wrote in 1929 that human rights were essential for life as a human being. Wei wrote an essay in March 1979 before his arrest in *Explorations* that was written under his pen name "Jin Sheng" that defines human rights, equality, and democracy. He held that human rights gave equality expression in society and preferred using the term "equal human rights issue" when discussing these three integrated concepts. Human rights for Wei did have limitations because of the environment and because they had to be constantly achieved. Politics was the means by which "people's rights to manage their lives are either realized or suppressed." Equality involved basic political rights that Wei defined as freedom of speech, assembly, association, the press, religion, movement, and right to strike by workers. When the Chinese have these basic political freedoms they will enjoy political and economic equality. He also stressed that equality did not mean averaging, but to a more complex understanding that involved similar opportunities and the same possibilities that could be used for different purposes. Finally, his concept of democracy centered on individual freedom of choice, which for an individual becomes possible when everyone's rights and choices are accommodated. Democracy is "a social condition insuring that all have equal opportunities to attain their goals in life. Thus, democracy is a social system" –

both political and economic.²⁰

Wei believed China had two choices – democracy or autocracy. He left no room for anything else and he accused Deng of manipulating the people and suspected that he might become a Maoist-style dictator. Wei attacked Deng directly in an essay in *Explorations* on 25 March 1979 in which he said that the people should only support his leadership as long as he continues to implement policies that provide for liberalism and freedom. He said that if Deng “follows a dictatorial road and acts contrary to the interests of the people, the people should oppose him.” Wei continued the attack saying that Deng had become an enemy of the people for violating basic democratic rights. He further advocated that people had to possess the right to vote and to have the power to dismiss officials from office. The day before his arrest on 29 March, the *April Fifth Forum* put up a wall poster that took issue with Wei’s essay on Deng, saying that Deng had done nothing to be labeled petty or a would-be autocrat. The poster went on to praise Deng’s work in correcting verdicts and permitting Democracy Wall to remain open. It argued that some regulations were necessary to foster the Democracy Movement not to ban it. Wei’s efforts at promoting reform from a more radical perspective resulted in arrest, and was later sentenced to fifteen years in prison as a counterrevolutionary. He was charged with providing information on the Sino-Vietnamese War to a foreign journalist. Wei argued in his own defense that the information came from published government sources. The same information was obtained by the *Washington Post* from the Foreign Ministry without objection. Deng had intended democratization to be limited and act as a vehicle to implement his Four Modernization’s. Wei broke through the ideology of the system and

²⁰ Ibid., 43, 141-45.

attacked fundamental Chinese communist theories – he had found Deng’s limits and exceeded them.²¹

Wei forced the authorities to react to him in a rather unusual way. His message that the Chinese have a right to democracy seems mild to the West, but to the Chinese it projects fear and revolutionary zeal the aging leadership was all too familiar with. He projected a charismatic fearlessness and evangelism of freedom.²² He actually broke no laws. Instead, he quoted to the authorities their own words. He cited communist classics and requoted their own statements about human rights. Wei attempted to heed the legal system and cited the constitutionally-guaranteed freedom of the press, provided a liaison address, and tried to register and pay taxes. He broke with the other journals, though, when he refused to profess loyalty to the CCP or to Deng’s reformist political faction. He rejected “the absolute correctness of any theory or person.”²³ The regime was forced to react in a manner similar to Chairman Mao by quashing Wei’s rights of free speech because of the depth and degree of his attacks on the political institutions and Deng. It came about as Deng was trying to reign in the Democracy Movement. To a certain extent, Wei Jingsheng caused his own arrest because he was not heeding the unwritten rules of legal reform and free speech, or widening of the road.²⁴

²¹ *Ibid.*, 23-25, 197-203.

²² Patrick E. Tyler, “Why Beijing Is So Afraid Of Mr. Wei.” *New York Times*, 17 December 1995, E1.

²³ Nathan, *Chinese Democracy*, 22.

²⁴ Wei, *xi-xii*.

CHAPTER II

PERSPECTIVES ON REMONSTRANCE AND POLITICAL REFORM

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution left two legacies – on the one hand loomed anarchy, chaos, and breakdown of order, while on the other hand despotism and ideological fanaticism – generating more demands for political reforms than traditional or external influences after the death of Mao Zedong. Elders in the CCP and government as well as those within the party-government apparatus who promoted reforms – many of whom were persecuted in the “Ten Bad Years” – offered differing perspectives on the future course of government. The party leadership wanted no repeat of the past and so they demanded unity, stability, party focus, authority, and communist orthodox ideology, meanwhile reform advocates within the party and government sought restraint on political power and the regularization of political procedures. Both perspectives were logical responses in the aftermath of the tumultuousness of the Cultural Revolution.¹

The CCP was in a defensive posture as a result of the Cultural Revolution and its legitimacy and ideological underpinnings were undermined. The party laid the blame of the excesses of the Cultural Revolution on the radical Gang of Four – Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, Jiang Qing, and Yao Wenyuan – and former PLA Chief Lin Biao for the distortion of ideology and rejecting standard party practices. Ba Jin in his *Random Thoughts* said the Cultural Revolution is a specter that haunts post-Mao China and is a “disaster without precedent in five thousand years of Chinese culture.” While they all

¹ Merle Goldman, *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China: Political Reform in the Deng Xiaoping Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 15.

agreed that China should never suffer the consequences of the momentous Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution again, they were unable to reach a consensus on how to create safeguards and reforms to prevent it. Even Deng Xiaoping in a 1980 speech said the party's excessive concentration of power at the top – one of the issues repeatedly referred to as an obstacle to liberal reform – had led to abuses. This political environment, then, widened the road to activism and criticism of ideology, government, and reforms. In this context the then-underdeveloped Democracy Movement found its voice after Deng instituted reforms beginning in 1978 and moved to the center of Beijing in late 1978 and early 1979 to launch the drive for sweeping political reforms.² This then has become the central dilemma for the democracy activists in attempting to determine the course of reforms. It underscores the historical intellectual development over the past twenty years as the movement progressed from the wall posters stage to the June 4 Movement in 1989 at Tiananmen Square.

Many intellectuals began reviving ideas that stemmed from the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and later movements, which demonstrated that efforts by Mao to suppress them had been ineffective. The range of intellectual activity included individualism, Western Marxism, human rights, and Christianity. Deng also permitted intellectuals to renew Western contacts, travel to the West for study as well as academic conferences and meetings, and bring new ideas back to China. While the 4 June 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown with the use of elements of the People's Liberation Army was predictable, the gradual shift in intellectual freedom during the Deng Xiaoping era became a significant milestone for evolving democratic thought. The intellectuals rejected

² Ibid. 15-16, 41.

Maoist ideology because of the persecution they suffered and because of its failure to improve Chinese society.³

The intellectual movement was free for the first time in decades to pursue academic and cultural issues long controlled by Mao's party-state apparatus. Intellectuals began open discussions of cultural values between China and the West, the new authoritarianism and democracy, and rule of law and rule of the people. This period of liberalism flourished without the CCP orthodoxy or governmental position. Amid the party's relaxation of ideological controls a growth of intellectual networks, study groups and even think tanks occurred. The Deng regime attempted to derive a consensus from among competing political factions while trying to maintain periods of control of political thought. There was repression, to be sure, but the duration of the repressive periods were far briefer than in Mao's regime. Deng's repression has had none of the fanaticism, mass mobilization, and terror of Mao. Often, too, the repression was restrained and channeled rather than wide and unbridled. It should be noted that Deng had been purged three times during his rise to paramount leadership and that altered his perspective on how to manage intellectuals and pro-democratic advocates. Hu Yaobang, chief of the state propaganda department, had hoped to revive interest in Marxism-Leninism as China's viable political ideology. However, the problem with that stemmed from the intellectual realization that Marxism-Leninism had not brought prosperity to China – the old riddle had not been answered – and once again Chinese intellectuals were looking to the West and Japan and seeing prosperous, powerful nations that were democracies, exactly the opposite of what

³ Merle Goldman, "Politically-Engaged Intellectuals in the Deng-Jiang Era: A Changing Relationship with the Party-State." *The China Quarterly* no. 145 (March 1996): 35-36.

China had become.⁴

In the early 1970s a schoolteacher named Chen Erjin wrote the first unofficial critique of existing Chinese socialism to ultimately reach the West. While he was not a major activist before or after his book, *On Proletarian-Democratic Revolution*, was published, Chen helped define certain critical issues that became major tenets of the Democracy Movement. The remarkable thing about his writing – which emphasized institutionalized democracy, legality, and free speech – is that it was done two years before the then-grassroots Democracy Movement moved onto center stage and shortly before the death of Mao Zedong in September 1976. Chen began his career as a teacher but was also active in the Cultural Revolution and became a leader of a “rebel” Red Guards group in Kunming where he taught. He attended a major rally of the Red Guards in Beijing in 1966 that was also attended by Mao, however, he did not become involved in the more violent aspects of the movement as it grew to the point of being out of control in later years. After the initial phase of the Cultural Revolution, Chen moved around various provinces teaching before returning to Kunming where he resumed teaching in the local school that was owned by a coal mining company. Finally, he went to work for the coal mining company as a statistician and it was during the early 1970s that he wrote *On Proletarian-Democratic Revolution*. He was arrested in 1978 and imprisoned for ten months for attempting to publish his book. During his prison term he was beaten and tortured, but he refused to renounce his political views. In June 1979 his book was published in a series of articles in an edition of the journal *April Fifth Forum*, which tended to mask its importance in understanding how democratic thought has evolved. The

⁴ Ibid., 36-37.

book was published in the West as *China: Crossroads Socialism*.⁵

Chen's work is not a typical ideological representation or a crowning figure of the Democracy Movement. The movement produced thousands of pages of materials through books and unofficial journals that represents a truly diverse spectrum of political thought, some of which represent periods of thought or critical issues. As such, Chen's work more correctly belongs to the period of the closing years of Mao's regime, and provides a vital link between the Mao era and the post-Mao era.⁶

Chen believed that if democracy, legal reform, and other institutional measures were instituted then an era of emancipated political thought would follow. In relationship to other democracy activists, Chen's perspective is similar, though he precedes the Democracy Movement by more than five years. The Chinese people never lacked the talent or ability to survive and function in a democratic environment, Chen believed, citing the ancient Spring and Autumn periods in the era of the Warring States when the "hundred schools of thought" contended in a harmonious spirit. Again in the aftermath of the 1911 Revolution, the Nationalist Republic "brought about a faint reappearance in China of such intellectual diversity and contention." However, feudalism and the inexperienced Chinese people, who had not sufficiently been exposed to democracy to understand how to implement it, prevented that period from leading to a greater life for modern China. Chen was aware that a new reform faction had arisen within the party as a consequence of the Cultural Revolution, though some feared the faction was still under the control of the Dengist leadership group that had grown up around Deng Xiaoping, whose political

⁵ Chen Erjin, *China: Crossroads Socialism. An Unofficial Manifesto for Proletarian Democracy*, trans. Robin Munro (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1984), 1-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

revival had begun shortly before the death of Premier Zhou Enlai. Chen, though, did not concur with the concept that was beginning to develop among the emerging democracy advocates that “the awakening of the people is historically inevitable,” and that the people were ready to assume a broader role in their own governance. He argued within the Marxist context that the system of proletarian democracy should combine public ownership of the means of production with a government that was of the people and by the people, or more clearly the consent of the governed, that would thus “constitute a socialist system of an entirely new type.” Further, it would be a socialist system that provided for universal suffrage and guaranteed human rights. “The proletarian-democratic system must and will ensure the ability of the working people genuinely to hold power.”⁷ The political leadership would govern China in Chen’s formula with the consent of the majority, and it would respect actual individual freedoms, and not just nominal freedoms that had been previously provided in the respective Chinese constitutions.

The Chinese constitution and its respective revisions have proved to be an important focal point for political activists throughout the twenty years since the first big character posters began appearing on Democracy Wall. The constitution provides basic civil liberties that are found in most Western constitutions, though it is critical to realize that China has no constitutional tradition. Constitutional law was not introduced until after the 1911 Nationalist Revolution. Wei Jingsheng carried his faith in the value of the civil liberties contained in the document twice into China’s prisons – basing his defense on the expressed freedoms. Chen Erjin wanted to see a government respect the individual rights contained in the constitution, and not just pay nominal respect to its provisions. Many

⁷ Ibid., 43, 154.

others have voiced similar views. That was precisely the case with Fang Lizhi, an educator who belonged to the party but was purged because of his democratic views on education and the reform of government.

In 1958 the Chinese Communist Party expelled Fang Lizhi, an astrophysicist, during the Anti-Rightist Movement, one of a number of purges concocted by Mao Zedong that led up to the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Fang was expelled for his early writings – which criticized the Chinese educational system – while working and teaching at the Institute of Modern Physics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Fang’s outspokenness of the educational system in China was what led to his political activism ultimately. Nevertheless, Fang continued to profess his belief in communism and the leadership of Chairman Mao, and China needed his critical scientific skills more than his political loyalty so he was permitted to remain at his post at the Institute of Modern Physics. He moved from the Institute to help establish the University of Science and Technology (*Kexue Jishu Daxue or Keda*) in Beijing. Later during the Cultural Revolution Fang was struggled against and was sent down to the countryside where he spent a year in Anhui Province, working in a mine and on a railroad. It was during his confinement that Fang began to question Mao’s leadership. While in Anhui he had begun to realize that the China Mao described was not the China that he was actually seeing – coming to the realization that the party and the government had deceived the people and they could not be trusted any longer. Fang said that as a youth he had developed a sense of duty, responsibility, and loyalty to the country, “but what I saw around me made me feel that the leaders weren’t similarly concerned about the country and weren’t shouldering responsibility for its people.” In 1969, he moved again in Anhui Province to teach and study astrophysics in a

new university (*Keda*) established by the Academy of Science.⁸

By 1978, Fang had become fully rehabilitated, rejoined the CCP, and regained tenure at *Keda* and a full professorship. With the death of Mao and the arrest of the Gang of Four two years earlier, and the ascension of Deng Xiaoping to power, circumstances in China had begun to change dramatically for the academic community. Fang was permitted to travel abroad to attend scientific conferences and seminars and that led to a major turning point in his political development. His first trip abroad was in 1978 to attend a conference in Munich, and he traveled to the United States in 1986 to visit and study at Princeton University. These trips accomplished a number of things beyond academic travel – they helped him attain an increasing international stature, and also expanded his intellectual study into education, politics, and philosophy.⁹

Fang became vice president of *Keda*, and his colleague, Guan Weiyan, became the university's president. They quickly moved forward with major educational reforms and changed the system to gradually remove the party's political leadership from the academic fields and give wider decision making to the university administration. Still, these reforms proved too radical for the CCP to tolerate very long and by 1987 Fang was reassigned to the Beijing Observatory and Guan was reassigned to the Institute of Physics. There had been an outbreak of student demonstrations across college campuses in China and the party wanted to chill talk of liberalization of the political system. Fang had been accused of having ignored the Four Cardinal Principles, and he had come under attack from the press as well as Deng Xiaoping himself. The foreign press and outside world began touting

⁸ Fang Lizhi, *Bringing Down The Great Wall: Writings on Science, Culture and Democracy in China*, trans. and eds. James H. Williams, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), *xiii, xvii-xviii*.

⁹ *Ibid.*, *xix-xx*.

Fang's efforts at academic reform as well as his outspokenness of China's political system. Many Chinese intellectuals applauded at the very least his boldness if not his political views entirely. The party, for its part, was caught in an extremely poor position. To persecute Fang now after some liberalization would invite accusations of another Anti-Rightist Movement that would simply put the party in an even worse light after opening China. The party was unable to find the middle way (*zhongyong*), a political position revered by classical Chinese political philosophers. The CCP in 1987 expelled Fang once again – hoping at one level to use only a mild punishment to make clear it was not going back to the past, but also to demonstrate that there were still limits and the party remained the centerpiece of Chinese political power. Finally in 1989, Fang wrote a personal letter to Deng, calling on him to release political prisoners and Wei Jingsheng. This opened up a deluge of letters from other Chinese intellectuals calling for greater freedoms and liberalization.¹⁰

Fang wrote an essay in April 1989 to commemorate the May Fourth Movement of 1919 – which was a student protest over China ceding large amounts of Chinese territory to the Japanese in the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. Fang told the Chinese people not to despair over the hope that democracy would one day achieve stature in China. He said that the “basic principles and standards of modernization and democratization are like those of science – universally applicable. In this regard there's no Eastern or Western standard, only the difference between ‘backward’ and ‘advanced,’ between ‘correct’ and ‘mistaken’.” What had kept modernization and democratization out of China was what kept science out for so long, Fang said – the theory of China's unique

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xx-xxxviii.

characteristics.¹¹ However, after the 4 June 1989 demonstrations Fang and his wife, Li Shuxian, were in the United States Embassy in Beijing seeking political asylum and hoping to leave China. They were finally allowed to leave China 25 June 1990, and Fang took up residence at the Institute of Astronomy at Cambridge University, but moved again in January 1991 to Princeton at the Institute of Advanced Study.

Fang came to the Democracy Movement not as a disenfranchised young political activist, but as a noted physicist and member of the CCP. He came into conflict with the CCP after he made public comments in December 1980 criticizing Marxism. He said that “Marxism has become ossified, in its rigid adherence to obsolete conclusions that have led to failure. It is only realistic to predict that the crisis of faith in Marxism is going to have a profound effect on China, and especially on the next generation.” He argued that civilization has passed through many stages, and it might be that Marxist culture is just another stage. The success or failure of China’s reforms, he said, was highly problematic and not completely certain. For China to survive part of the solution was that there must be advances in science and technology, but not just for economic development because that alone does not contain the whole answer. In the West and in Japan, science and technology have affected all aspects of development, but “economics is not the only mark of development.” Other factors in development include the equitable distribution of wealth, social order, and the lack of political corruption. Certainly, in the long view, China’s feudal history can account for some of its backwardness, but in the recent past it has been the orthodoxy that has ruled China for the previous thirty years. Part of the problem could be laid to the numerous political purges that have fostered suspicion among

¹¹ Ibid., 38–42.

the people and the hatred of learning. The Cultural Revolution is one such example, he said, it destroyed a generation of Chinese scholars and intellectuals, and it explains why the country's intellectual standards have been so low. He blamed Mao for the condition the country was in when Deng and his regime came to power – though it was true that Deng, as a policymaker, was also guilty of many of the problems the Cultural Revolution generated. He said Mao's highly negative opinion of education and learning in China may well damage and retard the reforms of the Deng era.¹²

Fang's criticism of Mao was a recurring theme in his view of the future of China and the means best suited for helping China achieve its goals. He argued that in the time of Marx industry often meant coal mining and raw steel production, but clearly not in the age China now found itself. Fang argued strongly that science and technology held the keys to new innovation, and as such the vanguard of the working class should be the intellectuals, which Mao so disdained, as the most capable of leading China. Until education and learning are given their rightful place in Chinese society there would continue to be problems with the modernization programs of the Deng era. Fang believed that China would follow the economic formula of many Western nations and Japan moving from an agrarian economy to industrialization, and into high technology. If China followed the notion of Mao and made intellectuals into laborers, then in the long run it would prove costly to China's future. Intellectuals, Fang believed, did not represent just a force for production, but they were also a force for social progress through thought and culture. If the intellectuals do not play a key role in China's future, then "without our efforts, the myriad problems that face China, both social and technical, will not be resolved, and

¹² *Ibid.*, 91-108.

China's attempts at reform will certainly be abortive."¹³

In an interview with Chinese journalists in September 1986, Fang argued that one of Chinese system's weaknesses was its narrow exclusion of other perspectives on politics, which had come to dominate political thought under Mao and to a lesser extent under the Deng regime. He advocated that China make a break with *ti-yong*, which is a term taken from ancient Chinese metaphysics but adapted in the nineteenth century to mean "taking Chinese learning for the essential things, taking Western learning for the practical application," but avoiding Western cultural influences such as religion and politics. Fang wanted China to embrace openness, adding that the most important factor in political reform was democratization – though he believed that it could take China another generation to fully realize democratization. He regarded Deng's policies of "loosening up" as inherently limited in its range and scope, because he believed democracy is the right of citizens. Democracy gives the people the opportunity to speak from divergent perspectives, but "demanding that the people always speak with one voice is a bad idea."¹⁴

However, Fang moves closer to the central theme of democratic theory when he questions who government ultimately serves – the people or a political party. The People's Republic was founded by a political party that said it was there to serve the people, but at the same time the party has said it provided for the people and the people must serve well. It then raises the question as to who serves and who grants authority. However, a lesson Fang learned from his travels, especially in the United States, was that democracy is not a thing that can be granted to the people by the government. Fang presents an interesting

¹³ *Ibid.* 110-113.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 121. 127-129.

parallel, for it was Liang Qichao who also visited the United States to learn from its democracy and was also troubled by what he saw in the context of what would be right for China. Fang said that while visiting and studying at Princeton, he actually received a regular mailing from the U.S. Representative for that Congressional District explaining in some detail what he was doing for the people of his district in Washington, D.C. To an American such mail is taken very much for granted, which may explain why Americans regularly ignore it. Under China's socialist democracy, Fang said no citizen would ever receive such a letter from a representative to the National People's Congress (NPC). In every instance Fang said China's representative body should behave better than a similar legislative body in the West. It is every citizen's right to raise his voice and to enjoy opportunities the political system offers, to not be able to speak is feudalism, which is completely inconsistent with the current age. The Chinese system, though claiming to be a socialist democracy, all too often practices privilege, such as selecting officials for the cadre system on the basis of informed recommendations – a practice that would not be found in a functioning democracy. The people should be able to supervise the nomination and appointment of public officials, and these officials should be subject to public oversight “the same way that there is nothing outside the universe itself to set things in motion, there is also no authority higher than the masses of ordinary people; it is therefore the people that must be the ultimate force.” Fang argues that the rights contained in the Chinese Constitution are similar to those found in other developed nations such as Japan or the United States, but the problem arises when it comes to the understanding of such issues, which are quite different in China. The people's rights – meaning those in

developed nations – demand accountability, while China’s bestows privileges. In attempting to characterize the Chinese experience with individual rights, he says that “we are endlessly hoisting new banners up the flagpole, but the feudal essence of the thing itself has never changed.” He draws a very interesting conclusion about political reform and expansion of individual rights when he argues that reform and democracy have to begin within the CCP. It has always been difficult to develop a pluralist system in China because the single perspective has prevailed in the country for six thousand years.¹⁵

Targeting reform to just a few sectors of Chinese life is little more than a pipe dream, Fang said in a 1986 speech to the Conference on Reform of the Political Structure held in Hefei, Anhui Province. In that speech Fang said that since the modernization reforms had begun and were proceeding “there is a clear mandate for political reform as well.” A critical first step is to fully recognize that China is backward in many areas such as food production and industrial development, but Fang said there is also a spiritual crisis, a crisis of morality, and of ideals. Without acknowledging shortcomings, no comprehensive reform can be made. He said that reform, as Deng Xiaoping once remarked, is revolution. This is an interesting set of remarks by Fang because it was China’s shortcomings that Deng targeted with his launch of the Four Modernization’s. Though, Fang does place his perspective within the context of the socialist system, saying that the time had come to face the facts directly and realize that socialism has not been successful by comparison to the rest of the developed world. He cited a lack of substantive progress in three decades in China or the Soviet Union. Additionally, he illustrated that argument with the case of East and West Germany. East Germany before World War II

¹⁵ Ibid., 129-133.

had been more industrialized than West Germany, but since the partitioning of Germany West Germany has become far more advanced. China should not be blaming feudalism for its current dilemma, but should be examining the past three decades for the failed practices, facing the problems, and then moving on to reforms. If China continues to disguise its problems “with the mask of socialist superiority, then reforms cannot be implemented and will not succeed.” Fang takes his argument to a much further stage in suggesting that if China is to advance it becomes essential to learn from the West and incorporate that into the country’s reforms – conceding of course that Western developed nations are not without their own problems. He raises the specter of 103 years of intense debate about the riddle of China’s backwardness by adding that “if we want things to change, ‘complete Westernization’ is the most viable approach. What I mean by ‘complete Westernization’ is complete openness to the outside world, assimilating all of the cultural advances of the human race.” China has had its influence on Asia and even portions of Europe, he said, so it is logically time for the West and other Asian nations to have their influence on China, without blindly fearing that it may destroy China’s vast culture. Fang said China has compounded its problems by the self-imposed isolation of Marxism, deeming everything Western worthless. Openness is a vital link in the political reform process, and a key component of democratization. Fang said that, as Wei Jingsheng has so eloquently argued, new laws to guarantee freedoms are not necessary, they already exist in the nation’s constitution and all that is required is strict compliance. Part of his formula requires making the National People’s Congress a legitimate representative body that does the work of the Chinese people. He had seen the nature of the United States Congress and believed that China should expect no less. Finally, he argues that in the West people are

permitted to disagree strongly with each other and still retain respect for opposing views. In China because of ancient patterns of orthodoxy, people feel that any question requires only one absolutely correct answer, variations become troublesome which impedes progress – because the essence of democracy is that there is always more than one answer. It is the thing that makes democracy so vibrant and so fluid.¹⁶

A detectable shift begins to occur during the 1980s in China with the evolution of democratic thought, first with Fang Lizhi whose own writings moved further than the original work of the Democracy Movement, but also with the writings of Yan Jiaqi, who was China's foremost political scientist until May 1989 when he broke with the CCP. The shift in thought moves from an attempt to formalize democratic political thought as in the wall poster stage of the Democracy Movement to one of change through specific reforms. We see this evolution specifically in the writings of Fang and Yan.

For Yan Jiaqi, the pursuit of democracy in China has taken a decidedly more ominous turn. Escaping China after the 4 June 1989 crackdown by the PLA, Yan has become the president of the Front for a Democratic China (*Zhongguo Minzhu Zhenxian*). He no longer hopes for political reform in China, but an outright democratic revolution in political thought.¹⁷

Yan began his academic career attending the University of Science and Technology as a student of Fang Lizhi – the connection to Fang, who was China's foremost political activist from 1985-1989, was a critical linkage to Yan's own evolution from a budding career in science to a much more influential position in political science.

¹⁶ Ibid., 135-155.

¹⁷ Yan Jiaqi, *Yan Jiaqi and China's Struggle for Democracy*, trans. and eds. David M. Bachman and Dali L. Yang (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1991) xiii.

He eventually became the director of the Institute of Political Science in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences from 1985-89. What prevented him from staying in science was the Great Leap Forward campaign, though he did eventually graduate with a degree in physics in 1964. He later entered postgraduate study in philosophy in the Philosophy and Social Sciences Division of the Academy of Sciences. What he saw happen to China during the Great Leap Forward campaign changed his perspective on life and the future of the Chinese people.

He published an essay in 1980 in *New Era (Xin shiqi)* that was later reprinted in *Quanli yu zhenli*. In that essay he calls for political reform and democratization of the Chinese political system through popular elections, a system of checks and balances, and the separation of powers, which is a major advance in the direction reform should follow. We do not see similar reforms discussed by Wei Jingsheng in his writings, but that is because of the evolutionary changes that occurred. Yan believes that this reform will finally quash feudalism in China, which he defines as a regime based on a unified centralized empire – something China had not escaped after the fall of the imperial system in 1911 and the evolution to two republican regimes. This connotation of the term feudalism – which appears repeatedly throughout democratic activists' writings – means overconcentrated and absolute political power. It was an autocracy based on the theory that authority of the sovereign was indivisible and nontransferable. Yan said in 1980 that there still exists many vestiges of the heavy feudal autocratic system. However to begin with, China must clean away the “influences of feudal autocracy in our thinking, we must also start with the removal of the expressions of feudal autocracy in our national system – the over centralization and non-transferability of supreme state power – in order to

annihilate these feudal remnants.”¹⁸

Two years after his earliest essay, Yan wrote in *Illumination Daily* (*Guangming ribao*) a carefully worded essay that suggested the means for reform might lie with allowing the Chinese people greater access through the constitutional processes of the 1982 constitution. He attempted to suggest to the government that radical reforms could be avoided if the constitutional freedoms were given wider observance. He said:

If the people cannot influence the choice of the actual power holders, if the actual administrative power holders have lifetime tenure, then the people will be unable to influence state policy and will find it hard to express their wishes and demands through established channels.¹⁹

The major revisions in the 1982 constitution allowed the National People’s Congress to elect the state president, chairman of the Military Affairs Commission, and premier with the intention of instilling greater public participation without actually allowing direct elections by the people. Yan, attempting to act the role of an inside reformer, praised the policy of tenure in state positions, but with limits. Limited tenure in office was a significant improvement because it ended a tradition that spanned thousands of years.²⁰

Yan echoed an argument advanced by Fan Lizhi earlier that called for greater intellectual autonomy in all fields of creation as a part of his overall perspective on liberal reforms. He argued that intellectuals must have a greater sense of freedom both internally and externally. Academic freedom – though a condition for scientific development – is also a goal scholars must achieve in seeking truth.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xiv-xv, 10-15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15-20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

One of the difficulties faced by political scientists and historians in the modern Chinese political system is that they have very limited access to the operations of government, and likewise are rarely called upon to offer expert advice to the government – a condition that is not common in the West where the academic community regularly interacts with the government. Citing the German-born physicist Albert Einstein who fled fascist Germany, Yan said that one's thought can not be bound by authority or social prejudice, which figured into the dilemma faced by the democracy activists in China. He said the question of how to build a highly democratic socialist political system was both political and academic. To help achieve the goals of a liberal system there has to be full academic freedom or "there will not be the study and investigation of what is politically highly democratic, let alone the actual construction of high levels of democracy in the political sphere." It is the freedom of choice that gives vent to creativity.²¹

In another interview with the *Guangming ribao* 30 June 1986, Yan linked the economic prosperity of China with democracy. He argues that some short-term economic improvement might be achieved within the current political framework, but long-term prosperity depends on the nation evolving to democracy with considerably less centralized power. To foster this approach, Yan suggests that a system of checks and balances be created among agencies and branches of government that would create a degree of individual autonomy through the political structure in decision making. The aim of checks and balances cuts to a much more central theme of the entire Democracy Movement, and that is to prevent any future Cultural Revolutions. The desire is to prevent the government

²¹ Ibid., 38–40.

from violating human rights, and to create a reform environment that fully integrates popular involvement in government.²²

Yan in 1988 at the International Symposium on the Political and Economic Modernization in Chinese Societies held in Hong Kong said the 1911 Revolution that ushered in the Republican era failed to produce democracy, it only created an environment for traditional warlord politics. It also created a new dictatorial dynasty with a colonial tinge. Later in 1949, Mao Zedong led the most successful peasant revolt in all the history of China since the Taiping Rebellion. But history has its own laws of development, Yan said, and no one can escape the limits placed on his own era. The Cultural Revolution underscores that condition and the outcome of the Mao regime. The Cultural Revolution proved to be an era of rampant feudalism, and not the continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat Mao had proclaimed from the Gate of Heavenly Peace in 1966 at Tiananmen Square. After forty years of de facto supreme power, power was still held by one individual. In China, because the party has direct control over the government, there are in fact two governments. Yan said the CCP holds power over the government that was created by the constitution – but power still is concentrated in the hands of one individual whether it was Mao or Deng Xiaoping or someone else. Though there has been some separation between party and state since the death of Mao, there is still “a unitary and pyramid-shaped power structure.” The constitution vests all power in the National People’s Congress as the highest organ of state power, though it rarely exercises state power, and for that reason it is difficult for the people to understand the value in the

²² *Ibid.*, 48-53.

separation of functions and powers between party and government.²³

Reforming China, Yan concludes, will be a very long-term process, “it is at once a process for building ‘democratic politics’ and a process for changing a China of personal rule into one ruled by law.” China will be greatly aided in its evolution with the adoption of party-government separation, improvement in the National People’s Congress system, creation of a civil service system, building an independent judiciary, and the guarantee of fundamental constitutional freedoms.²⁴

²³ *Ibid.*, 98-104.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

CHAPTER III

WEI JINGSHENG'S CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DEMOCRACY

Wei Jingsheng traveled extensively in China during the late 1960s and early 1970s as a member of the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution and later as a squad commander in the Chinese Army. He saw poverty and inequality throughout the country, readily equating it with the autocratic socialist politics he had once been fanatical about – which brought him to criticize Mao's dictatorship, quarrel with his supervisor at the Beijing Zoo where he worked as an electrician, be disapproved for CCP membership, and suspended from the Youth League. His life was at turning point by the mid-1970s after a four-year tour in the PLA and passing up a chance for a low-level government position. A key event on 5 April 1976 – the demonstration at Tiananmen Square to memorialize the passing of Zhou Enlai – brought Wei to the conclusion that China had to change.

By 1978, Wei was living at home with his father, but his father, a devout Maoist, began criticizing him for his publishing activities, suggesting that he was a counterrevolutionary, which was a serious indictment in China. Wei, in turn, accused his father, who had been a deputy director in the State Capital Construction Commission, of feudalism, patriarchalism, and bureaucratism.¹ Wei rejected his Marxist and Maoist upbringing in much the same way that Liang Qichao began moving from his classical Confucian-based education toward Western concepts of democratic thought. For Liang, the “riddle of backwardness” could not be adequately dealt with by China's imperial system, because the prosperous nations of the world were Western and democratic. If

¹Nathan. *Chinese Democracy*. 22.

China was the middle kingdom, or *Zhong Guo*, then it rightly should have been the prosperous nation, but it was not. It was feudal and backward.

Wei Jingsheng was confronted with a similar dilemma. If socialism held the answer to resolving China's backwardness, then why was it still a terribly poverty stricken nation and still underdeveloped by comparison to the West, Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan, whose standard of living and economies were vastly superior to China's. When Deng Xiaoping first began promoting his program of Four Modernization's for the economic revival of China, democracy activists believed the time had arrived to push the campaign onto the public stage and political posters began appearing in late 1978. However, it was an awkward time for the Democracy Movement because it lacked cohesion and a unified spirit, bordering almost on the fractious. The movement's main purpose was to encourage the development of a modern democracy for China, to be sure, though at times various factions would turn on each other, weakening its overall message to the government. An authoritarian government need not be terribly repressive if its major opposition movement is weakened from within by a failure to develop a unified strategy beyond theoretical arguments and paper wall posters. The CCP understood the nature of politics of change extremely well. It had waged a desperate struggle from the very early 1920s to win a revolution against all odds by late 1949 – and its most important attributes were strong leadership, intense loyalty and a unified strategy. Most of its struggle was against a superior opponent that had considerable external support, wealth, and resources, but an extremely weak leadership more concerned with its own aggrandizement than the democratization of China. Unseating the entrenched CCP and converting China to a

democracy characterized by popular participation would not easily be done with words and posters alone.

Wei Jingsheng visited the Democracy Wall several weeks after posters began appearing, but during that visit he was inspired to craft his own and in direct response to Deng. He wrote *The Fifth Modernization: Democracy* in a single night and it was posted the following night by a friend at two o'clock in the morning. The journey to that moment was long and instructive. Wei Shanshan, his sister and a college student, recalled telling Wei the poster had become a major topic of discussion on campus at the time not realizing he had written it, but she expressed grave concern for his safety when she found out. Wei had already spent time in prison during the Cultural Revolution and nearly everyone involved with the Democracy Wall movement had been under close surveillance by the Bureau of Public Security. The poster, though, provided Wei with instant recognition and clearly thrust him into the height of the Democracy Movement.² The essay to the people of China met with a mix of reactions from those who feared the government's reaction to expressions of refreshing ideas. Many, though, found the essay difficult to accept because of their years of orthodox Marxist education. According to Yale Historian Jonathan D. Spence, the writings of the early Democracy Wall spoke well of the need for greater political liberalism, but few spoke with the impact of Wei's ability to confront Deng Xiaoping directly.³ He argued in his big character poster for the representation of the people in government, who would act in their interests without regard to the CCP. He argued for *minzhu*, the people are masters, which is the closest the Chinese language

²Wei, 253.

³Jonathan D. Spence. *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 662-663.

comes to the word democracy. To Wei, democracy was not as Lenin had claimed solely the result of social development, but also a condition for development of higher forces. Without democracy, Wei believes Chinese society will die and economic growth will flounder along with Deng's four economic initiatives – which have been institutionalized by the National People's Congress. The CCP had not solved China's dilemma and collectivism of the socialist countries – which were among the poorest – left no room for individualism or initiative. The democracy movement had fought with ideas, but not with the force that could bring about immediate change.⁴

Wei argued for a civil rights-based democratic system, a concept relatively alien to Chinese political thought. While Liang Qichao argued for liberalism and Sun Zhongsan sought a republican political system, Wei added the measure of individual liberties as the centerpiece of society. Chinese thought centered on social interests dominating individual interests, requiring a centralized system of management or administration – the basis of all previous Chinese leadership. This is a reflection of the Confucian concept of social harmony, where relationships are more important than the individual. Therefore, China was best served, the argument went, by either a minority or single person creating the best centralized autocracy. Wei altered the order making the individual the central character and making society serve and respect his interests and rights. He added to his theory the term “human rights,” which had rarely appeared in a century in Chinese democratic thought. These rights are heaven-given and are not bestowed by any external government, they are, in Wei's concept, inherent. Socialism tends toward democracy, Wei argues, but because it has arisen in largely backward countries with feudal traditions, it has given up

⁴Ibid. 662-64.

democracy for autocratic leaders. Wei supported the idea of political primacy of rights, but few others in the democracy movement did. He advanced the thought that rights had to be satisfied by the government. In the final analysis, Wei argued that the purpose of citizens' rights were not to protect the individual entirely, but to enable citizens to strengthen the state. Citizens' rights have been a part of China's constitutional system, but they were regarded as a grant from the state to the citizen so the citizen could better serve the nation. The first principles were contained in a document in 1908 under the Qing Dynasty.⁵

The new regime promised no deceptive policies, no great helmsman, no class struggle, and no more revolution, Wei wrote in his essay *The Fifth Modernization*. Instead, the regime promised wise leadership, the Four Modernization's, and the value of higher education, but the regime did not promise democracy or liberalization. Wei wrote that for thirty years the Chinese people followed Mao Zedong's empty promises and consistently came up empty-handed. When Deng rose to power and called for practicality, the people's spirits rose as fast as Deng assumed greater power and control of the government, though Wei said the signs were evident that Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought was still the foundation of government ideology. The fear, then, was that nothing had changed. The new regime said the people did not need democracy because the country had democracy under a centralized leadership. Wei warned that those not willing to accept the regime would easily find an empty prison cell waiting for them. The new promise offered by the regime was the prosperity of communism with the Four Modernization's. Wei said that the people learned from the Cultural Revolution and no longer believed in

⁵Nathan. *Chinese Democracy*. 104-107.

the leadership's promises.⁶

Though Wei describes democracy in the context of *minzhu*, he more precisely says the people are the masters of history, a concept more familiar with Marxism. Without the effort and participation of the Chinese people, there can be no history, no great helmsman, or wise leader. When the regime said the people are the master of history it is hollow so long as people are not permitted to determine their own destiny. It is equally troubling when their achievements are credited to others and rights stripped away. For Wei, the people in this broad context of Chinese society – as Mao had said – are not master, but they should be:

When they call for democracy they are demanding nothing more than that which is inherently theirs. Whoever refuses to return democracy to them is a shameless thief more despicable than any capitalist who robs the workers of the wealth earned with their own sweat and blood.⁷

Wei then says something very interesting in his essay – he said that when the people embraced the CCP over the Guomindang (CNP) it was because they were seeking democracy, the people were to become the masters, echoing CCP promises of 1949 to make the people masters of the country. It is an interesting perspective on the outcome of the 1949 Communist Revolution, which marks the Second Republic. What happened to the promises, he asks of the government. They championed the dictatorship of the proletariat rather than a people's democratic dictatorship. It is not completely clear from his essay exactly what is meant by the "people are the masters of history" – though it stems from Marxist ideology – or how Wei defines what history is in this context, but it seems to indicate the connotation that the power to govern must emanate from the people

⁶Wei, 202-203.

⁷Ibid., 203-204.

and that the state derives its authority to govern from them, which is an interpretation of the Western Social Contract Theory. Mao had converted the concept of Mandate of Heaven from ancient times into Mandate of the People to support his ideology. The best understanding of Wei's writings indicates that during the time before he finished his essay *The Fifth Modernization* he apparently came into contact with some readings that reflected current Western thinking. Despite his leanings toward a democratic republic, Wei still uses the language of the Marxist – a concept that has become known as “internal oppression.” He reminds the people that when Peng Dehuai spoke too freely at the 1959 Lushan Conference, he was later denounced for complying with the orders of the “great leader.” Mao had sought open criticism of every aspect of political life in China and the conference was to be a centerpiece of that campaign.⁸

Wei in his assessment of China's conditions in 1978 attempted to answer two key questions – first, were the people satisfied, and second, what must be done next. In the first instance Wei's essay indicates the people were not satisfied with their plight and they were more backward than before the communists came to power. It is not expressly stated, but it is implied that the backwardness is in comparison with the West and within the region. Backwardness in the context used by Chinese democratists really is concerned with its political development and economic growth. The authoritarian government of the CCP has been regarded by the democracy activists as very similar to the ancient imperial system without the imperial trappings. Its economic development has not been improved by communist leadership or planning – contributing further to the country's continued backwardness. What to do about the backwardness raises a series of questions and issues

⁸Ibid., 204.

for Wei. The first question involves the relevance of the successes and failures of Mao's tenure – was it even necessary. He asks if there had been no Mao Zedong leadership would China have fallen into its current condition. Essentially then would China have been better off or worse without Mao's 27-year, authoritarian leadership, and Wei responds saying it would probably have been better without Mao because the Chinese people should not have followed the path they chose. It is an amplification of many arguments that had followed the Cultural Revolution. He arrives at this juncture as much for his own clarity of thinking as to the conclusion that the socialist road he followed was wasted. He argues, though, that the Chinese people really were not given any alternative and would very likely have been crushed by Mao's military forces and his dictatorship would have developed regardless. The path China chose with the Second Republic was the socialist road. By that logic Wei suggests that in socialism the masses, or proletariat, are the masters, but do the Chinese people regard themselves as masters of anything. The truth is the people are mastered by others "even down to your own marriages."⁹

Workers in a socialist state are entitled to receive any surplus from their labors after all duties and obligations are fulfilled. The Chinese did not enjoy that privilege during Mao's tenure, though, after Deng consolidated power he began permitting greater personal control over individual workers among other reform measures to improve the nation's productivity both in agriculture and industry. Socialism, Wei argues, was supposed to provide improved education for every citizen, but it failed the Chinese there too. The dictatorship of the proletariat has not led to the ideal world of Chinese socialism, but instead similar to the feudal socialism described in the *Communist Manifesto*. Feudal

⁹Ibid., 204-205.

socialism, like the Soviet Union's socialist imperialism and Hitler's national socialism, has but one enemy and that is democracy. Both political systems caused slavery and poverty for their peoples, but Wei said must the Chinese continue to suffer as the others have, or must it choose the other alternative – democracy. To modernize China, Wei said, means that “we must first modernize our people and our society.”

Wei believes that the kind of democracy the Chinese people want is “simply to have a chance to enjoy a happy life, or at least one that is no less than what people enjoy in other countries. A prosperity that all members of society can enjoy equally will only be achieved by raising the level of social productivity.” Nevertheless, even with democracy, the Chinese would still face problems with allocation, distribution, and exploitation, because none of the new wealth created after 1949 has reached the working people. It has gone elsewhere. He speculates that some of China's wealth was squandered in Vietnam and Albania, where the regimes cherished the same values as Mao. Finally, Wei defines democracy as the “means of placing all power in the hands of the working people.” To illustrate his point that working people can manage state power, Wei cites Yugoslavia, saying the people there had proved no need for a dictatorship. It was an interesting comparison, because he did not fully understand the nature of Yugoslavia in the Eastern Bloc nor its strained relationship with the Soviet Union.¹⁰

Wei defines the democracy he envisions for China as representative through elections where the representatives “manage affairs on the people's behalf and in accordance with the will and interests of the people. This alone can be called democracy.” In addition, the people must be able to replace those public office holders as necessary to

¹⁰Ibid., 205-207.

avoid abuses of power and oppression of the people. He said these are rights that the people of Europe, the United States, and Japan enjoy. No such rights exist in China, and an ill reference to Mao, though he is dead, could bring considerable trouble with the authorities. Wei went further to say that to compare the socialist system of “centralized democracy” of China with the “exploiting class democracy” of capitalism would show clearly how the vast differences in the values and treatment a democracy benefits its people. Wei says there is little chance that if the Chinese embraced democracy over the current system that the country would slide in to chaos, because China has already been thrown into chaos and anarchy by the present system. He was specifically referring to actions by the Cultural Revolution Group, the Gang of Four, and the usurper Lin Biao. The same type of people who worried democracy would lead to chaos and anarchy were the similar type who worried that when the Qing Dynasty collapsed under pressure from Westerners chaos would follow. They were willing to suffer oppression rather than assume the risks that experiencing democratic freedom might bring. Wei argues that democracy “is infinitely better than facing abusive overlords against whom we have no means of redress.”¹¹

In speaking to the Chinese people through his wall poster and later as a lead article in *Explorations* in January 1979, Wei was trying to convince the Chinese people that the system they were living under had failed to bring the prosperity and progress it had promised. He called on them to rally to democracy, saying that the stability and unity of dictators in fascist totalitarianism would only bring disaster to them. Democracy is the precondition of all modernization – social and economic. The reactionaries in history have

¹¹Ibid., 207-208.

always fought against the development of democracy because it gives the common people – their natural enemies – everything and leaves oppressors with no weapons to oppose the people. He said the United States is the best example of what happens when democracy defeats dictatorship, which brings on the conditions that generate social development. However, achieving democracy in China would not come easily or without a substantial price, and each tiny success would require a major price. The Chinese people need only see the direction and those who oppose democracy will be defeated. Wei said the Cultural Revolution showed the power the people possessed, but it came when they lacked clear direction and they still had faith in dictators. That aspect of China's development is past and the people have a clear goal. To Wei, the Democracy Wall was the first battlefield.¹²

As a result of his first wall poster and his immediate notoriety, a small group formed to help Wei publish *Explorations (Tansuo)*. In the beginning he worked from the home of his girlfriend, but later published it from his father's apartment in a room set aside for when Wei married. The informal political journal had press runs between 150 to 1,500 copies per issue and circulated in Beijing and once in Tianjin. In Beijing during the beginning of the Democracy Movement, there were more than fifty-five people's informal political periodicals published, and across China journals were published in most major cities by a variety of unofficial study societies and lecturers. The outpouring of the movement was not lost on Deng Xiaoping himself. Deng had published a mimeographed an unofficial Communist weekly *Red Light*, while a student in France in the 1920s.¹³ Li Yizhe, a pseudonymous wall poster writing team, was released from prison on 1 January

¹²Ibid., 209-212.

¹³Jonathan D. Spence. *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution 1895-1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 405.

1979 as part of a demand of the Democracy Movement, which was considered a major victory for the movement and an indication of the more liberal views of the new regime.¹⁴ Deng Xiaoping initially welcomed the Democracy Movement because it aided his own political agenda in at least three ways. Deng established the popular momentum among intellectuals and political democracy activists to oust his rivals for CCP and government leadership, strengthened his programs for modernization, and garnered increasingly widespread support from the people.¹⁵ But the Democracy Movement had begun reaching Deng's limits of tolerance and he began closing the road to speech. For Wei Jingsheng, time was running out faster than the life of the Democracy Movement. On 25 March 1979 Wei – writing in *Explorations* – bitterly attacked a speech made by Deng on 16 March that essentially indicated the aging leader still believed in the fundamental leadership of China by the CCP. Deng said that the Four Cardinal Principles – the socialist road, the people's democratic dictatorship, the primacy of the CCP, Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought – would be upheld.¹⁶ Wei accused Deng of becoming a new dictator and he asked the Chinese people in his *Explorations* article if they wanted a new dictator or democracy. *April Fifth Forum* challenged Wei's essay in a wall poster on 28 March 1979, saying the normal development of democracy in China had to be accompanied by regulations to strengthen the movement and not to stop it. Four days after the article appeared, which had been published anonymously, Wei and most of those who helped him publish *Explorations* were arrested. While some people attempted to stop the twenty some

¹⁴Nathan, *Chinese Democracy*, 22-23, 31.

¹⁵Wei, *xii*.

¹⁶George Black and Robin Munro, *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1993), 50.

police officers, Wei was taken away after a scuffle in which he almost escaped. At the same time, authorities in other cities began arresting many other democrats, and though the actual count is not known it has been estimated that as many as a hundred political activists of varying degree were arrested and sentenced to prison. He was held by police in the Banbuqiao detention center in Beijing and his arrest was never publicly announced by the government, though word of the arrest spread throughout the Democracy Movement. Wei was brought to criminal trial 16 October 1979 in the Beijing Municipal People's Procuratorate and charged with leaking highly classified defense information to English and French foreign correspondents and publishing counterrevolutionary statements. China has since abandoned its counterrevolutionary laws, but at the time of Wei's arrest the policy had only just been enacted. Wei was told by the authorities that every Chinese has the freedom of belief, but not the freedom to overthrow the state – although in all of Wei's writings he never advocated the overthrow of the Chinese government.¹⁷

Wei argued at his trial that Article 45 of the Chinese Constitution gave all citizens the rights of free speech and a free press. He said his writings were “simply to attempt a tentative exploration of the path along which China could achieve prosperity.” He also said he was not aware that English and French foreign correspondents were considered enemies of the state. When he spoke with them about the Sino-Vietnamese War, which had essentially been a long running border dispute that remains still not completely resolved today, he was speaking as a concerned citizen and was basing his knowledge on published news accounts and not on any secret documents, for which he had no access or

¹⁷ Nathan, *Chinese Democracy*, 34.

knowledge. Wei denied that he betrayed “the motherland,” supplied the enemy with anything, and he gave his friends no secrets – national or military, “thus the prosecution’s accusation that I committed treason is unfounded.” Wei said the charge of being a counterrevolutionary is absurd because the essence of “revolution is the struggle of new phenomena against old.” While his essays did attack Marxism as the state had charged him, Wei said he was addressing the distorted Marxism of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, who attempted to gain control of the nation during the height of the Cultural Revolution and had since been discredited. Wei had made accusations against Deng Xiaoping when he advocated democratic reforms for the Chinese government, but he was not specifically charged with that by the court. Finally, Wei argued in his defense that “the Constitution grants citizens the right to criticize their leaders, because these leaders are human beings and not gods. It is only through the people’s criticism and supervision that those leaders will make fewer mistakes, and only in this way will avoid the misfortune of having their lords and masters ride roughshod over them.”¹⁸

He was convicted of providing foreigners with national military information, carrying out counterrevolutionary propaganda and agitation, slandering Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought, and attempting to overthrow the state by calling for democracy and human rights in speeches and writings. Wei was sentenced to fifteen years in prison and was to be deprived of all political rights for three years after completion of his sentence, and his appeal to the Beijing Municipal People’s Court was rejected. As a matter of background, the family retained a young lawyer from Beijing University to represent him at trial. She was not given the indictment or told when the trial would be held. The

¹⁸Wei, 215-225.

government did not permit anyone from his family or his lawyer to attend the trial.¹⁹

After his trial he was portrayed as a chronic malinger and troublemaker, and as someone who had sold secrets to foreigners. Most activists were being portrayed as thugs and traitors, and anyone who hung wall posters, mimeographed newspapers, and journals were linked to the chaos of the Cultural Revolution and the Gang of Four, which was not entirely without foundation because many of those who joined in the Democracy Movement were involved in the ill-fated struggle punctuated by the Red Guards generation or were influenced by those events. Wei's own experiences in the Red Guards is not well known, but it was relatively short-lived. The *People's Daily* supported the government's conviction of Wei and accused him of "ultrademocratization." Wang Juntao of *Beijing Spring* tended to follow Deng's shift from moderate back to the left and said he really had not wanted the democratic politics of capitalism, but wished for a genuine proletarian socialist democracy – which illustrated how the activists were still struggling to determine their positions in the movement.²⁰ It became a brutal time for the political activists of the Democracy Movement who had placed so much hope and energy into changing to nation they most essentially loved.²¹

Prison, however, did little to thwart Wei Jingsheng's passion for writing. He was not allowed to write anything for the first two years in prison, but after being transferred to Beijing Number One Prison he was permitted to resume writing. In his first letter, Wei thanked the central government for permitting a visit by his family, but he also took advantage of the opportunity by asking the government to be permitted to receive books

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

²⁰ Black and Munro, 51.

²¹ Nathan, *Chinese Democracy*, 40-41.

and magazines from his family as part of his overall reeducation effort. The tone of most of his letters to his family were relatively typical of family letters, taking about day-to-day conditions and his overall health. But some of his letters were also politically inflammatory.²² He wrote to Deng Xiaoping in October 1992 about Tibet and the need for China to withdraw or at least grant the country greater autonomy. In a letter in June 1991, Wei discussed human rights with President Jiang Zemin and Li Peng, urging the government and the CCP to find out “how political and administrative organs can be made to show more respect, and provide more protection, for human rights.”²³

Wei Jingsheng’s arrest and conviction became known around the world and stirred up support both within and outside China. In 1989, the activist and scientist Fang Lizhi wrote a letter to Deng Xiaoping to request Wei’s release from prison. Many others, more than a hundred Chinese intellectuals, also wrote seeking Wei’s release. His first release from prison came on 14 September 1993 when China was actively trying to win the competition to host the 2000 Olympics and wanted to demonstrate it had improved its human rights record. The government issued Wei a parole just nine days before the International Olympic Committee was to announce what city would host the 2000 summer games. The terms of his parole and original prison sentence forbade him from conducting any democracy activities or to exercise any political rights. As soon as he was released from prison, he began writing almost immediately, even securing permission to publish some essays abroad. Through his writings new attention was paid to the Democracy

²² Wei, 1-5, 259.

²³Wei Jingsheng. *Letter to Jiang Zemin and Li Peng*, *United Daily* [database online] November 1993, The Democracy Project, Department of Chinese Studies, Stockholm University (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1995-98, cited 14 January 1997); available from <http://orient4.orient.su.se/letter.htm>; INTERNET.

Movement in China and elsewhere in the Western world. The 4 June 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations helped fuel world opinion in favor of the political activists, and the Chinese government had inadvertently turned Wei Jingsheng into a world human rights cause. He continued to maintain his contacts with other political activists not realizing the state security officials were maintaining considerable surveillance. Wei carried on political activism, believing he was protected by constitutional guarantees of free speech and press.

Wei met with John Shattuck, U.S. assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs, on 27 February 1994. Wei actually argued that the United States should extend Most Favored Nation status to China to help the people and improve their economic conditions. Chinese authorities were outraged. He was detained by authorities on 1 April 1994.²⁴ He was held for nearly a year without outside contact before a five-hour trial was held on 13 December 1995 at Beijing's No. 1 Intermediate Court and was sentenced to 14 years in prison for attempting to overthrow the government. Amnesty International claimed at the time of the sentencing that Wei was a prisoner of conscience, who was being held for the simple free exercise of his right to freedom of expression and association. Once again in his own defense Wei cited the Chinese Constitution and the express rights to certain freedoms.²⁵

Beginning in 1995 and every year after Wei Jingsheng was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and was awarded the Olof Palme Award and the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 1996. Wei's second release from prison came

²⁴ Wei, *xiii*, 267.

²⁵ Amnesty International, *China: Wei Jingsheng Sentence a Mockery of Justice* [database online] 13 December 1995, cited 3 October 1997; available from http://www.oneworld.org/amnesty/ai_china_dec19.html; INTERNET.

under entirely different circumstances, but tinged with the same political flavor of the previous released. He was released 16 November 1997 shortly after President Jiang Zemin returned from a state visit to the United States, which was his first since taking the leadership of China after Deng Xiaoping. The release was apparently directed at overtures from President Clinton, who made remarks about China's human rights record and behavior at the White House shortly before Jiang returned from his visit and tour of the United States. Other jailed political activists may be released this year in preparation for President Clinton's state visit to China, his first. Wei was technically released for health reasons and given a medical parole to travel to the United States, essentially with the understanding that he could not return to China, something Wei had previously resisted which prolonged his time in prison.

Since his arrival in the United States, Wei has been treated for his medical illnesses and gone on tour promoting democracy in China. His first advice for President Clinton is to keep pressuring China to improve its human rights record. He also said he has lost hope than Jiang Zemin can improve conditions in China "I haven't seen anything new from him. I think I am gradually losing hope that he can represent anything new."²⁶ Wei has also spoken with members of the United States Congress early this year and received the National Endowment for Democracy's annual award. But Wei also has not been without his critics since his release from prison a second time. Xu Wenli, a prominent activist who was imprisoned for 12 years for publishing an underground newspaper, attacked Wei late last year for being headstrong, arrogant, and too soft on Deng Xiaoping. It was an odd

²⁶*New York Times*. "Excerpts From Wei's Remarks" 22 November 1997 [newspaper online] cited 22 November 1997; available from <http://www.nytimes.com/yr/mo/day/news/world/china-dissident-text.html>; INTERNET.

twist to criticize a fellow activist in a letter that was distributed to news organizations in Beijing, but it also points to the continuing practice among the members of the Democracy Movement to attack each other in public, a continuing major weakness the movement has not learned to control.²⁷

²⁷ Seth Faison. "Critic of China Is Assailed by Colleagues." *New York Times* 25 November 1997 [newspaper online] cited 25 November 1997; available from <http://www.nytimes.com/yr/mo/day/news/world/china-dissidents.html>: INTERNET.

CHAPTER IV

THE JUNE FOURTH MOVEMENT

For a Westerner, Tiananmen Square is too complex to comprehend because there is no place else like it in the world. Geographically, it is a blend of ancient and modern China. To the north of the square along Changan Avenue stands the Gate of Heavenly Peace, an entrance to the ancient Imperial City – for centuries the focal point of Chinese government and the place where dynastic rule ended in 1911. To the west is the Great Hall of the People, the modern focal point of Chinese government, and opposite it across the square is the Museum of Chinese History. For several years leading up to the hand over of Hong Kong a giant electric clock board stood in front of the museum counting down the minutes, literally, until Hong Kong was returned to Chinese control. The mausoleum and memorial hall to Chairman Mao Zedong stands at the south end of the square.

On the west side of the Imperial City and adjacent is Zhongnanhai, which serves as the official headquarters and the residences for leaders of the Chinese government – an interesting juxtaposition of power relationships. In the center of the square is a relatively ornate obelisk to the People's Heroes, and near the north end of the square just across Changan Avenue from the Imperial City is a white flag pole that bears the national flag of the People's Republic of China, guarded by two members of the Beijing Garrison of the PLA. If you arrive at sunrise, you can watch the brief ceremony as the flag is raised each day in seeming harmony with the universe.

Tiananmen Square is a mystical place that stands figuratively at the center of the Middle Kingdom (*Zhong Guo*), but it is, also, a place that is politically in the center of the

Middle Kingdom. Tiananmen actually means in Chinese “Gate of Heavenly Peace,” which is ironic because it was designed by Yongle, one of China’s most brutal Ming Dynasty emperors. He built it to demonstrate power, but to also plead with heaven to grant him eternal and stable rule.¹ Quite noticeable is the huge portrait of Chairman Mao on the entrance to the Imperial City with two large placards on either side that read, “Long Live the Unity of the Peoples of the World,” and “Long Live the People’s Republic of China.”

Tiananmen Square, or the site of the current square, has been used for a number of major political protests or events for more than a century, including student protests in 1898 when students were preparing to take their third and final national examinations. The students protested the extreme terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki of 1895 that followed China’s disastrous defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. That demonstration startled the Chinese government because it not been the custom of anyone to address a petition directly to the Imperial government unless the road had been widened for comment on state matters. Even more impressive, the students gave their petition directly to the Imperial Censorate, equally unheard of in Chinese government.

Though in more recent times, and related to the events that led to 4 June 1989, was the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Chinese students protested the Nationalist government’s agreement to cede Germany’s territorial concessions in China, which dated to the Qing Dynasty, to Japan at the Versailles peace conference in France. The government of the First Republic tried to suppress the protests, but only succeeded in enlarging them. The actual demonstration on 4 May 1919 lasted all of one afternoon, but

¹ Liu Binyan, Ruan Ming, and Xu Gang, *Tell the World: What Happened in China and Why* trans. Henry L. Epstein (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 68.

it spawned a nationwide movement, and it made Tiananmen the center of political protest and political storm. On 10 June 1925, another major rally was held at Tiananmen Square over an incident in which the British police killed thirteen people in an anti-imperialist demonstration in Shanghai. The rally in Beijing drew more than 100,000 protesters.²

The December Ninth Movement in 1935 was a mass protest begun when thousands of students protested President Chiang Kai-shek's refusal to create a united front using elements of the Nationalist Army and the guerrilla forces of then CCP leader Mao Zedong to oppose the Japanese military advances in Northeast China. Nationalist military commanders in Beijing, because the Nationalist government was in Nanjing, turned fire hoses on the protesting students, which proved highly effective in the freezing December weather of Beijing.³

Mao Zedong climbed atop Tiananmen 1 October 1949 to proclaim to the world, but especially to the Chinese people, that the Second Republic marked the end of foreign encroachment and the establishment of a Communist Republic. It was an important moment, regardless of his communist ideology, because he rejected Western involvement in China something that had not been possible during the ill-fated Qing Dynasty and Nationalist Republic. However, the denouement of the communist revolution came on 5 April 1976 when Chinese students marked the death of Premier Zhou Enlai. They chose to mark his death and the meaning of his life to China on the annual day of the Qing Ming festival, which is when the living offer their respects to the dead in what is also called the sweeping of the graves. The demonstration began out of respect but became a protest

² Orville Schell, *The Mandate of Heaven* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 22-23.

³ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

against the Gang of Four, Lin Biao, and the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, while praising the life of Zhou. Finally, on 1 January 1987 protesting students stormed past police blockades to reach Tiananmen Square to make demands against the slow pace that democratization was taking.⁴

The 1986-87 demonstrations influenced the 4 June 1989 showdown between the students and the government over lagging democratization. Beginning in 1986 attempts at further political reforms were proposed by Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, but party elders once again drew concerned with the direction they were taking. Discussions proposed making the National People's Congress a working legislature and instituting laws to guarantee legitimate freedom of speech. Additionally, intellectuals such as Fang Lizhi began telling students that individual rights are not handed down from the party-state, but are inherent. He urged students to strive for their rights, and students began attempting to gain public office in local elections. Local officials blocked them and by late 1986 a set of protests had begun.

Protests spread among universities and by January 1987 had reached Beijing. Deng ordered Hu Yaobang to halt the demonstrations, but Hu was reluctant because he supported the proposed reforms. A brief period of repression followed, Hu was purged as CCP General Secretary, and the entire episode ended by April 1987. Fang Lizhi, and the writers Liu Binyan and Wang Ruowang were targeted largely because they could attract large audiences.⁵

⁴ Ibid., 24-29.

⁵ Goldman, "Politically-Engaged Intellectuals in the Deng-Jiang Era: A Changing Relationship with the Party-State." 40-41.

Two factors began to influence Deng Xiaoping and the party-state apparatus: fear of losing vital foreign investment and the increasing relationship between Chinese intellectuals and outside intellectuals, who often generated unfavorable public pressure. China under Deng had begun to care about its international image and position – no longer clinging to the notion that as the Middle Kingdom nothing from the outside world mattered. By 1988, the Deng regime and its intellectual coalition had separated, as Deng still attempted to hold together a Leninist political system. As in the case of the late Qing Dynasty, the Dowager Empress Cixi was willing to entertain some political reforms – too late to be useful, to be sure – but it was more a question of leadership than reform. That was where Deng found himself in 1988. The intellectuals continued to argue that political liberalization had to accompany economic reforms if the country was to avoid social conflicts.⁶

Zhao Ziyang succeeded Hu Yaobang as general secretary of the party in late 1987. One of his primary roles was to protect the intellectuals and reunite them with the regime, a task at which he failed. Many believed that Zhao was less interested in political reforms and more interested in his own political agenda. Few of Hu's intellectual network rejoined the regime because Zhao had undermined Hu's influence and because Zhao was supporting a new authoritarian view. A view was developed that for China to establish democratic reforms, the country would require several decades of rapid economic reforms – Deng's plans had only been in force since 1978, less than a decade. Additionally to support these economic reforms, China would have to develop a substantial middle class –

⁶ Ibid., 41-42.

a pattern of the “four little dragons.” Deng supported this view because it rationalized his own agenda.⁷ He had said that the modernization process in a country still backward called for strongman politics with authority and not a Western-style democracy. He endorsed a type of neo-authoritarianism considered necessary for Chinese government as a transitional stage between China’s much older traditional society and modern society.⁸

Liberals supporting political reforms had argued that reforms were vitally needed to lessen social tensions caused by rapid economic developments, creating a potentially explosive social situation. Hu had determined earlier in the 1980s that Chinese stability in the changing environment depended on free elections of leaders following democratic procedures. He wrote in the *Economic Weekly* 5 May 1989 that “democratic elections may not necessarily choose leaders of the best quality, but they ensure that bad leaders will not be able to remain in power.” He also disputed the party’s concept of majority rule socialist democracy, saying that the minority who holds different opinions require protection as well. The intellectuals that responded to this reasoning did so for two critical reasons – their own repression and disillusionment, and an increasing understanding of democracy.⁹

Hu Yaobang, recovering in the hospital from a heart attack, died suddenly on 15 April 1989. His death touched off six weeks of protest led by students from mid-April to 4 June 1989. It has been variously described, but the Chinese government refers to it as simply “turmoil.” Students immediately seized the moment as an opportunity to show

⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁸ Michael Oksenberg, Lawrence R. Sullivan, and Marc Lambert, eds., *Beijing Spring, 1989: Confrontation and Conflict, The Basic Documents* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990), 125-126.

⁹ Goldman, “Politically-Engaged Intellectuals in the Deng-Jiang Era,” 43.

respect for his death – a man regarded as a reformer who was persecuted for it. Wall posters were put up on walls around campuses almost as soon as it became known of his death. In two days time marchers had giant photographs of Hu to carry, which clearly indicates the students were organized. Demonstrations were already developed to coincide with the seventieth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement. Hu's death provided a chance to move the date up and the student demonstrators did. Photographs were provided by old reformers and business people who supported the reform movement, but who did not desire to join the demonstrations. The communications among these student groups and reformers was a tightly controlled network, though the student demonstrators were not organized into any type of formal organization. The majority of the students were not manipulated by a few leaders and there were no outside agitators constituting a “black hand” behind the protests, as had been suggested by the government in the aftermath. The student demonstrations had a loose leadership that was diffuse, often contested, and planning was informal and rooted more in custom than in any kind of design. The movement, too, had deep roots in Chinese traditions, including old slogans, protest themes, and national concerns. These proved helpful in opening the demonstrations to a large number of workers, government officials, and ordinary people – the “old hundred names,” or *laobaixing*.¹⁰

The June Fourth protests, though joined by some others in the greater community, were begun by urban intellectuals – not the same mixture of peasants that had supported Mao and his guerrilla revolution that toppled the Nationalist Republic in 1949.

¹⁰ Craig Calhoun, *Neither Gods nor Emperors: Students and the Struggle for Democracy in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). 1-2.

Nevertheless, the students acted out the reform movement in 1989 indirectly aided by the government that had expressed a desire to see reforms – so in a greater context the students were acting in accordance with the aims of the party-state apparatus. Equally important in understanding this movement is the style of remonstrance demonstrated by the university students. They presented petitions and banners, attempted to resolve issues within the existing party-state structure, and demanded a dialogue with the governmental authorities, who for the most part were extremely reticent to interact with the protesters lest they be seen as condoning the movement. This was clearly a classical confrontation between intellectuals and the government. That it was any different from the protests of 1898 and the various periods thereafter are problematic, but part of a continuous tradition all the same.¹¹

Unfortunately, because the movement never became unified – an attribute of the entire Democracy Movement – it prevented and stalled attempts to withdraw from Tiananmen Square in sufficient time to avoid the eventual showdown with the PLA, but it also created disorder, disputes, and petty abuses of power. The movement essentially outgrew its organizational capacity.

Nineteen Eighty Nine was to be a year of intense political celebrations and commemorations even without the student demonstrations of the June Fourth Movement. It was the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the thirtieth anniversary of the Lushan Conference, and the twentieth anniversary of the death of Liu Shaoqi. Added to that was the seventieth anniversary of the May Fourth

¹¹ Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom and Elizabeth J. Perry, eds., *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), 148-160.

Movement, and the tenth anniversary of the Democracy Wall Movement, which began one block away from Tiananmen Square. It was a time of intense political feelings, which was most apparent among intellectuals and the university students. These students had benefited indirectly because of the Cultural Revolution. They were freer to attend college than before, though they still had to take national examinations to gain entrance, and they came with less political education than for students before the Cultural Revolution. This left them with the ability to absorb more that was foreign and Western.¹²

The average age of China's leadership by 1989 was regarded as a failure of China's attempts at modernization. The role of China's elders was often characterized by democracy activists as a drag on progress and a source of embarrassment – a sign of backwardness. Many Chinese activists believed or hoped at least, that China's communist regime would become a short-lived dynasty, following dynastic pattern. Dynastic patterns usually followed a natural course: strong and sometimes expanding in their youth, stable and peaceful in middle age, and increasingly prone to crises and instability as they grew old. Students who participated in the June Fourth Movement decried Deng Xiaoping's extraordinary hold on power, often equating him with the Dowager Empress Cixi. A student described the student-led democracy movement of that spring as a "life-or-death struggle between democracy and totalitarianism. We want to overthrow Deng Xiaoping because we see him as the last dictator in the centuries-long history of China." Few students thought that short-term reforms would end the People's Republic. What they did see was a weakening with the succession crisis and believed reforms were possible. Of

¹² Calhoun, 3.

course, the June Fourth protests actually heightened the succession of Deng and ultimately caused Jian Zemin to rise to power. His own performance as Mayor of Shanghai during the June Fourth events were interesting and far more stabilizing and peaceful than the Beijing response.¹³

The college campuses had become places of intense political activism, as demonstrations and protests were already being discussed openly. The students saw themselves as critical agents of protest and struggle in Chinese society emanating from the May Fourth Movement tradition. The pattern of protest adopted for the 1989 march on Tiananmen for Hu Yaobang followed the pattern established by the 5 April 1976 demonstrations for Zhou Enlai. As many as five to ten thousand people initially marched to Tiananmen Square, about eight miles from the Beijing University campus, on 18 April 1989 to rally in front of the Great Hall of the People. The protesters largely came from Beijing's most elite universities.¹⁴

The students sought democracy, but within a very wide range of meanings. They wanted a degree of autonomy and recognition, a degree of civil rights that would guarantee a richer public life and provide some realm of privacy, and they sought an end to corruption in government and that essentially included party interference in governmental operations. They also sought a richer China and a better share of those riches. Western observers have had difficulty understanding the desire for democracy because they do not understand what kind of democracy the Chinese activists seek. Originally the students were seeking a limited agenda that included state recognition of an

¹³ *Ibid.* 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 31-37.

autonomous students' association, improvement of a variety of conditions at universities, and more choice in merit selection in the assignment of jobs to graduates. After the protest began and widened, issues grew deeper and longer-range ideas came with them. The students approached the demonstrations from two perspectives – they were becoming intellectuals and saw China's problems from the roles they would play, and they also genuinely were concerned with the country's future. It was true that they saw governmental policies hurting their own changes for privileges and income, but they also saw from a broader perspective that the policies were preventing them from doing something to meet the country's challenges.¹⁵ For the many people who experienced the Cultural Revolution, the similarities between the students that formed the Red Guards and the students that led the June Fourth Movement were too close. That played a role in the somewhat dampened support the students of 1989 received when the government turned on them and the violence erupted. Nevertheless, the role of the June Fourth Movement in the context of the greater Democracy Movement is critical, because it reflects how far the movement had come from those days of wall posters twenty years earlier. The students were continuing the tradition of remonstrance established centuries ago.

Democracy, to work and function as a viable political system, requires a participatory discourse and the students believed their role was essential in several ways. First, they viewed themselves as watchdogs of government and accountability, second as proposers of policy, and finally as interpreters for the demands and needs of the people. Technological improvements and economic reforms were needed, to be sure, but they

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 240-241.

could not be accomplished without intellectuals.¹⁶

One of the continuing problems relatively evident as the June Fourth Movement progressed to its violent end was that the Western press covering the event did not fully appreciate what it was that the students wanted when they called for democratic reforms. One student described his concept as “more in terms of Rousseau and the model of direct participation.” His understanding comes from the fundamental concept of the Western Social Contract Theory of which Rousseau is widely regarded as the most articulate writer. Nevertheless, Chinese understanding of democracy varied widely.¹⁷ The manifestos and petitions repeatedly called for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. However, some have argued that while the student protests were passionate, they were too vague and weak on innovative ideas, especially about how to move China from neo-authoritarianism into a democratic system. What the student protesters appeared to lack was a clear concept of the democracy for China and the specific reforms necessary to get there. Student leaders, however, argued quite well that the broad themes had greater mass appeal and the narrower issues that contained more detail would have to be discussed with the government. This is a very important, and a very traditional, perspective. It had been considered in ancient China a significant attribute of any political leader who could reduce complex issues to relatively simple and eloquent statements – something Mao did with considerable regularity. Most of the students undoubtedly held only a passing knowledge of the American, European, and Japanese modern political systems. Most did not understand how any of these systems operated in a functional sense. This in part accounts

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

for the lack of specific institutional changes and reforms in their writings or speeches. What the posters did specifically state were fundamental and basic demands. They wanted “the right of people to have a say in their government’s policies; the right of individuals to choose their own values, careers, and places of residence; the subjugation of personal power to the rule of law; and freedom of speech, assembly, and the press.” Some students, no doubt carried away by early successes in the protests, even started calling for a multiparty system. A student from Beijing Normal University defined in a big character poster 2 May 1989 his perspective of democracy in China. He said that government “is only an administrator of the people’s sovereign will, an institution to which the people grant administrative power and entrust law enforcement power. If the National People’s Congress is truly to reflect the people’s will, the electoral procedures for its representatives must be changed.”¹⁸

The events leading up the 3-4 June 1989 crackdown in which hundreds, if not thousands, or more died have been well reported throughout the world and were watched by millions on television. There has to date been no accurate accounting of the number of people killed or injured as a result of the violent crackdown. Officially, the Chinese government has said that no one was killed in Tiananmen Square – which is a purely technical point because most who died were outside the square at the time they were killed, though there were injuries sustained actually in the square. The important thing to come from the June Fourth Movement, though, is that a whole new generation of intellectuals and students carried on what had begun late in 1978 with the first big

¹⁸ Han Minzhu and Hua Sheng, eds., *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 137-145.

character posters to appear on Beijing's Democracy Wall. The movement did not end, but has continued with the next generation. President Jiang Zemin said during a visit to Canada in December 1997 that the crackdown was essential to China's stability. He said that during the 1989 political arrests "had the then-Chinese Government failed to adopt resolute measures, then we could not have enjoyed today's stability."¹⁹ Wang Dan, a key activist who led the June Fourth protests, said in New York on 24 April 1998 that had he known in advance "that so many people would have died, I would have done things differently." Wang, now 29, was released from prison in China and allowed to come to the United States on medical parole. He was sentenced in 1996 to eleven years on charges of conspiracy to subvert the state, though he had actually been jailed from 1989 to 1993. His concern of the outcome of the protests lies to some degree with his own feelings of guilt. He said that when so many were killed "I have the feeling of moral guilt in this matter and I imagine I will have this all my life. At the time we were young and naïve in certain ways and therefore made mistakes that led to this tragedy." Wang continues to promote democracy for China.²⁰

Liu Binyan, a former reporter for the *People's Daily*, speculates that the reason the June Fourth Movement was not entirely successful in transforming ideology into action was that reformers within the CCP and government were indecisive. Reformers did not conduct dialogues with the students, then-Premier Li Peng and his government, and

¹⁹ Agence France Presse. "Crackdown 'led to today's stability'," *South China Morning Post*, 3 December 1997 [newspaper on-line], cited 3 December 1997; available from <http://www.scmp.com/news/template/templat...na&template=Default.htm&maxfieldsize=1457.html>; INTERNET.

²⁰ Edward A. Gargan, "Dissident Says Students Bore Some Blame in Tiananmen." *New York Times*, 24 April 1998 [newspaper online] cited 24 April 1998; available from <http://www.nytimes.com/yr/mo/day/news/world/china-dissident.html>; INTERNET.

they did not pursue alternatives through the legal process. Liu also said that reformers failed to utilize the mass media to either strengthen the case made by the student protests or to gain broader public support for changes.²¹

²¹Liu Binyan. 104-107.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In East Asia there is a strong tradition of intellectual criticism of unrestrained power, but there is no heritage of institutional limitations on power. Remonstrance, the ancient system of political criticism, has been a part of Chinese political life since before the time of Qin Shi Huang Di and the unification of China under one emperor. Remonstrance differs from dissidence in that the activist who practices remonstrance is not attempting to break the political system down from without in the context of revolution, but is attempting to bring about constructive change from within through reform. Though China moved from an imperial political system in 1911 through two Republican periods, it still possesses traditional patterns that have stymied reform and liberalization. Among the patterns are the continuing importance of *guang xi* – which reflects continued political culture – and persisting patterns of patriarchal authoritarianism. Even now past totalitarian excess is explained as feudal despotism. The Leninism often employed by Mao could provide a useful cover for more blatant traditional authoritarianism. Nevertheless, reform has come from official sources, and the culture of reform has come from the democratic opposition over the last twenty years.¹

With the arrest of the Gang of Four less than a month after the death of Mao, immediate changes in Chinese politics were introduced. A minor, but clearly real liberalization ensued in both culture and ideology as the country began its push toward economic modernization. Deng employed economic rationality over politics to command

¹ Peter R. Moody, Jr., *Political Opposition in Post-Confucian Society* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 12, 175.

the country – parting with the practice of central planning in favor of a market-driven economy. Among Deng's initiatives was to separate the functions of the party and the state, which was designed to eliminate uncontrolled, arbitrary, and personalized power. These moves did not come smoothly. Under Deng's system – the party set ideology, set basic policy, and then observed its implementation, while the governmental apparatus provided direct rule acting according to law and administrative regulations, representing a break from the regime established by Mao who wanted the party involved in every aspect of Chinese life. Deng also established special economic zones and autonomous regions and provinces ostensibly as part of his economic modernization programs, but in so doing initiated an embryonic federal-state system – in a Western sense – within the current political environment, something he may not have intended but exists. Nevertheless, absolute personal political power has remained China's hindrance since Qin Shi Huang Di. Any political activism from the masses has been equated with the dictatorship of the Cultural Revolution – which is not entirely without a basis in fact. The push for political liberalization, or democracy, came from Red Guards, more precisely the educated of the Cultural Revolution. These youth essentially turned Maoist critique of bureaucratic power against the Maoists. They had learned that to have democracy also required having power that had to be limited and regulated by law. The Cultural Revolution has given political activists a common bond that has helped them create a context of personalized groups familiar to post-Confucian political opposition. The most serious weakness faced by political activists from the beginning of the modern movement in 1978 has been the failure to act in unison and sharing common positions. These necessary political coalitions are

essential to promote political power.²

For Westerners, the last two decades of changes in Chinese politics have gone lacking – democracy has not been embraced quickly enough and political reforms seem as far away as they did when Mao was living. The changes, however, in Chinese political realities have been profound. Westerners understand democratization in only one set of terms. At the heart of this concept is the notion that holding free and open elections is the centerpiece of a democratic society. Essentially, they see democracy in current terms, not understanding what it took to arrive at free and open elections – they have no substantial comprehension of the intellectual history and development of a modern democratic political system, not to mention the price people had to pay for those ideas.

Democratization is made all the more difficult in nations like China because they have never possessed the rudimentary elements of democratic government. Political reform, East or West, requires establishment of norms governing elite politics; restructuring of basic institutions governing relations among parts of the state, as in a division of power among the government's branches; and strengthening of the institutions of political participation. Taken in sequence, a country is more likely to survive reform with less instability. Deng Xiaoping was faced with two major problems in 1978 – economic reform and political reconstruction. Mao had left him with a political system that was dysfunctional. He reestablished norms and began restructuring state institutions. The impact of these actions created an acceleration of the next generation into government power circles and prevented the perpetuation of individual power bases. The effect was dramatic. Deng replaced aging, poorly educated revolutionaries with educated, middle-

² Ibid. 184-192.

aged officials. Until 1982, the average age of ministers and vice ministers in government was 64, and only 37 percent were college educated. After Deng's institution of reforms, the age of ministers and vice ministers dropped to 58, and 52 percent of the government leadership was college-educated. With these changes has come an elite that no longer engages in bitter ideological debate, and it has become more difficult for extremes to dominate the CCP delegates to the NPC or Central Committee. By controlling the extremes and by creating an environment for a better educated elite, Deng was able to establish a stable transition in power. This enabled the post-Deng elite to compromise on policy and personnel matters and enabled Jiang Zemin to enjoy a smoother transition. In the post-Mao period China faces two radical transitions. China, in the first instance, needs to move to a less centralized political system, and secondly, move from a command economy to a market economy. It demands of the Chinese a redefinition of power, because both transitions have to happen to prevent a stalemate and possible collapse.³

The price China is paying is extremely high. There has been "massive socioeconomic dislocation, rapid shifts in values and beliefs, and mounting pressures on the political system." These problems would simply overwhelm mature political systems. China has chosen to muddle along with its existing system and attempted to promote political order. Even though Beijing still clings to CCP supremacy, it has begun institutional reforms that may change China in dramatic ways. These changes have involved the National People's Congress, which is moving to greater independence, and legal reforms that are aimed at preventing the governmental excesses of the Cultural

³ Pei Minxin. "Is China Democratizing?." *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 1 (January/February 1998): 68-73.

Revolution. Between 1978 and 1994, the NPC passed 175 laws, while local people's congresses enacted some 3,000 laws. Most modern Chinese laws are developed from Western legal doctrines. Increasingly, the people and businesses are turning to the courts for legal remedies. The problem of democratic participation is China's ultimate challenge – a restructuring of relations between state and society. Even though the institutional changes have lagged, a new social contract is developing. Nevertheless, the Chinese leadership continues to resist Western notions of democratic reform and popular participation.⁴

In all of this, the modern Democracy Movement that began in 1978 and celebrates its twentieth anniversary this year has itself remained quite moderate throughout, which is striking in its character. The mainstream democratic movement has always wanted and sought changes within the political system, just as Qu Yuan in ancient times sought changes, not a revolution. Chinese democrats have consistently behaved as remonstrators and not as opponents, though the June Fourth Movement almost became a revolution. The Chinese democrats have not sought outright revolution, but have consistently sought reforms within the existing system. This is strikingly important – the activists accept the system in which they live, but seek reforms in the defined context not replacement. This condition did not change with the June Fourth Movement in 1989 or after – they still seek nonviolent change within the system.

There are a number of reasons for this seeming contradiction. First, the Chinese democrats believe change can come from within, and within the Chinese context they have continued to believe in socialist democracy. This first factor is the most important. All of

⁴ Ibid., 74-79.

China's modern constitutions have affirmed popular sovereignty, and even if somewhat rhetorical in character they point to the desire that China can become democratic. The Chinese democrats have maintained a moderate approach because the regime still controlled the police and military. Finally, the Democracy Movement has been largely composed of students and intellectuals, who are a small minority in Chinese society. They had neither the numbers or power to confront the regime in a head-to-head confrontation. It has thus been a self-limiting revolution. Most of the early Democracy Movement participants in 1978 believed that Deng was moving to democratization, but Wei Jingsheng saw Deng more as a new dictator but not as a reformer, and that much of Deng's tolerance of the Democracy Movement was simply temporary as long as it met his political agenda. Many intellectuals believed that the confrontation between Deng and Wei was regrettable, but also inevitable. The road could be widened to comment only so far and Wei had gone too far. Deng saw tactical advantages in shifting from total authoritarianism toward a more reform minded state, but not to an extreme.⁵

Finally, the students of the June Fourth Movement, as well as most of the activists in 1978, maintain their long-standing loyalty to the regime because of their own ideals. The opposition's vision of democracy is not incompatible with the socialist order. In 1978-79 they called for modest political openness and competition from within the system, and not from a whole new political order. Wei wanted the Chinese government to adhere to the existing constitution with its defined civil liberties, which he believed would approximate the democracy of his vision for China. In the 1986-87 debates many of the

⁵ Andrew J. Nathan, "Chinese Democracy in 1989: Continuity and Change." *Problems of Communism* 38, no. 5 (September/October 1989) [database on-line] cited 15 January 1997, available from <http://www.nmis.org/Gate/themes/Nathan.html>; INTERNET.

reforms Deng eventually promoted began with debates from the intellectuals and students who sought wider roles for the NPC, a civil service system, and separating the party from the government. The June Fourth Movement sought to petition reforms from the existing government. The vision of the reformist democrats was a Chinese system that still employed the CCP, but it would be part of a checks and balance system involving competitive elections and a free press to keep the government honest and the people informed. It called for greater political participation from the people within China's existing constitutional framework. Wei Jingsheng asked for very little more. In the final analysis, ten years after Wei had been imprisoned many of the intellectuals had moved in the direction of Wei's original big poster demands in 1978 – popular participation and guaranteed constitutional freedoms.⁶ Democratic activists are seeking the system first perceived by Wei in his path finding essays – effectively embracing the man who was willing to stand alone.

⁶Ibid.

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