
NEO-LEFT AND NEO-RIGHT IN POST-TIANANMEN CHINA

Kalpana Misra

Abstract

Post-Tiananmen neo-left and neo-right theorizing is characterized by a new emphasis on central power and normative legitimacy to redress the problems of ideological and political fragmentation associated with reform. This development has strengthened the Chinese government but also undermined the Communist Party's role as the fount of ideological authority.

In China, rapid economic growth, erosion of the planned and state sector, and marketization of economic life have continued at an accelerated pace in the inaugural years of the 21st century. Even more significant and cogent, however, have been the attendant problems and concerns over the adverse consequences of reform, and more recently, China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). In these circumstances, the challenge posed to Communist Party (CCP) rule and the socioeconomic order by rapid change and decentralization has become a major focus of intellectual attention. Declining social mores, pervasive official corruption, rising levels of inequality, and a heightened popular sensitivity to issues of national sovereignty and prestige have also provided the context for new apprehensions about an ideological vacuum; the search for indigenous cultural and ethical values to guide China through a crucial phase of transition has acquired an acute sense of urgency during this period.

In the post-Tiananmen era, the 1980s liberal democratic orientation of radical reformist theorists and their student followers stands officially denounced

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as an insidious counterrevolutionary current aimed at subverting the authority of the Party-state, and has also been brushed aside as “impractical idealism” or utopianism by a large number of Chinese intellectuals. The prevailing climate of political opinion has prompted a resurgence of intellectual trends like neo-Maoism and neo-authoritarianism that had played a less consequential role in the preceding decade and contributed to the emergence of new groupings of leftists and conservatives. This broad range of theorists can be identified as left or right on the basis of terminology, the teleological goals they embrace, and the social groups whose interests they articulate, but what is more striking is the degree to which they concur on the role of the state in managing the tensions of development. There are real and important differences between the neo-left and the neo-right in post-Tiananmen China, but the two are dynamically linked and have evolved naturally and logically from the official ideological stances staked out in the early years of the reform program. The political consensus of a strong centralized state that they represent has shored up the power of the Chinese government in the past decade, but the broader and more long-term significance of these new intellectual developments lies in the challenge that they pose to the CCP as the sole fount of ideological authority.

A Return to Mao

In the early 1990s, the partial revival of neo-Maoism was linked to the Tiananmen Incident and the successive collapse of communist governments in the Soviet bloc. For leftists in the political leadership and the intellectual establishment, these events were an unhappy vindication of their fears that extensive reform and unchecked intellectual liberalization would entail too fundamental a revision of official doctrine, and eventually undermine the party’s normative authority.¹ The support provided to students and liberal democracy activists by industrial and commercial interests further underscored the leftist belief that social polarization generated by economic reform had facilitated the emergence of new bourgeois groups that were now boldly seeking political authority and a restoration of capitalism.

1. I use the term leftists to denote a broad range of officials and theorists who are concerned about the increasing gap between socialist norms and official policies, the emergence of class stratification, erosion of Communist values, the integration of China into the global capitalist system, etc. Many of these were moderate reformers who supported the Dengist reforms of the 1980s but were not in favor of far-reaching changes that would, according to them, alter the fundamental character of China’s society, economy, and polity. To their right are the radical reformers, who are committed to a much greater extent to privatization, market forces, Open Door policies, etc. and are less concerned with, indifferent, or even opposed to, the official ideological tenets.

In the months following the Tiananmen crackdown, terms such as class struggle and dictatorship of the proletariat that had almost vanished from the Chinese media surfaced anew in official denunciation of bourgeois liberalization. Moderate reformers in the 1980s had warned of the dangers of “peaceful evolution” or a gradual and subversive expansion of bourgeois influences stemming from capitalist policies and the Open Door implemented by the Party leadership. However, in late 1989, the calls for preempting capitalist restoration reflected an imminent sense of urgency and foreboding. In the wake of the failed August 1991 coup in the Soviet Union, a *Renmin Ribao* [People’s Daily] commentator’s article reminded readers:

Chairman Mao was the first to raise this question . . . [t]he actual development over the past few decades has fully proved that the hostile forces at home and abroad have never stopped attempting to subvert the Communist Party’s leadership and undermine the socialist system—they are largely relying on the “war without the smoke of gunpowder” for fulfilling their goal. We will grieve if, instead of gaining a keen insight into the real threat of peaceful evolution, we lower our guard against it.²

In response to *Jiefang ribao* commentaries that advised against squabbling over “whether something is socialist or capitalist in nature,” former Party Propaganda Department head Deng Lique charged that “reform and opening up [was] itself a banner for peaceful evolution in China.”³ Party elder and one of the senior, most leftist, spokesmen Hu Qiaomu asserted that “those who recognized proletarian dictatorship but not class struggle were not Marxist-Leninists.”⁴ He noted, with satisfaction, that “in the ever stormy situation around the world” after 1989, socialist China appeared more stable, but the international and domestic class struggles were protracted, and the guard against peaceful evolution could not be relaxed.

Then-President Jiang Zemin’s 1991 address on the 70th anniversary of the founding of the CCP also reflected leftist influence. Jiang emphasized economic planning and socialist ownership, and echoed the Party elders’ warnings to guard against infiltration, subversion, and peaceful evolution. However, on the question of class struggle, he reiterated the line associated with Deng Xiaoping since 1979: class struggle was no longer the principal contradiction in China, even though it still existed in certain spheres and

2. *Renmin Ribao* [People’s Daily], August 16, 1991.

3. The commentaries reflected Deng Xiaoping’s views and policy preferences and are said to have been personally approved by Deng’s daughter Deng Nan and then-Party Secretary Zhu Rongji. *Jiefang Ribao* [Liberation Daily], February 15, March 2, 22, and April 12, 1991; *Guangming Ribao* [Guangming Daily], August 7, 1991; *Renmin Ribao*, October 23, 1991.

4. Hu Qiaomu, “How the Chinese Communist Party Has Developed Marxism—Written to Commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the CCP,” *Renmin Ribao* (overseas edition), June 25, 1991, p. 11.

could intensify under certain conditions. Mindful of Deng's policy preferences, Jiang downplayed the international aspect of class struggle and focused on the need for a peaceful global environment to build socialism with Chinese characteristics. In the domestic context, he reduced class struggle to the conflict between bourgeois liberalization and the Four Cardinal Principles, "with the central question of political power being the central issue."⁵

Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour of early 1992 and the subsequent 14th Party Congress's shift of emphasis to more extensive reform reversed the leftist ascendancy within the ranks of the political leadership, the official media, and the central propaganda apparatus. However, apprehensions about the undesirable and destabilizing consequences of unbridled reform and marketization continued to be voiced in academic analyses. The economist Yang Fan noted:

(T)he ideological standard of surnamed socialism or surnamed capitalism has been replaced by the standard of productive forces, and the standard of morality and conscience has replaced the standard of money. . . . Stimulated by a small minority getting rich quickly, people's desire to pursue wealth has become unprecedentedly strong, and the principles of the commodity economy have corroded everything. . . . The activity of the whole society revolves around the word "money" . . . the secularization of China's society is complete and it is developing in an unhealthy direction.⁶

10,000-Character Posters Appear

In the immediate post-Tiananmen period, leftist theorizing focused on the corrosive influence of bourgeois ideas and the declining commitment to socialist norms in Chinese society. By the mid-1990s, however, the concern with ideological contamination had broadened and escalated to a deeper dissatisfaction with more fundamental changes in the social structure and economic base. Between 1995 and 1997, a series of 10,000-character statements—attributed to Deng Lique and his son Deng Yingtao, and to study groups associated with leftist journals like *Zhenli de Zhuiqiu* (Pursuit of Truth), *Zhongliu* (Midstream), *Gaoxiao de Lilun Zhanxian* (Theoretical Front of Institutions of Higher Learning), and *Dangdai Sichao* (Contemporary Trends of Thought)—presented detailed analyses of the specific socio-eco-

5. The Four Cardinal Principles were: Uphold the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. Jiang Zemin, "Speech on the 70th Anniversary of the Founding of the CCP," *Renmin Ribao*, July 2, 1991.

6. Yang Fan, "Shichang jingji yizhounian" [First anniversary of the market economy], *Zhanlue yu Guanli* [Strategy and Management], no. 1 (1993), p. 26.

conomic changes wrought by the expansion of market forces and China's integration into the global capitalist economy.⁷

The most significant issue raised by these articles was the assertion that a re-stratification of Chinese society had occurred, and the reforms thus far had already contributed to the emergence of a non-governmental bourgeoisie and the embryo of new bureaucrat and comprador bourgeoisie classes. According to the first article, entitled "Several Factors Affecting China's State Security," the objective basis for new classes was the shrinking role of the public sector and rapid expansion of the collective and private sectors in the national economy.⁸ Between 1980 and 1994, the state sector decreased from 76% to 48.3%, while the collective sector increased from 23.5% to 38.2%, and the private sector, including foreign-funded enterprises, rose from 0.5% to 13.5%. The introduction of the shareholding system, corporate property rights, and the leasing, sale, and mergers of existing state-owned enterprises (SOEs) would further reduce the public sector to only a quarter of the gross industrial output value and would expand the collective, and the private or individual sectors, by 50% and 25%, respectively, by 2000. Changes in the ownership system had already resulted in a massive drain of over 500 billion yuan (\$62 billion) of state assets from 1982 to 1994, and this turnover from public to private hands had been the main source of the primitive accumulation of the new bourgeoisie.

For the leftists, whose definition of socialism centered on the predominance of public ownership and implementation of "distribution according to work" as a remunerative principle, these trends represented the possibility of an imminent change in the class character of the Chinese state. The political activities of the new entrepreneurs, their significant presence in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC), the Youth League, and in administrative posts such as mayor and people's deputies, as well as their use of money in local elections, and their subsidy of publications, had already established an alliance with liberal intellectuals that would transform the new bourgeois class-in-itself to a class-for itself.

The CCP had been undermined by astounding corruption within its ranks and growing estrangement from its traditional constituency of laborers. Large-scale layoffs, increasing popular insecurity about jobs and livelihood, and the reemergence of exploitative relationships between workers and domestic and foreign business had promoted the perception that the CPP "loved rich rather than poor people" and represented the interests of those who had

7. The 10,000-character statements were a series of commentaries widely disseminated from 1995 to 1997 that sharply criticized the capitalist orientation of reformist policies and put leaders like Jiang Zemin on the ideological defensive in the period preceding the 15th Party Congress of 1997.

8. Text in *China Quarterly*, no. 147 (July–September 1996), pp. 1426–41.

“knowledge, capability, and wealth.” Should there be a critical juncture, similar to the August 1991 incident in the Soviet Union, the Party would not be able to retain power if a sizeable chunk of its membership made opportunist choices to desert its ranks, and workers and peasants declined to back the Party leadership.

The second 10,000-character statement also warned that Moscow was a “mirror” for Beijing, and the reality of “polarization and the rise of a new bourgeoisie” in present-day Russia was now rapidly coming true in China.⁹ Countering the three criteria to evaluate reform attributed to Deng Xiaoping—enhancing national strength, raising living standards, and developing social productive forces—this piece suggested that reform be considered a failure if it undermined public ownership, promoted new exploiting classes, led to the moral degeneration of the CCP, or deprived people of political power and turned the Party into an agent of the bourgeoisie.

Continuing the theme of threats to national security, the second statement also emphasized that the penetration of China by international capital had reached a critical stage. With the entry of Western business into sensitive areas like finance, insurance, and telecommunications, China’s formal economic independence was at stake, just as many individual sectors and markets were also coming under the monopolized control of foreign companies. The rise of a comprador bourgeoisie with extensive foreign links was promoting an alliance that would facilitate the Western strategy for a peaceful transformation to capitalism in China.

The third and fourth 10,000-character statements began circulating in 1997 and were signed by the Editorial Department of *Dangdai Sichao* and Xin Mao (a pseudonym), respectively. Together, the two articles presented a strong defense of public ownership, collectivist ethos, normative incentives, and egalitarian practices. Their major arguments rebutted radical reformist claims that leftist policies had contributed to sluggish economic growth and dampened worker enthusiasm. The superiority of public ownership over individual or private ownership had been demonstrated adequately both by the rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union prior to World War II, and the remarkable industrial growth and economic development that took place in China after 1949. While the previous system had worked out a balance between equity and efficiency, and given workers a sense of being “masters of enterprises,” reform was pursuing growth at the expense of equity, as workers faced massive layoffs and increasing insecurity, while managers behaved like capitalist bosses and siphoned off state assets for private enrichment.¹⁰

9. The author was Wu Yifeng of People’s University, according to Hong Kong sources. See *Ching Pao* [Mirror], August 1, 1996, pp. 23–26.

10. Shi Liuzi, *Beijing dixia “wenyanshu”* [Beijing’s underground “ten-thousand word statements”] (Hong Kong: Minjing chubanshe, 1997).

Reformist policies that attacked the concept of the “iron rice bowl” of lifetime job security, and that linked high productivity to material incentives, were based on the assumption that social progress could only follow from the pursuit of individual benefit. Such ideological positions followed capitalist, rather than socialist, theories of human nature, and it was inevitable that reformist policies based on such premises would shake the foundations of the socialist system and lead to capitalist restoration.

Clearly, the return of the vocabulary of class and class struggle, two-line struggle between capitalist and socialist roaders, dictatorship of the proletariat, and capitalist restoration warrants the label “neo-Maoist” for such theorizing. However, it is important to note that these leftist analyses of contemporary Chinese society are a logical extension of the moderate reformist positions staked out in 1979 and through the early 1980s. The moderate reformist leadership of Chen Yun, Peng Zhen, Hu Qiaomu, and Deng Liqun had early on emphasized the economic determinants of class, premising the identification of China as a socialist society on the extent of nationalization of the economy and the pattern of “distribution according to work.” Although the moderates conceded the need for “readjustments” to accelerate rates of growth and eliminate sectoral imbalances, along with an expanded role for the technical and professional intelligentsia, their emphasis had always been on efficient and rational macro-control mechanisms, the precedence of the state sector, nationalized industry, and the plan over the market. Throughout the 1980s, moderate reformers resisted efforts to switch to political and behavioral criteria to describe “progressive” rural capitalists and urban entrepreneurs as members of the working class; their considerable stretching of the definition of “distribution according to work” and the distinction between ownership and management; and their innovative reinterpretation of social and individual ownership.

The political timing of the 10,000-character statements and publication of articles critical of the capitalist orientation of reform could, no doubt, be linked to perceptions of shifting power configurations as Deng Xiaoping faded from the scene and personnel arrangements were finalized in 1997 for the 15th Party Congress. However, the resurgence of Maoist analyses was more closely related to the events in eastern Europe that clearly vindicated the deceased chairman’s views, and also to the crucial phase that the reformist process had entered in China. By the mid-1990s, the cumulative effects of reformist economic policies were becoming much clearer. Unemployment (rural and urban), was estimated at 20% by the World Bank. Rural inequality had registered a sharp rise between 1988 and 1995, and the gaps between urban and rural, coastal and inland areas, and across urban industrial sectors had increased considerably. According to Khan and Riskin, whose estimates for urban inequality were 18% higher than those of the State Statistical Bu-

reau, the increase in urban inequality was proportionately greater than that in rural inequality over the same period; overall, China in 1995 was among the more unequal Asian developing countries. Moreover, the rapid growth of inequality was traceable to regressive policies, such as dis-equalizing systems of net subsidies that aggravated income disparities, or to rural fiscal policies that placed the burden of net taxes and other transfers of income from households to the state and collective sectors principally on the poorest households.¹¹ Even more significantly, the Khan and Riskin studies point to a big gap between the growth of personal income and gross national product (GNP), as well as a sharp decline in the share of government revenue in GNP (from 15.7% to 10.9% between 1988 and 1995), which would suggest that macroeconomic policies were indeed redistributing incremental income into business accumulation.

Transformation of Industry

At this juncture, reformist calls for “bold experimentation” and new forms of economic ownership, organization, and management, including the selling of shares in state enterprises, appeared to set the stage for a qualitative transformation of the Chinese economy. Jiang Zemin’s plan for the reform of state-owned enterprises envisaged the merger of approximately 1,000 of the largest firms or “pillar” industries into corporate conglomerates with dominant state ownership and autonomous corporate management, and the conversion of the remaining large- and medium-sized operations into “mixed” firms, with less than predominant equity held by the state. Clarification of property rights and establishment of “standard corporations” had been endorsed by the Third Plenum of 1994, and since 1996, the policy of “grasping the large, letting go of the small” had been promoted to permit the disposition of the 85,000 or so small industrial enterprises as “joint stock cooperatives,” with equity shares offered to management, staff, and workers.¹²

Jiang’s 1997 report to the 15th Party Congress drew attention to the vigorous growth of “self-employed and private businesses,” and asserted that “even if the state-owned sector accounts for a smaller proportion of the econ-

11. Azizur Rahman Khan and Carl Riskin, “Income and Inequality in China: Composition, Distribution, and Growth of Household Income, 1988–95,” *China Quarterly*, no. 154 (June 1998), p. 247. Khan and Riskin point out that the significance of the slower growth in personal income as compared to GDP is that rapid economic growth will not alleviate the effects of widening inequality, and even a small adverse change in distribution will have a deleterious effect on the poor (p. 235).

12. *Asian Wall Street Journal*, September 23, 1997.

omy, this will not affect the socialist nature of our country.”¹³ Such claims were rejected by the leftists. Not only was the vast expansion in “mixed” collective-private sectors of the economy considered incompatible with socialism, but also, the introduction of the shareholding system for the SOEs and the proposed property rights reform effectively undermined public ownership as the “foundation” of the national economy. The process of enterprise conversion, it was feared, would result in “asset stripping” and “spontaneous privatization” by corrupt factory managers, while masses of workers would simply face factory closures and destitution.

The publication of the 10,000-character statements indicated a significant ideological divide within the Party in the period between the 14th and 15th Party Congresses (1992–97). Although the leftists were outnumbered, the greater coherence and systematization of their arguments against the latest policy proposals made their stance more threatening than in previous years. On a theoretical level, radical reformist intellectuals seemed little prepared for responding to the leftist offensive. Cao Siyuan, director of the private Beijing Siyuan Merger & Bankruptcy Consultancy and a major advocate of privatization, sounded an alarmist note by accusing the left of trying to begin a new Cultural Revolution, but he provided no substantive arguments to refute the concerns raised by the articles.¹⁴ The decision of the Party leadership to ban Cao’s article was obviously related to its mediocre content and the fact that his extensive use of quotations from the original statement would, in fact, result in a further publicization of leftist arguments against the new economic policies. A similar directive was issued to suppress the article “Unshakable Reform and Opening Up—Commenting on Deng Liqun’s ‘Ten Thousand Character Memorial,’” by Fan Liqin.¹⁵ The unwillingness of the leadership to engage in ideological debate—attributed to the need for unity and focus on economic development—more likely stemmed from ideological defensiveness, and the awareness that the leftist critique could easily find a very sympathetic audience in a disgruntled constituency of unemployed workers and impoverished and uprooted peasants. Herein lies the significance of the resurgence of neo-Maoism. The passing of the old guard of Chen Yun, Hu Qiaomu, and Wang Zhen, and the political eclipse of individuals like Deng Liqun, has resulted in a much smaller base of leftism within the Party, but the appeal of leftist ideas has strengthened and broadened beyond

13. Jiang Zemin, “Hold High the Great Banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory for an All-Round Advancement of the Cause of Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics into the 21st Century.” Report to the 15th Party Congress, *Beijing Review*, October 6–12, 1997, pp. 19–21.

14. “What Are Those Negating Reform and Opening Up Up To?” *Jingji Gongzuo Yuekan* [Economic Work Monthly], no. 7 (1996). Text in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts—Far East/2707 (September 3, 1996), pp. G6–9.

15. *Ching Pao*, September 1, 1996.

the Party membership, owing to the adverse social and economic consequences of reformist policies. As an intellectual trend, neo-Maoism experienced a revival because it provided a much more compelling theoretical construct to understand present reality than the official hodge-podge of "socialism with Chinese characteristics."

As I have argued elsewhere, the massive ideological reorientation begun in late 1979 failed to satisfactorily and conclusively set aside the Maoist legacy.¹⁶ Marketization, increasing inequality, and particularly, the emergence of the cadre capitalist in the 1980s and 1990s all confirmed Mao's fears of capitalist restoration and vindicated his preoccupation with the phenomenon of the CCP itself becoming the major obstacle to the achievement of socialism. Throughout the Deng era, the Maoist prognosis returned to haunt both moderate leaders who agonized over China's "peaceful evolution toward capitalism," as well as radical reformers and liberal intellectuals who echoed the ultra-leftist denunciations of a new exploitative class of communist bureaucrats in socialist systems. The nostalgia for the Maoist era, and the "Mao fever" of the early 1990s, for all their eccentric and commercial manifestations (e.g., demand for Mao buttons as collectibles), underscored and reflected at a deeper and more serious level the shortcomings of the intellectual effort to provide a sufficient theoretical basis or guideline for the reform program. The ideological tenets that the Party continued to emphasize to justify its rule no longer appeared to restrict significantly its policy choices, but they did provide credible ammunition for critics who were less complacent about the ever-widening chasm between ideology and practice.

Neo-Maoist theorizing was, for the most part, not a return to Cultural Revolutionary ultra-leftism, as alleged by its detractors. Its proponents drew attention to the undesirable and destabilizing effects of reformist policies, but in a telling illustration of how fundamentally China has changed, the leftists did not suggest an abandonment of reform. Rather, their strategy was to reassert the normative goals espoused by the CCP in order to ensure a balance between equity and growth, distribution and development, collective interests and private benefit. References to a bureaucrat class did appear in neo-Maoist writings, but were relatively muted and far less frequent than the allusions to the newly emerged capitalist class and comprador bourgeoisie. A far more serious concern for neo-Maoists was the question of political power, because the Party's loss of control, in the ultimate analysis, would spell the end of the socialist system. The erosion of socialist norms threatened the very existence of the CCP because it promoted corruption within the rank and file at the same time that it weakened the organic links with the industrial

16. Kalpana Misra, *From Post-Maoism to Post-Marxism: The Erosion of Official Ideology in Deng's China* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

working class and the peasantry. Needless to say, neo-Maoists overlooked the fact that while opportunities for corruption have multiplied significantly as a consequence of liberalization, the misuse of official authority and control over resources, privilege seeking, and arbitrary exercise of power were also structural characteristics of the pre-reform period.

In emphasizing the new sources of tension and potential instability within the system, and asserting the need for a stricter dictatorship of the proletariat, neo-Maoists had identified an issue that is increasingly of concern to broad sections of Chinese intellectuals and the society in general. However, the neo-Maoist apprehension that increasing economic pluralism would be accompanied by a widening and more insistent appeal for political liberalization has been misplaced, and the trends in intellectual theorizing in the past decade have, in fact, been far less critical of government policies, past and present, and more supportive of political authoritarianism.

The “New Left”

Amid rising dissatisfaction with socio-economic disparities and the alarming decline of public morality, a greater appreciation for the Chinese socialist revolution has appeared in the writings of a newer group of “critical” intellectuals influenced by Michel Foucault, Edward Said, and a variety of neo-Marxist, postmodernist, and postcolonial literature. The “new left” (*xin zuopai*) or “post-ist” (*hou xue*) scholars, as they have been dubbed in Chinese circles, encompass a wide range of critical theory and methodologies, but a common thread underlying their works is the reappraisal of the concepts of modernity and development and the attempt to transcend long touted dichotomies such as socialism and capitalism, modern and traditional, China and the West.

The most striking contrast that these intellectuals delineate with the predominantly nihilist and individualist orientation of the critical voices of the 1980s is their reassessment of Western models and theories of development and the Chinese Communist path to modernization and progress.¹⁷ The undercurrent of nationalism that characterizes the new analyses is more evident in the works that directly address the hegemony of Western discourses on modernity and culture. Critics like Zhang Kuan draw on Edward Said’s arguments on Orientalism to call for a deconstruction of Western accounts of Chinese history and to reclaim both the Chinese identity and the nation’s right to chart its own path of development. For Zhang Yiwu, the concept of modernity cannot be understood without reference to power relations and specific ideologies. In “From Modernity to Chineseness,” he joins Zhang Fa

17. Zhang Yiwu et. al., “Chongu ‘xiandaixing’” [Re-evaluating “modernity”], *Huanghe* [Yellow River], no. 4 (1994), pp. 195–207.

and Wang Yichuan in contending that from the mid-1800s to the end of the 1980s, China had been engaged in a project of modernity, whose terms were essentially set and defined by the West.¹⁸ During this phase, China was victimized and reduced to a status of the Other, as it struggled to implement Western notions of survival and progress. The 1990s, however, ushered in the “Post-New Era,” when a new model of knowledge, viz., “Chineseness,” rose into prominence to illuminate the distinctively Chinese features of the country’s market economy, popular culture, and intellectual discourse. Such neo-leftist attempts to validate the Chinese strategy of development as both authentic and Chinese have some parallels with liberal reformist arguments in the 1980s about the specificity of the Soviet socialist model and the legitimacy of the Chinese variant, but in general, they go much further in rejecting Western paradigms as both irrelevant and hegemonic.

In the post-Tiananmen era, Chinese intellectuals who have traveled or lived extensively in the West and acquired a more ambivalent view of Western theories and practice of development have generally been at the forefront of rethinking about modernity, but they strike a responsive chord in several mainland cohorts and sections of the leadership. Scholars such as Cui Zhiyuan have gone to considerable lengths to defend Mao for his intellectual vision and for policies such as the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution that had been the focus of much criticism in the preceding period. Cui, who received his doctoral degree from the University of Chicago and went on to teach at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, questions the relevance of economic liberalism and neo-classicism, arguing that Mao’s socialism, growing out of the specific conditions of China, has been a more appropriate model of development than any Western implant. The successes of the 1980s, and the foundations of local autonomy and village township enterprises, Cui maintains, were traceable to the communes and policies of the Great Leap Forward. The Cultural Revolution, for all its radical excesses, was a well-intentioned and necessary experiment against power holders in a society where bureaucratic domination had always been a curse.¹⁹

18. Zhang Kuan, “Sayide de ‘dongfang zhuyi’ yu xifang de hanxue yanjiu” [Said’s orientalism and western sinology], *Liaowang* [Outlook], no. 27 (July 3, 1995) pp. 36–37; “Wenhua xinzhimin de keneng” [The possibility of cultural neocolonialism], *Tianya* [Corners of the World], no. 2 (1996), pp. 16–23; Zhang Fa, Zhang Yiwu, and Wang Yichuan, “Cong ‘xiandaixing’ dao ‘Zhonghuaxing’” [From modernity to Chineseness: Inquiry into a new model of knowledge], *Wenyi Zhengming* [Debates on Literature and Art], no. 2 (March 1994), pp. 10–20; Zhang Yiwu, “Chanshi ‘Zhongguo’ de jiaolu” [The anxiety of explaining “China”], *Ershiyi Shiji* [Twenty-first Century], no. 28 (April 1995), pp. 128–35.

19. Cui Zhiyuan, “Zhidu chuangxin yu di’erci sixiang jiefang” [System innovation and the second thought emancipation campaign], *Ershiyi Shiji*, no. 8 (1994); “Mao Zedong wenge lilun de deshi yu xiandaixing de chongjian” [Mao Zedong’s idea of cultural revolution and the recon-

The impact of globalization and marketization has come under scrutiny in terms of its implications for new social and economic polarization, both international and domestic, by mainland scholars such as Wang Hui. Like Cui, Wang Hui emphasizes the developmental aspect of Chinese socialism and maintains that Mao's thought evolved as an alternative to capitalist modernity and attempted to avoid the harsh, exploitative, and competitive aspects of Western capitalism.²⁰ Echoing analyses like those of Immanuel Wallerstein, Wang's critique of international capitalism focuses on the power relations that underlie global economic processes. Globalization, he maintains, is simply the expansion of multinational companies that join with national and local vested interests to undermine political democracy and free markets. The symbiosis of political and economic power makes it unrealistic to assume that reliance on market forces alone can deliver social justice and democracy. The worldwide "crisis of modernity" can begin to be resolved only by linking the concepts of political democracy with economics and culture. For Wang, the central issue of the post-Tiananmen period is the complex relationships between state and society that are developing in the course of capitalist modernization.

The December 2001 accession of China to the WTO has exacerbated concerns about resulting adverse consequences for the socio-economic order, as well as for issues of sovereignty and autonomy. Di Yinqing and Guan Yang express reservations about China's WTO entry because in their view it would enhance the ability of strong capitalist states such as the U.S. to intervene in Chinese affairs on the pretext of implementing international norms.²¹ Like many other intellectuals and policy makers in the developing world, they perceive the WTO, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank as institutions that serve Western interests, and they see globalization primarily as Americanization.

struction of modernity], *Xianggang Shehui Kexue* [Hong Kong Journal of Social Sciences], no. 7 (Spring 1996).

20. Wang Hui, "Dangdai Zhongguo de sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing wenti" [The condition of contemporary Chinese thought and the problem of modernity] *Wenyi Zhengming*, no. 6, (November 1998), pp. 7–26.

21. Di Yinqing and Guan Yang, "Meiguo weishenme jiyu Zhongguo chongkai ruguan tanpan" [Why is the United States anxious to reopen negotiations on China's entering the WTO], *Gaige Neican* [Internal Reference for Reform], no. 8 (April 20, 1999), pp. 39–42; "Ruguan dui Zhongguo changyuan liyi jiuqing yiweizhe shenme" [What, after all, are the implications of entering WTO for China's long-term interests], *Gaige Neican*, no. 9 (May 5, 1999), pp. 34–38; Shao Ren, "Zhongguo: Ruguan buru tao [China: Joining the WTO without falling into the trap], *Tianya*, no. 3 (May 1999), p. 6. There are many others who believe that the overall effects of membership will benefit China by facilitating greater foreign investment, transparency, a strengthened legal system, etc. See Gu Ming and Yang Xiaohong, "Is China Prepared for WTO Accession?" *Xinhua*, March 9, 2001.

The effects of international competition on Chinese industry and agriculture are particularly troubling for some. Economists like Wen Tiejun point to China's structural disadvantages such as land/labor ratio and cost and efficiency of production, and warn that Chinese agriculture in the short run may be disastrously undermined by opening up. Others fear a massive rise in rural migration as Chinese peasants are ousted from their traditional occupations by the influx of American agricultural products.²²

For certain critics, the likelihood of rising inequality within and between regions (which is not discounted even by WTO advocates) is ideologically unacceptable and poses the greatest risks for social and political stability. While the coastal southeastern provinces are expected to benefit from their superior human capital, and technological and infrastructural edge, in attracting even more investment and opportunities for trade, the industrial northeast and the interior provinces are considered inadequately prepared for the challenges of the global market. Large-scale increases in unemployment and widespread decline of incomes in these areas will inevitably strain the resources of local and central governments and make it exceedingly difficult to contain social disturbances and preserve order.

This concern with erosion of government control is also voiced by Hu Angang and Wang Shaoguang, who analyze the situation at the domestic level. These two scholars perceive a significant decline in the Chinese state's political capacity and financial strength, owing to the devolution of authority and control over revenue and resources from the center to the provinces. Using indices of "extractive capabilities" based on taxation, Wang and Hu conclude that fiscal reforms initiated in the 1980s brought about a steady reduction of central government revenues as a percentage of GNP. Simultaneously, "local state corporatism" that flourished in the wake of those reforms allowed the provinces to raise and retain a growing pot of extrabudgetary income for themselves, in addition to the larger budgetary allocation of local revenue to which they had become entitled.²³ The combination of a "weaker center and strong localities" had the potential for undermining macroeconomic stability and economic growth; moreover, the enhanced regionalism and growing clout of provincial governments could

22. Wen Tiejun, "Zhong-Mei WTO tanpan zhong nongye tiaokuan dui woguo de yingxiang" [The impact that the terms involving agriculture in the WTO negotiations between China and the U.S. will have on our country], *Nongcun Jingji Baokan* [Agricultural Economic Journal], no. 6 (June 1999), pp. 4–5; Han Deqiang, *Pengzhuang: Quanguohua xianjing yu Zhongguo xianshi xuanze* [Clash: The pitfalls of globalization and China's realistic choices] (Beijing: Jingji guanli chubanshe, 2000).

23. Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang, *The Chinese Economy in Crisis: State Capacity and Tax Reform* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2001), and *The Political Economy of Uneven Development: The Case of China* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1999).

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well end up with the transfer of political allegiance from the center to local groups, as in Yugoslavia.

The rising interregional disparity exacerbated by the market and by the policy of developing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) was also a major issue for Hu and Wang. Lack of “fair competition” between regions was problematic for reasons of equity and justice, but most importantly for the preservation of public order and social control. The specter of massive social instability, heightened tension, and violence caused by economic dislocation and a torrent of rural migration underscored the need for decisive state action to implement comprehensive tax reform and address regional differences, thereby eliminating the distortions introduced by vested interests and privileged enclaves.

The wide array of writings that are subsumed under the label of “new-left” address many of the issues identified by Neo-Maoism, but their authors are, in general, far less critical of the incumbent regime and its policies. Their criticism of the international capitalist order is coupled with an acceptance of the progressive credentials of the Communist leadership, and their attention, for the most part, has been focused on a quest for Chinese solutions to the problems encountered in the reform process. The rise of “new-leftism” has strengthened the positions of like-minded sections within the officialdom, and this in turn has facilitated a more sympathetic hearing of their voices and recommendations. Nevertheless, for all of the heightened visibility of the “new left,” forces on the right have remained strong, and the most significant development of the post-Tiananmen period has been the consolidation and predominance of neo-authoritarianism as a policy preference and intellectual trend.

Neo-Conservatism and Neo-Authoritarianism

The increasing leftist preoccupation with political authority to resolve problems associated with reform is shared by a host of intellectuals who remain strongly disposed toward marketization and are convinced that the survival of the Chinese state and economic progress can be guaranteed only by retaining power within the party elite and reversing the erosion of ideological and cultural norms. This mind-set ushered in a phase of new intellectual conservatism in the early and mid-1990s that also facilitated in its wake a resurgence of the theory of neo-authoritarianism that had gained currency among a section of Zhao Ziyang’s supporters in late 1988 and early 1989.

Against the liberal democrats who called for immediate democratization and elimination of the monopoly of state ownership in the late 1980s, Zhao advisors Wu Jiaxiang, Chen Yizi, and Wang Xiaoqiang advocated “enlightened despotism” to guide the transition to a full-fledged market economy, on

the grounds that pluralist democracy could only be the “result of reform in China, not its precondition.”²⁴ Introduction of political democracy before the consolidation of a capitalist economic order, they maintained, would be inefficient and prolong the transition to market relations.

Such open advocacy of free enterprise, creation of a middle class of property owners, and rule by an elite group consisting of business entrepreneurs and intellectuals who possessed the “consciousness of modernity” brought criticism and persecution for theorists of neo-authoritarianism in the period of leftist ascendancy during and immediately after the Tiananmen crackdown. However, in the neo-authoritarian emphasis on political control and stability, as well as its instrumental approach to socialism and capitalism, there was much that was attractive for incumbent leaderships like those of Jiang Zemin and Deng Xiaoping, and it was not surprising that the basic ideas survived and emerged, repackaged, in the neo-conservative climate of the 1990s.

The major differences between pre- and post-Tiananmen neo-authoritarianism stem principally from changed political, social, and intellectual circumstances. In 1988 and 1989, scholars like Zhang Bingjiu, Yang Baikui, and Xiao Gongqin were enunciating their ideas within a context of massive introspection about Chinese culture and civilization, Marxist ideology, and socialism as a model of development, amid insistent demands for greater intellectual pluralism and political liberalization. In an intellectual climate where the terms of discussion were largely set by radical reformers, neo-authoritarians tended to highlight similarities with liberal democrats and their commitment to a market economy. Their preference for market relations was premised on the perceived weakness of the planned economy and its consequences for both economics and politics. Neo-authoritarians agreed with their radical reformist colleagues that “vague and unclear property-rights relationships” embodied in state ownership prevented effective utilization of productive property and obscured social responsibilities and the pursuit of individual interests. In practice, public ownership degenerated into either “individual bureaucratic ownership” or a “feudal warlords” economy that turned competition into “civil wars” among government departments.²⁵ Furthermore, the complex macroeconomic regulation required by a planned economy produced an intense concentration of power in the state and politicization and bureaucratization of the entire society. Interests and demands of various

24. See Liu Jin and Li Lin, eds., *Xin quanwei zhuyi* [The new authoritarianism] (Beijing: Beijing Institute of Economics Press, 1989).

25. Rong Jian, “Does China Need an Authoritarian Political System in the Course of Modernization?” *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 23 (Winter 1990–91), p. 62; Wu Jiaxiang, “Xin quanwei: Tongguo shichanghua kai wang minzhuhua de tebie kuaiche” [The new authoritarianism: An express train towards democracy by building markets] in Liu Jin and Li Lin, eds., *Xin quanwei zhuyi* [The new authoritarianism], pp. 39–46.

strata and groups could be reflected only through a single political channel, and political clout became central to the pursuit of economic and other benefits. A full-fledged market would curtail the scope of public power and political decisions, undermine the fusion of politics and economics, and contribute to pluralization of the political sphere.

However, in the transitional phase, the neo-authoritarians made the case for a benevolent dictatorship by arguing that the combination of a weak market with imprecise delineation of rights and responsibilities tended to raise “transactional political costs,” as more and more people sought political power for economic benefit. Such tendencies, along with the resistance of vested interests to privatization, necessitated “coercive guidance” by a “power elite” to oversee the transition to a market economy and liberal democracy.

In the post-Tiananmen period, neo-authoritarian theorizing builds on earlier arguments in support of market reform but differs in its greater appreciation of macroeconomic control and planning. Neo-authoritarian theorists have also become more forthright in their opposition to democratization and support for “orderly change from above.” The subtle shift in emphasis from the economic to the political sphere grew out of the challenges perceived internationally and within China; the broader appeal of authoritarian solutions was linked to the currents of neo-conservatism that marked Chinese official circles and the intellectual and cultural arenas in the early and mid-1990s.

Ethnic unrest, political disintegration, and the unruly economic transition in the former Soviet bloc appeared to have vindicated the views of the Chinese leadership that had prioritized economic over political liberalization. The democratizing orientation of radical reform theorists and students now stood discredited as “romantic utopianism,” and the nihilist cultural iconoclasm of the past decade was replaced by a new emphasis on indigenous values and traditional culture as the most fitting conceptual foundation for the Chinese state and society. This new conservatism emerged in response to the perceived crisis of faith in official ideology and a new cynicism toward Western values and belief systems. It was spurred on by various factors: the support of leaders like Jiang Zemin, the intellectual reaction to the publication of Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” and Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History” theses, and an increasing appreciation of shared cultural identity with other East Asian states whose social and economic accomplishments ostensibly demonstrated the virtues of “Confucian capitalism” and Asian values. The officially sponsored revival of “national studies” (*guo xue*), and a renewed interest in a “third epoch of Confucianism,” marked a new awareness among a group of intellectuals and leaders that China’s traditional values and culture—rather than Western liberalism and Enlightenment ideas—could

hold the key to addressing the challenges facing contemporary Chinese society.

In the prevailing atmosphere of reevaluating the Westernizing impulses and “totalistic anti-traditionalism” that was a legacy of late-19th and early-20th century reformers like Kang Youwei and Tan Sitong, more recent intellectuals like Ji Xianlin, Sheng Hong, and Chen Lai took their cue from Yu Yingshi of Princeton University to draw contrasts between Western and Chinese civilization and argue that the latter, with its emphasis on harmony between self and community, humanity and nature, was far better suited to resolving the problems of industrialization and modernity.²⁶ The hallmark of their new conservatism was the emphatic rejection of the Chinese tradition of radicalism and utopianism that had “played a predominant role from the May Fourth Movement, through the Cultural Revolution to the 1980s Culture Fever.”²⁷ Wang Desheng suggested replacing the “dysfunction of radical cultural critique and enlightenment” with the “rearguard function of cultural conservatism,” and noted that Chinese intellectuals in the 1990s had eschewed political romanticism and idealism for realism and pragmatism. Admirers of the Enlightenment tradition like Li Zehou and Wang Yuanhua also advocated a gradual and evolutionary approach to change in the 1990s. In *Farewell to Revolution: Reflections on Twentieth Century China*, Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu reiterated their commitment to individual freedom, social justice, and democracy, but prioritized the need for economic development. In doing so, Li, quite clearly, was privileging “national salvation” over Enlightenment values, a tradeoff that he had so eloquently criticized in the previous decade.²⁸

Neo-conservatism in the 1990s solidly identified itself with a transformative agenda espousing gradualism, with a special place for indigenous values. As the historian Xiao Gongqin wrote approvingly:

26. Yu Yingshi's argument was presented in a lecture at the Chinese University in Hong Kong in 1988 and also in articles like “Zailun Zhongguo xiandai sixiang zhongde jijin yu baoshou” [Again discussing radicalism and conservatism in the history of modern Chinese thought], *Ershiyi shiji*, no. 10 (1992), pp. 143–9; Ji Xianlin, “‘Tianren heyi’ fang neng chengjiu renlei” [Humanity can be saved through ‘unity of Nature and man’], *Dongfang* [Orient], no. 1 (1993), pp. 6; Sheng Hong, “Shenme shi wenming” [What is civilization], *Zhanlue yu Guanli*, no. 5 (1995), pp. 88–98; Chen Lai, “Rujia sixiang yu xiandai Dongya shijie” [Confucian ideas and the modern East Asian world], *Dongfang* no. 3 (1994), pp. 10–13.

27. Chen Lai, “Ershi shiji wenhua yundong zhong de jijinzhuyi” [Radicalism in 20th century culture movements], *Dongfang*, no. 1 (1993), pp. 38–44.

28. Wang Desheng, “Minjian de xueshuguan—jiushi niandai Dalu xuekan xianxiang” [Unofficial academic views—the phenomena of scholarly periodicals in the nineties mainland], *Dongfang*, no. 5 (1994), pp. 56–58; Wang Yuanhua, “Jinnian de fangsi” [Reflections of recent years], *ibid.*, no. 2 (1995), pp. 72–76; Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu, *Gaobie geming* [Farewell to revolution] (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1996).

New Conservatism in the twentieth century is in fact a conservatism that is oriented to modernization and transformation. It is essentially different from traditional fundamentalist conservatism, which respectfully regarded the traditionalist socio-cultural order as immutable and opposed any change as heresy. New Conservatism, on the contrary, sees tradition as national collective experience and wants to establish this as the basis of gradual social transformation. New Conservatism emerges as a reaction against radicalism in China's process of modernization.²⁹

In the 1980s, critical intellectual like Jin Guantao had linked the inability of the Communist system to achieve modernization and intellectual enlightenment to the ultraconservatism of the Confucian order. In the 1990s, neo-conservatives employed the historical perspective to debunk the Chinese tradition of radicalism that overstepped historical phases and attempted total transformation of values and institutions, but only ended up retarding progress and causing massive social and economic dislocation. Mass mobilization of the Cultural Revolutionary variety, or the activities of latter-day liberal democrats, merely provided sporadic outlets for mass grievances. It was irresponsible and unrealistic to demand immediate political reform or to promote Western-style democratization in a society such as China, which lacked both the civic culture and the historical and social contexts essential for the proper functioning of such institutions.

In the neo-conservative climate of the 1990s, the goal of political stability to offset crises sparked by rapid economic growth had become an overriding national priority. China's daunting and ever-increasing problems of corruption, unemployment, socio-economic polarization, and crisis of values underscored the need for tighter controls, and reassertion of ideological norms and beliefs.³⁰ For neo-authoritarian proponents, the prescription of a strong and enlightened dictatorship acquired even greater significance at this time, not simply for guiding the transition to a market economy but as the most important mechanism for arresting political decline and preventing total collapse and disintegration of the system itself.

The neo-authoritarian preference for orderly change from above now envisaged an enhanced role for political institutions and central authority in exercising macroeconomic control, and for arbitrating conflicts of interest. A

29. Xiao Gongqin, "Dangdai Zhongguo xinbaoshouzhuyi de sixiangyuanyuan" [The ideological roots of neo-conservatism in contemporary China], *Ershiye shiji*, no. 40 (April 1997), pp. 126–35.

30. Xiao Gongqin, "Minzuzhuyi yu Zhongguo zhuanxing shiqi de yishi xingtai" [Nationalism and ideology in China during the period of transition], *Zhanlue yu Guanli*, no. 4 (1994), pp. 21–25; "Zhongguo minzuzhuyi de lishi yu qianjing" [The history and future of nationalism in China], *Zhanlue yu Guanli*, no. 2 (1996) pp. 58–62; Yi Baoyun, "Minzhuzhuyi yu xiandai jingji fazhan" [Nationalism and modern economic development], *Zhanlue yu Guanli*, no. 3 (1994).

Heart-to-Heart Talk with the General Secretary, published under the auspices of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (under the sponsorship of Liu Ji, an advisor to Jiang Zemin), reiterated that the reformist policies of devolution of authority and control over revenue and resources had been counterproductive, as they merely expanded centrifugal forces and created lordly consciousness of rival special-interest groups that feuded with one another and were increasingly difficult to control.³¹ The economist Sheng Hong used the Tiananmen crisis as a negative example to illustrate the “cost of reform.” According to Sheng, gradualism, as opposed to “shock therapy” (which in the eyes of many Chinese analysts had undermined the Russian economy), and institutional economics, rather than the “romantic attitude” of neo-classical economists, constituted the Chinese model of development that was capable of reconciling diverse interests and facilitating cooperation among disparate groups and regions.³²

In arguments reminiscent of Gunnar Myrdal’s “soft state, hard state” thesis, neo-conservatives and neo-authoritarians pointed to the market-oriented, yet state-dominated, modernization strategies of East Asian states with their ideologies of nationalism and political conservatism as the model for China to emulate.³³ Inspired both by the examples of these countries and the gradual evolutionary approach of late-19th and early-20th century indigenous reformers like Yan Fu, the neo-conservative and neo-authoritarian strategy for China’s transition from tradition to modernity stressed a blend of selective Western ideas and institutions with traditional Chinese values of collectivism and patriotism, propagated and maintained by the Party elite.

The resurgence of neo-authoritarian thought, and its increasing attraction to wide sections of Chinese officialdom and the intellectual elite, is related—to some extent—to the incarceration and exile of the more vociferous liberal democratic critics of the regime. However, its broader appeal is linked, in no small measure, to the fact that the vast body of writing that can be characterized as neo-authoritarian is based on theoretical assumptions that are common to a variety of Chinese political opinion, ranging from liberal democratic to neo-Maoist thought. Neo-authoritarian arguments in favor of market

31. Wang Jiemin et al., *Yu zongshuji tanxin* [A heart-to-heart talk with the General Secretary] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1996).

32. Sheng Hong, “A Survey of the Research on the Transitional Process of Market-Oriented Reform in China,” in Joseph Fewsmith, ed., *Reflections on the Economic Reform Process (II)*, *Chinese Economic Studies*, 29:2, pp. 5–38 (March/April 1996).

33. In his *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations* (New York: New York Twentieth Century Fund, 1968), Myrdal distinguished between “soft states” that adopted piecemeal and gradualist developmental policies and avoided the “use of force for social ends,” and “hard states” that did not shrink from authoritarian methods and violence to push through radical reform and enforce social discipline. Xiao Gongqian, “Dongya weiquan zhengzhi yu xiandaihua” [East Asian authoritarian politics and modernization], *Zhanlue yu Guanli*, no. 3 (1994).

forces and a capitalist economy flow naturally from the ideological evolution set in motion with the critiques of ultra-leftist voluntarism and the valorization of the role of productive forces after the December 1978 Third Plenum. The triumph of economic determinism was evident in the adoption of the “primary stage of socialism” thesis by the Party’s 13th Congress in 1987, which consigned the goal of socialist society to a very distant horizon and paved the way for theories marginalizing teleological concerns and rationalizing the immediate and complete transition to a market economy. Neo-authoritarianism’s vague promise of liberal democracy, contingent upon the consolidation of a solid middle class and the establishment of an advanced economy, reveals parallels with the reformist leadership’s own extended time frame for establishing democracy and socialism, after several decades, even centuries, of “primary socialism.” The reassertion of planning and administrative controls has also brought the proponents of neo-authoritarianism closer to political leaders who share their gradual and incremental approach to change, and particularly to the prescription for a more active governmental role for addressing politically divisive issues such as unemployment and social inequality.

Moreover, the distinction between the instrumental rationalism of the political pluralism advocated by liberal democrat intellectuals, and the civic or technocratic dictatorship favored by neo-authoritarians and neo-conservatives, is narrower than would be warranted by such labeling of the two groups. Before the events of 1989, the extent of political reform demanded by most radical reformers was also one that would establish an elite democracy. Li Honglin, Yu Haocheng, Su Shaozhi, and Hu Jiwei were a minority who extended the application of democratic rights to workers and peasants. Most of their colleagues emphasized the criteria of education and professional skills as requisites for participation in policy making and politics. Indeed, on the question of participatory democracy, there has been a remarkable congruence of views across the Chinese political spectrum. Fang Lizhi, “China’s Sakharov,” who advocated wholesale Westernization, maintained that intellectuals were an “independent stratum occupying a leading place,” while the broad masses of the peasantry were not quite ready for democracy.³⁴ Fang’s characterization was not far removed from that of leftist hardliners who emphasized “people’s limited capacity to withstand political and psychological strains . . . and their lack of democratic practice, experience and habit. . . . When many people are still preoccupied with the daily toil of basic survival, it is impossible to expect from them a high degree of democratic participation.”³⁵

34. *Zhengming*, no. 117 (1987) p. 20.

35. *Jingji Ribao* [Economic Daily News], July 18, 1989, p. 3.

On the eve of the Tiananmen crisis, neo-authoritarians echoed liberal democratic sentiments about the role of intellectuals' modern consciousness and values in order to justify their own arguments for a "civic dictatorship" of technocrats, elite intellectuals, and political leaders in favor of free enterprise. Equally contemptuous of the "backwardness of the economic and educational standards of the masses," neo-authoritarians also advocated a polity in which an elite would "occupy the positions of leadership, represent the masses, and oversee the transition to a market economy."³⁶ Wang Huning—who would emerge as a major advisor to Jiang Zemin in the 1990s—argued that it would take a rather long time to "change the undemocratic political tradition formed under semi-colonialism and semi-feudalism."³⁷ Since a "given political structure must fit the given historical, social, and cultural conditions," Wang recommended developing democracy in a scientific manner, i.e., providing for consultation and feedback to promote efficiency and rationality within government, rather than representative procedural democracy, during the transitional period. In the post-Tiananmen period, neo-conservatives and neo-authoritarians repeat all of the earlier arguments against participatory democracy, maintaining that the incorporation of mass democratic movements in national politics can only produce negative outcomes.

It is no exaggeration to say that the authoritarian solution to China's problems is deceptively simple and disappointingly vague on issues of substance. The significance of neo-conservatism and neo-authoritarianism lies in their identification of the varied and serious challenges faced by the Chinese state in an era of rapid development and change. As in the case of neo-Maoism and the "new-left," the most important contribution of these ideologies is the refocusing of attention on the factors of competent and efficient governance and cohesive ideological norms for generating support and legitimacy for authority. A glaring weakness is the inability to provide satisfactory answers to the questions raised.

The need for augmenting performance-based legitimacy with ideological norms that would unite the population behind the leadership and mobilize it voluntarily for the pursuit of elite-defined modernization goals has been emphasized by most neo-conservative and neo-authoritarian theorists. The increasing difficulty of maintaining law and order, rising incidence of crime and corruption, and declining capacity of the state are seen to be linked in one way or another with the dissipation of moral and ethical values, yet these theorists provide few substantive details about the normative framework that

36. Yang Baokui, "Democracy and Authority in the Course of Political Development," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, no. 3 (Spring 1991), pp. 67–80.

37. Wang Huning, "Lun minzhu zhengzhi jianshe" [On constructing democratic politics], in *Wang Huning ji* [Collected works of Wang Huning] (Harbin, China: Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1989), pp. 30–38.

needs to be put into place. In 1991, a document entitled “Realistic Responses and Strategic Choices for China after the Soviet Upheaval” suggested nationalism as a renewed rallying and cohesive force within an ideological framework combining Western rationalism and the “lofty and noble traditional culture of the Chinese people.”³⁸ Based on the East Asian experience, a focus on cultural nationalism and revival of Confucian values to fill the vacuum created by cynicism toward socialist ideas would seem to be a logical choice, and this has indeed been reflected in the receptivity to the ideas of new Confucianism introduced by overseas scholars like Tu Wei-ming. The Confucian concepts of “self-cultivation” and “inner-sageliness” do not simply provide a key to improved ethical standards for both elite and masses; they also assist in national rejuvenation by reorienting the country’s search for values and belief systems away from the West and toward indigenous traditions. However, given the neo-conservative and neo-authoritarian instrumental approach to ideology, it is not surprising that the reevaluation of Confucianism is cursory and inadequate. It is, moreover, compromised and contradicted by the calls for adhering to the CCP’s leadership and the Four Cardinal Principles.

The more obvious inconsistency between the neo-authoritarian commitment to the market economy as a teleological goal, and its support for the incumbent political leadership and “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” is problematic both for neo-authoritarian theorizing as well as for the ruling elite whose legitimacy it is trying to enhance. For the Party elite, neo-authoritarian advocacy of the Party’s claim to leadership at best reinforces neo-Maoist accusations that the Party has allowed itself to become a vehicle for evolution toward capitalism. At worst, such advocacy exposes the neo-authoritarian utilitarian perception of Marxism-Leninism-Deng Xiaoping Theory as simply an integrative myth and makes the Party a conscious ally in a cynical ploy to use ideology as a cloak for the pursuit of diametrically opposed interests.

Perhaps the most serious shortcoming of neo-authoritarianism is its inability to explain how a strengthening of dictatorship or greater concentration of powers in a centralized bureaucracy will resolve the problem of pervasive official corruption that is the greatest contributor to economic crime and mass cynicism about authority. In the late 1980s, neo-authoritarian theorizing had identified the structural basis for corruption and misuse of official position in the concentration of power in the state and the “supra-economic coercion mechanism” that it provided for “bureaucratic manipulation and extraordinary interference in all spheres of society.”³⁹ However, neither then nor now

38. Lilun Bu, “Sulian jubian zhihou Zhongguode xianshi yingdui yu zhanlue xuanze” [Realistic responses and strategic options: An alternative CCP ideology and its critics], translated by David Kelly, in *Chinese Law and Government*, 29:2 (March–April 1996).

39. Wu Jiaxiang, “Xin quanwei”; Yang Baikui, “Democracy and Authority.”

do neo-authoritarians demonstrate how the institutional arrangements of the "civic dictatorship" would preclude and eliminate such an inherent defect.

According to the neo-authoritarians, honesty and integrity in public office would be guaranteed by the sincerity and ethical standards of the "power elite." In this resort to explanations of bureaucratism and corruption as individual behavioral problems, rather than arising from a social structural base, these neo-authoritarians are in agreement with the official position as well as neo-Maoist currents of thought. One can recall that even the ultra-leftists in the 1960s and 1970s, who had first raised the issue of bureaucratic capitalism and rejected the distinction between legal ownership and control of productive property, had suggested a strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat, rather than limits or checks to authority, as a solution. It would seem that the historical and cultural appeal of rule by a few virtuous individuals retains a powerful hold over a broad political spectrum in the contemporary period.

The "Three Represents"

The post-Tiananmen period has witnessed a new emphasis on central authority and normative legitimacy as neo-Maoists, the "new left," neo-conservatives, and neo-authoritarians have focused on the serious consequences of ideological and political fragmentation. The Party-state has attempted to tighten its political hold by stifling dissent and affirming the role of ideology, in an abstract way, in official proclamations and programmatic documents. The neglect of ideological work, first noted with regret in 1986, and then criticized as a major mistake by the Sixth Plenum of the 14th Central Committee, was reversed in 1996 by a new emphasis on building socialist spiritual civilization. However, what constitutes a socialist spiritual civilization is far from clear. Through the 1990s, the notion of Deng Xiaoping Theory as the ideological embodiment of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," the thesis of the primary stage of socialism, and the concept of patriotism and collectivism as normative ideals were all put forward as the main components of official ideology or Marxist-Leninist theory in the current phase.

Jiang Zemin's Guangdong tour of February 2000 advanced a new ideological agenda with the enunciation of the "Three Represents": the Party must always represent the requirements of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. His July speech on the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Party directly addressed some of the main concerns that had been voiced by the neo-left and neo-right in the preceding decade. Jiang drew attention to the Party's "grave alienation from the people," and emphasized the need to build a "solid protective ideological dam" against corruption, abuse of power, and the formation of vested interests.

The “rule of law” needed to be combined with the “rule of virtue” to lay a “lofty ideological and ethical foundation for a good public order and healthy environment.”⁴⁰

The most significant element of Jiang’s initiative, however, was the new twist to an old Party maxim of putting the interest of the people above everything else. Pointing out that “overall interests” are “always composed of specific interests,” Jiang argued that the Party “must take into consideration and look after the interests of people from different social strata and circles.” Stated thus, his formulation simultaneously ruled out political pluralism in interest representation and offered a justification of what could turn out to be a major change in party composition and identity. In a significant political move, he was rationalizing the acceptance of new groups, such as private entrepreneurs, for their important contributions to the Party line and program. The Marxist theory of labor and labor value needed to be reassessed in light of new conditions, Jiang implied, and it was not advisable to judge people’s political commitment by whether they owned property, and how much. In contrast to the Neo-Maoists, who viewed the re-stratification of Chinese society with considerable alarm, Jiang claimed that “the influence and cohesiveness of the Party” would only be strengthened and expanded by reflecting the changes in the new social structure. Representing a wide range of interests was “vital to the overall interests of keeping the Party in power” and ensuring social stability.

Predictably, the outlining of the “Three Represents” has been hailed in the official media as yet another innovative adaptation of Marxism to new and complicated international and domestic conditions. The real importance of this formulation lies, however, in marking another crucial shift in the CCP’s political platform, to bring its stated ideological goals closer to the practical policies that the leadership has been implementing. Jiang’s focus on the central question of political power, plus repeated assertions that without the strong leadership of the CCP the country will sink into a “chaotic abyss and break up”—and indeed, his attempt to project himself as a paramount leader enunciating his innovative thoughts in a line of succession from Mao and Deng—all provide echoes of the neo-conservative solution to China’s dilemmas.

For all its instrumental urgency, Jiang’s exhortation to pay greater attention to ideological norms reiterated again in his “Report to the 16th Party Congress” is no less vague than that of neo-authoritarian writers.⁴¹ His call for upholding fundamental Marxist tenets and preserving a “correct theoretical

40. Jiang Zemin, “Speech on the 80th Anniversary of the Founding of the CCP,” *Renmin Ribao*, July 2, 2001.

41. Jiang Zemin, “Report to the 16th Party Congress,” *ibid.*, November 18, 2002.

basis and ideological soul” is increasingly empty rhetoric, given that it is not at all clear that anyone in the top leadership, let alone young cadres, understands or agrees upon which tenets are inviolable or fundamental. Mindful of the cynicism of the masses and the general orientation of the populace, Jiang’s “Three Represents” simply provide a far less-demanding and less-stringent set of criteria than the Four Cardinal Principles for assessing the political commitment of a new generation or a social group of aspirants to CCP membership. The political platform of promoting the development of productive forces, a.k.a. economic growth, and advanced culture, as representing the interests of an overwhelming majority of people, is a stance that can draw acceptance from a wide range of opinions from the right to the left.

In the past few years, what has been more significant as a development than the meager content of the official discourse on ideology is the apparent passage from the top leadership of the CCP to other groups such as the neo-authoritarians, neo-Maoists, or “new left,” of the initiative for outlining doctrinal norms and providing authoritative conceptual lenses for understanding present reality. This development, if it continues, has long-term implications for the Party’s role and hegemony over ideological discourse, but in the immediate context, the ruling group has benefited, for the most part, from the climate of opinion that has been created from objective developments, nationally and internationally, as well as the trend of intellectual evolution in the post-Tiananmen period. The backlash against cultural and national nihilism and the wholesale Westernization of the previous decade has allowed the Party to recoup a measure of legitimacy on the basis of past achievements in repulsing imperialism and to promote itself as the defender of Chinese sovereignty and national interests in a post-Cold War world marked by the resurgence of a U.S. poised to contain China. In this context, the Party, rather than establishing its own hegemonic discourse, has benefited from the discursive invention of the nation by other groups. As Western imperialism, rather than Enlightenment values, has incited the Chinese popular imagination in recent years, the Party has not lagged in turning the new tide of nationalist sentiment to its advantage.

The prevailing climate of intellectual opinion has also enabled the political leadership to be more assertive in its claim to sole and absolute authority, much to the disappointment of liberal democrats in China. Party leaders, taking their cue from the neo-authoritarians as well as the “new left,” have pressed their case for centralization by warning against “weak and incompetent leadership” and the possibly adverse consequences of the diversification of the Chinese economy. The strategy of inducting business entrepreneurs and other groups into the ranks of Party membership makes it clear that cooptation—rather than power sharing—remains the goal of the leadership for the time being.

Conclusion

In the post-Tiananmen period, the broad appeal of neo-conservatism and neo-authoritarianism among influential sections of Chinese society has prompted a bolder cooptation of those ideas by Party leaders who are favorably inclined toward market forces and prefer an aggressive governmental role to address the ideological and political disintegration that threatens to erode central authority and undermine the social fabric. However, the revival of intellectual trends like neo-Maoism and the “new left” in the 1990s also puts the Party on the ideological defensive, and the refusal of the top leadership to engage with neo-Maoist critiques has undermined its claim to be the fount of ideological authority. Political challenges to the continuation of CCP rule have arguably become the most serious concern for the incumbent leadership, against a background of Falungong activism, mounting public demonstrations and violent protests over economic issues, along with the anticipation of further economic dislocation and threats to social stability in the wake of China’s entry into the WTO. Highly publicized initiatives in the past two years to combat corruption, launch welfare reform, and alleviate unfair tax burdens are aimed at addressing the problems identified by neo-Maoists and the “new left,” and reflected in worker and peasant unrest. Although the private sector has continued to grow, accounting now for 43.7% of the country’s total number of enterprises, the economic role of the state has not been curtailed, and the Chinese government has increased its spending for officially sponsored projects that “relieve employment pressure” at the cost of rising budget deficits and a debt as high as 140% of economic output.⁴² In these circumstances, the new Party chief Hu Jintao’s highly publicized visits to the former revolutionary base in Xibaipo, Hebei Province, and to Inner Mongolia to commemorate Party history and discuss economic development with local officials and residents; his emphasis on “plain living and arduous struggle”; and his calls for leading officials to “care for the lives of the masses” mark a shift in tone that must be a source of some satisfaction for the left.⁴³

It may seem premature to conclude that the ideological ambivalence and legitimacy crisis, characterizing CCP policy in recent years will be resolved either by making a decisive move toward neo-authoritarianism or by a more selective appropriation of neo-left and neo-right stances. In the short term, the Party’s authority has been consolidated by the perceived threat of chaos and instability. However, in the long run, the more interesting and significant aspect of recent developments is the crystallization of a left-right political continuum that could conceivably serve as the basis for, and indeed contrib-

42. Xinhua, January 17, 2003.

43. Xibaipo in Hebei Province was the revolutionary seat of the CCP Central Committee from 1947–48. For coverage of Hu’s visit, see *Renmin Ribao*, December 9, 2002.

ute to, the emergence of pluralist politics and a competitive party system in China. Intellectual evolution in the post-Tiananmen period demonstrates a remarkable degree of congruence with regard to the central issues that are of concern to theorists on the left and the right. On both sides of the political divide, there is a consensus on the need for continuing change and recognition that the problems that have arisen during the course of reform require serious attention and resolution. Political discourse thus has matured and moved beyond the simplistic arguments for and against reform, yet there are significant and legitimate differences and opinions on the general direction of reform and specific issues of growth, equity, efficiency, social anomie, and questions of law and order. Both the left and the right have distinct bases of social support that they can draw upon. Neo-Maoists and the "new left" indirectly represent and articulate the interests and concerns of large numbers of the rural poor, urban workers in collective and state-owned enterprises who have lost their jobs or are in danger of doing so, and party and state functionaries whose positions and authority are threatened by privatization. The neo-authoritarian, neo-conservative constituency is not simply the new entrepreneurial and commercial classes, but also successful professionals and all those, in general, who have prospered under—or at least who have not been adversely affected by—recent policies, and who are easily persuaded that guided change is a better bet than the vagaries and uncertainty of a truly liberalized political and economic order. Thus far, neither the left nor the right has expressed an inclination to challenge CCP dominance and to test their strength through political organization and the electoral process. However, given the rapid pace at which China is changing, it should not be a flight of fancy to envisage the possibility of the CCP morphing into a neo-conservative, neo-authoritarian political entity, while its disaffected leftist elements gravitate toward a more viable and credible social democratic opposition to pave the way for multiparty politics in the not-too-distant future.