VOICES FROM THE PROTEST MOVEMENT,
CHONGQING, SICHUAN

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Chongqing is one of the great cities of China’s interior. Known to old-timers as Chungking, the city is best known outside China as the wartime capital of the Kuomintang during the Second World War. In the 1960s and 1970s, it became a major centre for the production of military hardware, under Mao’s ‘third front’ policy of concentrating militarily vital industries in the inner provinces. Today, having diversified, it manufactures some 30 per cent of the nation’s motorcycles and motor vehicles.¹

Compared to Beijing’s pro-democracy protests and the violent disturbances at Xi’an, Changsha, and Chengdu, the upheaval in Chongqing in the spring of 1989 was relatively mild. Nevertheless, the frustrations that had been building among the populace over the past half decade erupted into mass protest here as elsewhere. In the pages that follow, we shall focus on these frustrations and shall show how they differed for the various social classes. We shall see, too, how mutual misapprehensions and distrust undermined cooperation between the different types of protestors in Chongqing.

We were not there. But we have been able to interview two former democracy movement activists from Chongqing. Coming from two

¹ This statistic is from *Beijing Review*, vol.33, no.8 (19 February 1990), which cites Chongqing as a ‘pilot city for comprehensive economic restructuring’, pp.18-19.
quite different social backgrounds, they recount the movement from different perspectives. They have never met each other, but they separately escaped arrest after the Beijing massacre by fleeing to Hong Kong, where we conducted interviews with each of them during November and December 1989. Both of them have more recently been granted refugee status by Western nations and have left Hong Kong for lives abroad.

The first interviewee, Wang, age 32, was, until forced to flee, a junior faculty member at one of Chongqing’s nineteen tertiary-education institutions. Though too young to have participated in the Cultural Revolution of 1966-68, he was old enough to remember the factional violence then. In the spring of 1989, when he became advisor and then leader of the protest movement at his university, his sour memories of Red Guard violence led him to exert a moderating influence on the students. His description of the propensity of some of these students to advocate extreme Red Guard-style actions (discussed below) should alert us to undercurrents in the student movement that at times placed the peaceful nature of the protests in jeopardy.

The second interviewee, Hou, comes from a very different social and occupational milieu. Until his flight to Hong Kong, he was a private entrepreneur, a getihu. The word getihu, literally ‘individual private household’, has a peculiarly complex connotation in Chinese. The term encompasses the self-employed repairmen, the street hawkers selling breakfast pancakes or smuggled imported clothing, and the taxi drivers who own their own cabs, but it also includes factory owners and the well-placed wheelers-and-dealers who use their connections to corruptly buy cheap and sell dear. Most of the initial urban getihus of the early 1980s had arisen from the margins of the social hierarchy of socialism: people who had not had the wherewithal to obtain secure jobs in the state sector and who, when the doors were opened, began to scramble for their living as a means to get out of the ranks of the unemployed. The term getihu accordingly carries two contrary overtones. It at once conjures up a notion of initiative and resourcefulness similar to the English word ‘entrepreneur’, but also bears the distasteful connotation of money made from non-productive and not-always-aboveboard pursuits by people who are socially suspect. Intellectuals and students tend to hold getihus in disdain, blaming them for price-gouging and resenting them as social upstarts if they have done well.2

2 On public perceptions of the getihu, see Thomas B. Gold, ‘Guerrilla Interviewing Among the Getihu’, in Perry Link, Richard Madsen, and Paul Pickowicz (eds), Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People’s
Hou was, until June of 1989, a quintessentially successful getihu. He had grown up in an impoverished working-class family that could not adequately feed and clothe his six children, and his driving ambition in life has been to make good money. After graduating from high school he had become a worker at one of Chongqing’s large military-hardware factories, but he felt that all initiative there was stifled by a surfeit of bureaucrats. When Deng Xiaoping’s economic reform policies presented the opportunity for him to ‘do my own thing’, he scraped together 300 yuan in borrowed money and opened a private eatery. Working twelve hours a day, he soon made a success of the venture, and used the earnings to move on to yet more profitable pursuits. As of 1989, age 29, he owned two plastics factories employing several dozens of casual labourers from the countryside and was, in Chinese yuan, a millionaire.

We will focus on the democracy movement in Chongqing from the twin perspectives of these two individuals, supplemented by documentation from Chongqing ribao (Chongqing Daily). From these three vantage-points, we shall try to differentiate the grievances and roles played in the protest movement by the students, by the private entrepreneurs like Hou, and by workers.

Rumblings from Afar

As in Beijing and other cities, the university students in Chongqing were the first group to take collective action after the death of Hu Yaobang on 15 April. At first, though, their activities were confined behind campus walls and went entirely unreported in Chongqing ribao. It was nevertheless possible for readers to sense from the local press that a national crisis was impending. Elsewhere in the country, according to the official news reports, confrontations and disturbances had just erupted in Beijing outside Xinhua men, at Xi’an (see Joseph Esherick’s paper), and in the capital of Hunan province, Changsha. The coverage of Hu Yaobang’s funeral in Beijing was written with a candour and graphic details reminiscent of reportage during the Hundred Flowers movement of 1957. People who had grown adept at reading between the lines of newspaper articles could tell that for such unusual treatment


Chongqing ribao, 21, 23, & 24 April, 1989.

Chongqing ribao, 23 April, 1989, p.3.
of a deposed leader to appear in a city newspaper, even the paper's Party branch had to be in a rebellious mood.\textsuperscript{5}

Nonetheless, during these early weeks the local newspaper also attempted to ward off any infectious upheaval in Chongqing. Articles suggested darkly that law and order in the city might be on the brink of collapse, seriously threatening social and political stability. The number of people charged with serious criminal offences in Chongqing had jumped by 45.2 per cent that past year; the number sentenced to ten or more years of imprisonment had leaped by 62.8 per cent; and the number executed, by 50 per cent. The warning to people was clear — any protest action would open the door to further crimes and upheaval.\textsuperscript{6} All of the leadership of the government-sponsored 'mass organizations' were summoned to hear the city authorities' apocalyptic scenario of a return to the chaos of the ten years of 'Cultural Revolution' if things got out of hand.\textsuperscript{7}

**Geti\textit{h}us Mount the Stage**

In early May the students did spill over onto Chongqing streets, but ironically it was at the instigation of two small-time geti\textit{h}us — unlikely people to play a catalytic role \textit{vis à vis} the students. According to Hou, who played a part in these events, one of the two geti\textit{h}us was a 21-year-old barber, and the other a teenager who worked as an errand-girl for a private entrepreneur. Attempting to supplement their incomes, these two young geti\textit{h}us regularly travelled to Beijing carting luggage stuffed with Sichuanese cigarettes, since cigarettes in the national capital are rather more expensive than in China's interior. This petty trade had taken them to Beijing in April. They were much affected by the student demonstrations that they saw there, and on their return to Chongqing they were greatly disappointed to see Chongqing students docilely acceding to the authorities and 'only milling around' on campus. The two young geti\textit{h}us were acquaintances of Hou, and they went to him to discuss what to do. That evening, they decided that they should go to Chongqing University to deliver public speeches to rouse the students. But they realized that if

\textsuperscript{5} According to an interviewee who was working for a Chengdu-based newspaper, this kind of reportage is normally considered subversive, and could have appeared only with the consent of the newspaper's top leadership. By contrast, the newspaper she was working for, which she says is managed by a self-serving bureaucrat, barely reported on Hu's death.

\textsuperscript{6} *Chongqing ribao*, 25 April, 1989.

\textsuperscript{7} *Chongqing ribao*, 4 April, 1989.
they went as getihus, the students would rebuff and ridicule them. So they hit upon the idea of assuming the identity of students from the Beijing Teachers-training Institute, to provide them with the credibility of emissaries from the very epicentre of China. They contacted students from Chongqing University, and six getihus, Hou included, went to the university on May 4th to help stir up the students.

More than 2,000 students, eager to learn about the latest developments, gathered to listen to these two ‘Beijing students’ speak emotively about the students’ campaign in the capital and about the officials’ profiteering and corruption. The local television station videotaped the rally. Among the audience was Wang, who recalled: ‘Many people believed in them, including myself. They spoke very well, very eloquently’. They succeeded in arousing the students to take to the streets in a large procession. According to Wang, after the student marchers returned excitedly to campus, the two speakers were elected to a five-member leadership committee. That night, they slept at the students’ dormitory, and were arrested there by public security officers in the early hours of May 5th. The two young getihus, Xiong Changping and Duan Quan, two days later were sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment.

The local media immediately gave major publicity play to the case. Wang recalls that the incident totally embarrassed the students. The media ridiculed them: that well-educated university students had allowed themselves to be manipulated by two impostors. Wang observes that when the students realized that these two ‘students’ were, worst of all, getihus, ‘they felt cheated and didn’t want to rise up in demonstrations again’.

Hou, on the other hand, was deeply affected by the arrest of his two friends and by the public announcement of their prison sentences. On television he saw film clips of their ‘counter-revolutionary’ speeches and then their purported ‘confessions’, their faces bruised and battered, at the detention centre. Hou was certain, though, that he could see only furious defiance on their faces. Subsequently he was told by the mother of one of them who visited them in prison that they had actually refused to confess despite torture.

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8 Chongqing ribao, 7 May, 1989, reported that on May 4th two getihus, disguised as university students from Beijing, ‘mixed in’ with the students’ procession and a strike, made subversive speeches, yelled slogans and claimed that they had been sent to take charge of organizing the procession and a strike. It is interesting to note that despite the report’s negative bias, the facts reported in the newspaper were basically correct.
This first phase of the Chongqing protest movement had only highlighted the gulf separating the students and intellectuals from these self-employed people and small capitalists. China’s students and intellectuals tend to feel that, like the literati of past centuries, they are the rightful leaders of any morally righteous cause. One could discern in the tone of Wang’s recollections that having lowly getihu steal that mantle had served a double blow to their pride.

For their part, the getihu, Hou and his friends, harbored mixed feelings of inferiority and superiority toward the students. On the one side, they knew their place in society. They had latched onto the student movement and echoed its slogans in part because they were aware that their own station was too low to command respect. They had taken the risk of assuming leadership of the student cause in part because they had felt a need to prove that, despite their status and reputations, they were uprightly concerned with the affairs of the nation. As Hou said to us, ‘Of course as getihu we felt we ought to join in this kind of righteous movement also’.

If we can go by Hou’s account, some of the getihu have felt at the same time that they are superior to the students and to other social groups. Above all they have money. Their incomes can be twice, three or many times more than the ordinary wage-earner; and they pride themselves on having earned it through their own ingenuity. During the movement they gave liberally. Hou took the initiative to collect donations from his getihu friends and acquaintances. The day after the June 4th massacre in Beijing, moreover, he donated money to the students to buy a photocopying machine to speed up the dissemination of news in Chongqing. In Beijing, as another example, the high-profile ‘flying tiger’ motorbike corps that zoomed through the city as news couriers, many with their wireless page callers, played a crucial role in the campaign of protests. The getihu were an important source of hard cash and material support – foodstuffs, communications equipment, vehicles, etc. Their enthusiasm and generosity surprised many and provided them with a new image. As one getihu who was a member of the ‘flying tigers’ in Beijing later wrote in a Hong Kong magazine,

Whenever the getihu passed by one of the students’ donation checkpoints, they would stop to give money – from ten, several tens to a thousand or even tens of thousands of dollars, to show that we getihu were sincere from the bottom of our hearts. All the students, the students from all over the country, the students on hunger strike, greeted us ‘flying tigers’ with tears in their eyes: ‘Long live Beijing’s getihu!’ Ever since this term getihu came
into existence, it was the first time we had heard this unimaginable slogan, ‘Long live the getihu!’

They were not necessarily purposely calculating in their support for the students, but it is clear that getihu like Hou hoped to buy social respect, prestige and status with their new-earned money. They wanted to be welcomed into the fold of the ‘people’.

In Chongqing, due to the arrest and exposure of the two young getihu early in the movement, the getihu were not able to attain the same level of recognition and acceptance as the getihu in Beijing. Taking advantage of the incident, the authorities in Chongqing were able to play upon divide-and-rule tactics. Even so, Hou and his colleagues continued to be active.

The getihu as a social class had their own set of grievances, but these could easily be encompassed within the broad student-movement sloganeering about ‘democracy’, ‘oppose corruption’, ‘down with bureaucracy’, and ‘oppose tyranny’. In the heat of emotion, a common enemy provided a unifying force, even if the content of some of the slogans, given a closer look, might have caused the students and the getihu to stand on opposing sides. When the students and others complained of corruption, after all, they in part had the getihu in mind.

Yet the popular antipathy toward getihu on that score was not entirely valid. The single biggest complaint of Hou involved the insecurity of running a business, due to heavy taxation and an unlimited variety of ‘donations’, ‘special taxes’ and payoffs to officials from a wide variety of government bureaus. It is not always easy for a getihu to distinguish one from the other, from what goes to the public coffers or into private pockets, from what goes to the central government and what goes to the local government. Hou exasperatedly lists the irregular exactions that were levied in addition to the regular business taxes:

The Foundation for the Disabled [Deng Pufang, the elder son of Deng Xiaoping, is the president of this Foundation] once again came asking for a ‘donation’. You have to ‘donate’; you simply can’t refuse. The amount of ‘donation’ depends on the size of your business. If you don’t give, they’ll make you wear ‘small shoes’ [impose all kinds of inconveniences on you]. Because my business was quite big, I had to ‘donate’ up to a thousand yuan each time, several times in one year. Apart from Deng Pufang’s institution, many others came around. I was even told that I’d better provide a donation toward the construction of the Asian Games Village. We feel our lives are under pressure from all sides.

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In addition to such exactions, the regular business tax paid by getihu each year has amounted to some 20 billion yuan nationally. This tax is pre-fixed as a percentage of the size of a business, not as a percentage of the profit. It has to be paid even if the enterprise that year is running at a loss. So a getihu, says Hou, necessarily has to learn how to evade some of the tax burden, lest he be forced out of business. He finds himself obliged by circumstance to act corruptly.

To be a successful getihu you have to build up your connections. We have to get to know people from the public security organs. It’s necessary for our business. The people in the public security bureau have very low salaries, so they like to make friends with getihu who have money. We help each other out in a way. We feast them, buy them cigarettes, entertain them. In a way we’re friends – wine-and-dine friends.

Their involvement with the public security people and with corrupt officials have earned the getihu the image of having made their money through tax evasion and unethical business practices. It was, in part, this image that they were trying to shed through their participation in the pro-democracy movement. They wanted to be seen as honest, indeed righteously so. If we can go by our lengthy conversations with Hou, he and his colleagues sincerely wished that they could operate in a meritocratically based society, not one anchored corruptly in particularistic relations. They themselves, after all, were not the relatives of officials; they were on the giving rather than the receiving end of corruption. They found it grossly, frustratingly unfair that they have had to share their self-made incomes with grasping officials. In the protest movement of 1989, a part of the new monied class was in rebellion against the old power elite.

The Students Take to the Streets

Just as in Beijing and in other cities, the university students in Chongqing stood at the centre of the pro-democracy movement. From mid-May onward, they were the best organized and the most persistent, though not necessarily the most militant.

After May 4th, student activities in Chongqing had all but collapsed with the discovery that they had been misled by the two getihu. Feelings ran high again only after news of the Beijing students’ hunger strike reached the provinces. The largest student procession in Chongqing, involving up to 10,000 students, erupted on 17 May, and it

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received ‘objective’ front-page press coverage, including a photograph prominently displaying some of the provocative banner slogans.\textsuperscript{11} As the pro-democracy protests in the nation’s capital gathered steam, the pro-democracy wing of the local Chongqing press was beginning to express its sympathies. The coverage of the events of the following day, 18 May, was even bolder and in yet greater detail. In front of the city hall on the 18th, more than 2000 students had staged a sit-in, and 82 of them commenced a hunger strike. Like the students in Beijing, they were demanding a dialogue with local officials. The students were reported in the press to be receiving ‘enthusiastic support from the city’s residents’. By now, some of the local news personnel were even joining the protests themselves.

The city authorities, for their part, were going out of their way to avoid a confrontation. According to the local press, the traffic police helped to ease traffic congestions; the security police made arrangements with a restaurant to set up a drink-supply checkpoint for the procession; the police helped fainted students into ambulances; and by the end of the long hot day, the city transport office mobilized 167 public vehicles and 500 personnel to drive the more than 10,000 students back to their various campuses.\textsuperscript{12} After Li Peng and Zhao Ziyang’s visit to the students on hunger strike in the early morning of the 18th, so too did Xiao Yang, the Chongqing Party secretary. Braving a heavy downpour, he visited the fasting Chongqing students at 2 a.m. on the morning of the 19th, urging them to take care of their health and to end the hunger strike and promising that channels of dialogue would be opened.

That was the official version of what happened in Chongqing during the several days preceding the announcement of martial law in Beijing. The same events, as recounted by Wang and Hou, differ at points from the official scenario. The official version tried to portray the movement as mainly a ‘student’ movement, that it had been orderly, unmarred by skirmishes. In reality, the student movement had become a mass movement by now, and despite the generally non-violent nature of the processions and rallies, there had been several confrontations with the police. On the 18th, a crowd gathering outside the city hall smashed the city government’s signboard, an act of defiance that was of sufficient symbolic significance that both Wang and Hou separately related the incident to us in excited tones. The next day, as if a psychic dam had

\textsuperscript{11} *Chongqing ribao*, 19 May, 1989.

\textsuperscript{12} *Chongqing ribao*, 18 May, 1989.
been broken, the city hall was stormed by a crowd of students joined by others. But wary lest the authorities might use this as a pretext to let loose the army, whose presence by then was evident at key places in the city, the crowd stopped short of taking over the building. Instead they began an occupation of the verandah outside the main doors. That same night, the police grabbed a dozen workers who were hoisting the banner of a new worker-based group, dragged them inside the city hall, gave them a thorough beating, and released them the next day.

As promised, the municipal Party committee did send a delegation of city officials to hold a dialogue with the students and other protesters on 20 May. But from Wang’s account, the protesters themselves were too disorganized to conduct a proper dialogue. They had not drawn up a common platform, nor was there a list of concrete demands. Each participating school and work unit simply sent some seven or eight representatives, who had been selected hastily and almost arbitrarily. On the appointed day more than two hundred of these representatives, among them Wang, streamed into the city hall, while a crowd of 10,000, including Hou, waited outside.

The questions and points raised in the dialogue were diverse and totally uncoordinated. The students’ included requests that the city government order the telegraph office to lift the ban against Chongqing protesters sending messages of solidarity to the Beijing students; that the Chongqing city government should telegraph its own message of solidarity; that the city’s Party secretary should behave like Zhao Ziyang, not like Li Peng. The diffuse nature of the students’ demands could be seen in an issue raised by Wang on behalf of his university. The year before, the students at his university had staged a protest over a ‘green’ issue: the spewing of toxic gas onto the campus by a factory next door. In the course of the dispute, Xiao Yang, Chongqing’s Party secretary, had come in person to the university to pacify the students. In his speech, he had made a statement to the effect that there was no official profiteering in Chongqing. No one had dared challenge him then. Now Wang wanted to know whether Xiao Yang would continue to stand by his statement of a year earlier. Much time was also spent pressing for clarification of a well-known case of suspected graft relating to the building of a luxury hotel.

While honesty in government was the righteous demand of Wang and the students, the demands of the workers’ representatives concerned job security, pay, and welfare benefits. At the end of several hours of rambling ‘dialogue’, the representatives poured out again from the city hall. The city Party committee had not given any concrete promises.
Nothing had been achieved. No-one was satisfied. Protest actions were to continue.

The twists and turns of the movement, the students’ demands, and the local authorities’ tactics in handling the protesters all followed the same patterns and rhythm as the movement in Beijing. Both protesters and local authorities looked toward Beijing for direction. When Beijing students went on hunger strike, so did students in Chongqing. When Zhao Ziyang visited the students, so did Chongqing’s Party secretary. When the Beijing students called off the hunger strike, so did the Chongqing students. The slogans and ditties in Chongqing were largely reproductions of those from Beijing. The raison d’etre of the Chongqing students’ protests, and even that of the workers, was to ‘support the Beijing students’. Money and material supplies were collected for the Beijing demonstrators. A great many of Chongqing’s students were eager to go to Beijing to swell the ranks at Tiananmen Square. A thousand volunteered to go, and in the end 170 went, seen off by excited crowds at the railway station. Beijing was Mecca, and Tiananmen was its Kaaba Mosque. In a metaphorical sense, the local movement did not live for itself; it lived for the movement in Beijing.

Yet local issues, and grievances particular to specific social classes, did get raised under this overarching ‘support for Beijing students’ slogan. Wang pinpointed several complaints that agitated the university students. Having succeeded through cut-throat competition in getting into a university, students found themselves unhappily corralled into an intolerably rigid system in which they were treated as anonymous cogs in a machine, with almost total disregard for their interests or aspirations. Moreover, says Wang, the students found themselves under great economic pressure. Even those who are on government stipends had difficulty making ends meet in the face of high inflation. Food alone cost up to 70 yuan a month in the spring of 1989, about half a month’s average salary and far more than the student stipends. Wang reports that his own students were finding that they were a major financial burden on their parents.

Another major problem facing students involved employment after graduation. The new policy of having graduates seek jobs in the labour market themselves had not proven popular among most students. Many found that they were even more disadvantaged than before. At least under the prior system, in which graduates were automatically assigned to postings directly from university, they had been guaranteed a job, even if not the one they wanted. Now, with a recent tightening of the job market for university graduates, some had been encountering difficulty finding any urban employment at all, especially the women graduates.
and students who were originally from rural areas. The graduates who benefitted most from the new system were those with powerful parents or good connections. A new system that was meant to reward academic merit and skills, that had been designed to replace a system susceptible to particularistic bureaucratic relationships, had itself very quickly become mired in particularism. Students began complaining that the new system was even less fair than the old. (About half a year after the suppression of the protest movement, the Chinese government began to shift back to that former system of job allocations.)

All these frustrations that were directly relevant to the students’ livelihood did not surface in the movement, however. The students sublimated them into more lofty goals in the form of fighting against corruption and supporting the Beijing student movement. By doing so, they provided the basis for other groups in Chongqing to join them.

The students’ tactics were confined to non-violent remonstrances toward the Party leadership, which provided their movement with a popular touch of moral superiority. But according to Wang, adhering to this strategy required some effort on his own part and that of the students’ other mentors. Some students, as noted earlier, were inclined to re-enact the Red Guard movement. They wanted to vent their frustrations and anger in an actively destructive way. Thus posters appeared on campus calling for the school head to be ‘dragged out’ and paraded around for public ridicule. Some suggested occupying the broadcasting station. At another Chongqing university, a group of students who came from the home county of Deng Xiaoping organized themselves into a ‘Kwangan County Association’, and boarded a train to Kwangan. They wanted to dig up Deng’s ancestors’ tombs, a symbolic effort to excommunicate Deng Xiaoping from his home county. But when they arrived at Deng’s ancestral village it was already heavily guarded by two military detachments. The students were arrested, and so far as Wang knows, had not been released as of the autumn of 1989.

Such episodes played into the hands of the authorities, who had already in late April, as observed earlier, resorted to scare tactics in the shape of dire warnings that the protests portended a return to the chaos and violence of the Cultural Revolution. Such warnings were apt to send shudders down the spines of all the many officials and elite intellectuals who had been the targets of Red Guard violence. Over the past two decades, their conception of the Cultural Revolution has been reduced one-dimensionally to visions of fanatics humiliating and physically assaulting people like themselves. Aware that undue

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13 For instance, an editorial of Chongqing ribao, 28 April, 1989.
militancy would unite this elder generation in fearful opposition to the
demonstrators, Wang and other teachers sought to persuade students to
abide by more moderate tactics. Wang personally tore down student
posters that urged overly militant action, arguing with them that 'we
should not be distracted from our main goal of supporting the Beijing
student movement'.

The authorities' fears of phantom Red Guards were perhaps not so
unrealistic. In the past couple of years, a fair number of teenagers and
young adults had taken a revived interest in Mao and Maoism. Wang
recalls that in 1988 the dance halls in Chongqing had taken to playing
the Maoist anthem 'The East is Red'. At about the same time many
students had begun to show an interest in reading Mao's writings.
Because Deng Xiaoping and the Party have decreed that the Cultural
Revolution be repudiated, students deliberately went in search of
evidence that the Cultural Revolution had not been that bad. They
fastened on the view that Mao Zedong had deliberately instigated the
oppressed during the Cultural Revolution to rise up and struggle against
the privileged and the powerful. Perceiving themselves as belonging
among the oppressed of a corrupt bureaucratic system, they envisioned
the Red Guard movement, despite its excesses, as a righteous
movement. Over the past few years, a fad of collecting Cultural
Revolution-era Mao badges, of the type that Red Guards used to
religiously collect, has swept China. A friend of Wang, a graduate
student who had studied with Fang Lizhi, a most unlikely captive of the
Mao cult, had implored Wang to hunt in Chongqing for him for such
Mao badges. A great many of these badges reappeared in 1989 on the
T-shirts and dungarees of protesters.\footnote{See also \textit{The Hong Kong Standard}, 20 October, 1989; \textit{The South China Morning
Post}, 7 November, 1989. Also \textit{Jiushi niandai}, March 1990, pp.78-79.}

There was also an overtly strategic element to the pro-Mao boomlet.
So long as the national authorities had not repudiated Mao, the banner of
Maoism could be safely waved as a red flag to attack Deng's pink flag
of the 1980s. That was plainly the effect of the very popular slogan of
the day, quoted in Joseph Esherick's paper, to the effect that 'Mao
Zedong's son went to [die on] the battle-field... Deng Xiaoping's son
demands money from everyone'. Quotations from Mao such as, 'Those
who suppress students will come to no good end' or Mao's comment
that 'Deng Xiaoping is not tall, but his ambition is not small' could be
brandished with telling effect.
The Role of the Workers

The production workers participated in the movement mostly as individuals. They but rarely came onto the streets as contingents of workers carrying aloft banners identifying their own work units. Did they, then, play any important role in the movement? There are several answers to this question. The official press deliberately downplayed the level of their participation. When workers or other Chongqing residents from non-academic walks of life warranted mention, invariably they were described as *provocateurs* who had somehow managed to mix themselves in among peacefully demonstrating students. In addition to the two *getihus*, in the months of April, May and June Chongqing *ribao* reported a number of other arrests: three on 4 May (one peasant, two unemployed youths); nine on 20 May (all of whom had allegedly resorted to violence; of the nine, two were ex-convicts); five on 5 June for overturning vehicles (all described as peasants from suburban counties, several of them with criminal records); and two women workers on 10 June for trying to instigate protests calling for the release of the five arrested on 5 June (one of the two allegedly was already under disciplinary supervision for having stolen cloth from her own factory).\(^{15}\) The very fact that in the same period, not one student or intellectual or white-collar employee was reported to have been arrested conveyed to the people of Chongqing an important message: a student movement could be tolerated by the authorities, but not a mass movement; and any attempts by those living on the margins of society to take advantage of the demonstrations so as to foment unrest would be ruthlessly crushed. The authorities also seemed to be endeavouring to mark off as illegitimate any public expression of the grievances of the general masses of people.

For their own part, the students and intellectuals felt ambivalent about the ‘lower’ social strata joining *their* protest movement. On the one hand they lamented that the workers did not come out in full support; on the other, particularly in the early stages of the movement, they had tried to keep the workers and others at arms’ length, both metaphorically and literally. In their overriding concern to attain an image of selfless idealism unmarred by material demands, and in an effort to earn credibility in the eyes of the authorities by mounting a strictly peaceful and moderate campaign, they cordoned themselves off

\(^{15}\) *Chongqing ribao*, 6 and 23 May, 7 and 15 June.
in the marches and rallies from onlookers and even supporters.16 But as the protests mounted and they began to perceive a groundswell of popular support, and as it became increasingly apparent that financial support in the order of many thousands of dollars was essential to their cause, they began to consider the benefits of widening their base. Students began to canvas factories to solicit support.

The initial attitude of the students played into the hands of the authorities, whose nightmare was a Solidarity-style front of all social strata. When the students endeavoured to prevent others from mixing in with their processions, the police assisted them in forming a human cordon. At the same time, enormous pressures were exerted in the factories and other work units to warn workers and staff against going into the streets. Carrots and sticks were equally brandished. Bonuses were given out liberally for staying productively on the job during these weeks, and punishments were threatened for those vacating the workplace for the streets or, worse yet, going on strike. When the students finally did approach the factories to contact workers, the police and army were stationed outside to keep them out.

The workers reacted to all this with mixed feelings. They were at once tempted to join in and yet dared not, at least not in an organized or open manner. They had their own grievances as workers, but the students shunned getting entangled with these. Hou, who comes from a home in which both parents are industrial workers, discusses the workers' situation:

The workers could see that participation was being strictly restricted by the students themselves, as if the workers were not qualified to participate. And from the news on television, accusing workers of spreading rumours, etc., it seemed that workers were being specifically targeted by the authorities. They could see that the sentences imposed against working-class people were particularly heavy.

Moreover, in Beijing the issues that the students raised had nothing to do with the workers. For example, Wuer Kaixi in his speeches only talked about the students [Wuer Kaixi and other student representatives' dialogue with Li Peng was broadcast nationwide on television, including Chongqing]. If he had mentioned the workers as well, appealed to the workers, appealed to them in a sincere manner, the workers might really have come out in a major way.17

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16 This has been noted, too, in a number of the reports from other provinces. See the other articles in this journal.

17 A similar kind of feeling is evident in two open letters to students written by two Beijing workers. See Zhongguo minyun yuanziliao jingxuan [A Selected
Hou observes that, nevertheless, three particular kinds of people from working-class background did openly join the protests in substantial numbers. These were: unemployed teenagers from Chongqing, whose ranks had swelled in the past year or two as the Chinese economy cooled; plus the so-called ‘blindly floating population’, comprised largely of former peasants who had been employed in urban construction work during the boom years of the 1980s but who, under the national policy of economic retrenchment that had commenced in mid-1988, had been sacked in great numbers; plus the industrial workers who had been sent home from their factories on grounds of overstaffing. These latter workers were largely employees of the huge military hardware plants that had been established in Chongqing. Now under Deng, budget cuts to the military were forcing cutbacks in production. But rather than dismissing unneeded workers outright, the factories were providing them with some 70 per cent of their ‘basic wage’ and asking them to stay home. What particularly perturbed these workers was that the ‘basic wage’ no longer comprised the major part of a normal salary; bonuses, from which they were excluded, now constituted half or more of a worker’s take-home pay. Worse yet, the ‘basic wage’ did not rise with inflation. They had been left in limbo with less than they could live on, and their circumstances were worsening by the month. With little to lose, they angrily crowded into the fringes of the demonstrations.

The workers with full-time employment needed to be far more cautious. As Hou relates, ‘They were too worried to join in. After all, workers have families to support, and if they were to be fired for participating in the movement they’d have no way to live’. Thus those who wanted to show support tended to come out individually and anonymously after work hours. Unable to join the processions, they gathered in the square in front of the city hall.

Notwithstanding the working class’s fears, two citizen-worker groups did emerge with banners in the square: the Chongqing Citizens’ Support Corps (Chongqing Shimin Shengyuan Tuan) and the Chongqing Mountain City Workers’ Support Corps (Chongqing Shanzheng Gongren Shengyuan Tuan). They had arisen almost spontaneously, and absorbed anyone interested and brave enough to join. But in Chongqing

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18 In a separate set of interviews, two pro-democracy activists of working-class background from Beijing related to us that this form of semi-employment had also been quite prevalent among state workers in Beijing.
there was no counterpart to the Workers’ Autonomous Federation in Beijing, organized around workers’ issues.\textsuperscript{19} Despite this, after June 4th the authorities publicly charged several workers with having established such a workers’ federation and placed them under arrest, apparently as a means of intimidating other workers.

**Responses to the Beijing Massacre**

The week preceding June 4th, the movement in Chongqing was running out of steam. The authorities took advantage of the disruption in rail cargo deliveries and city traffic to embark on a propaganda offensive against the ‘turmoil’ of the increasingly dispirited demonstrations. But as June 4th approached, the atmosphere again became tense. That night Hou and his friends hovered over a radio, and the next day he helped to spread the news to the entire city by donating money for the purchase of a photocopying machine.

The city was astir once more. The students began a ‘vacate the school movement’ (*kongxiao yundong*) to express their anger, emotionally pledging in front of each other that they would not return to class until after September. Some students wrote to their school heads declaring that they were going to set out to disseminate the true story of the Beijing massacre to the people of Sichuan. Many other students left Chongqing for home. Those who remained in Chongqing joined non-students in setting up roadblocks, overturning vehicles, and blocking trains. For some two days the city was paralyzed.\textsuperscript{20} By the evening of 5 June, however, the authorities were able to persuade those blocking the rails to end their protest. The tone of the city government’s appeals, citing massive losses to the local economy, was relatively moderate. The protesters’ transgressions were more in the order of disruption to the normal functions of city life, rather than hinting at counter-revolutionary intent. Neither the press nor Wang or Hou reported any violence. In fact, Wang commended Xiao Yang as having handled the situation skillfully. It was rumoured that in a speech to high-level Chongqing officials he had scaled down the seriousness of the situation by characterizing it as

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\textsuperscript{19} A pro-democracy activist from Canton told us that although his city did have a ‘Guangzhou Workers Autonomous Federation’ its main organizers were not really workers. They held university degrees and had gone on to employment in factories and other institutions. Because they could not join the students’ or intellectuals’ groups, they formed a ‘workers group’.

'purposeless commotion' (*luandong*) rather than as 'political turmoil' (*dongluan*), the standard phrase used by the Party hardliners in Beijing.

By 6 June the flow of traffic was almost back to normal.\(^\text{21}\) To pre-empt further outbreaks of trouble, the city was placed under armed patrol.\(^\text{22}\) To supplement the authorities' message, in the suburban counties squads of 2-300 militiamen apiece were mobilized.\(^\text{23}\)

The city government did not utilize the forces at its disposal, however. The implicit warning was considered sufficient. During the two-week period following the Beijing massacre, Wang heard of only a few arrests of students, including one who had embezzled money from the student movement's coffers. The universities' administrations sent out letters ordering the students to return to sit the year-end examinations, or they would be considered to have voluntarily surrendered their places. Despite their oaths, by the end of the month 95 per cent of the students reportedly had returned to take their exams.\(^\text{24}\) In anticipation that students would obtain poor grades due to the disruptions of the previous months, the administrators of Wang's university even circulated an advisory urging teachers to be generous when grading examination scripts, with which Wang gladly complied.

Wang felt sufficiently secure regarding his own safety to remain on campus. He was required, though, to write accounts (*jiaodai*) of his activities during the movement. He tried his best not to disclose organizational details that had not yet been made public knowledge. But those in charge were not satisfied with his reports, and Wang began to feel increasingly uneasy. Through the end of July not a single university teacher had been arrested, but dozens of workers had. Seeing them on television, battered and humiliated, greatly perturbed Wang. When the summer holidays arrived, he hastened to leave Chongqing for his home town for a month, and by the time he returned to campus at the end of August the political atmosphere had taken a turn for the worse. Xiao Yang, who had handled the protesters with comparative leniency, a 'Zhao Ziyang type', as Wang puts it, was replaced as head of the 'investigatory small group' by Chongqing's deputy Party secretary, a known hardliner. The Central Committee had just issued a document designating nineteen kinds of people who should be targeted in a
campaign to thoroughly ‘weed out the roots of counter-revolution’. Wang realized that if targets were needed he could very well be placed in the list as an organizer and plotter. When a friend of his who had not been very active in the movement vanished into police custody, Wang decided it was time to go into hiding. He succeeded in fleeing to Hong Kong, and a month later his wife wrote that she was divorcing him to protect herself.

Just as the students had not been able to withstand pressure and had reversed themselves about ‘vacating the school’, Hou noticed, too, a changing attitude among some of the workers in their fifties or older. They were more credulous toward government propaganda and were willing to buy the official line that in Beijing the army had used violence only in response to violent provocation. There were some, too, who had never been in favour of the processions and rallies because their livelihood had been adversely affected by the upheaval; and after June, Hou noticed, they took the opportunity to begin openly badmouthing the protesters. But Hou relates that there were also young workers who became more militant in their feelings. They privately swore that if they were to come out onto the streets next time, they would come prepared, armed if need be. Violence was no longer beyond the realm of imagination.

At the end of July, Hou was asked by the public security bureau to appear for interrogation. They were surprisingly polite to him. He was asked what he had done, how much money he had donated, etc. He was allowed to return home, but a ‘friend’ working for the public security bureau soon privately informed him that it was best he go into hiding. Hou slipped out of Chongqing, heading for Guangdong and then Hong Kong.

Even now Hou remains bewildered as to why he had become a target in the campaign of suppression. He does not think he had been particularly active. To be sure, he had been sighted with the two young getihu, and he had helped to raise funds and had also donated some of his own money to the movement. But he had not been an organizer and had not engaged in any violent activities. Hou suspects that, because he had been a participant in the protests, he may have been singled out as a target in a campaign that was about to be launched against China’s getihu in August, ostensibly to eradicate corruption and tax evasion. The Party clearly was endeavouring to deflect the popular belief that profiteering by officials was largely to blame for corruption, by

25 For the nineteen kinds of people to be targeted, see Jiushi niandai, September 1989, pp.6-7.
publicizing the transgressions of *getihu* and refocusing resentments against them. Party leaders were calculating, obviously, that the *getihu* were already the objects of jealousy on the part of intellectuals and workers and that a campaign targeting them would elicit very little sympathy in their behalf. The various groups that had participated in the demonstrations would be turned against each other.\(^{26}\)

So, too, efforts began nationally to play upon working-class antagonisms toward intellectuals. Newspaper propaganda during the summer and autumn of 1989 sought to reinforce blue-collar resentments at the decline of the working class's social status since Mao's death. Articles also accused the 'bourgeois liberal' intellectuals, on the face of it fairly, of openly having looked down upon the working class.

In these propaganda efforts, the Party leadership has been anxious to ward off the nightmare that came close to being realized in the spring of 1989: a grand coalition of intellectuals, students and workers à la Solidarity. To a Party leadership that for decades has based its legitimacy on its claims to represent the interests of the 'proletariat', the most frightening part of that nightmare would be the mass participation of workers. This goes far in explaining the post-June efforts to turn working-class opinion against the other groups, and equally explains the harsh public examples made of those workers who were bold enough to openly join such a coalition.

In discussions with us, Wang mentioned such workers as victims of the post-June 4th suppression. Hou, for his part, mentioned both workers and the *getihu* as the main victims. It slipped the minds of both of them that yet another group bore a disproportionate share of the suppression, including most of the executions nationwide. That group comprises the unemployed and the 'blindly floating population', the former peasants who have swarmed into the cities in search of jobs. Just as the government would have wished, both Wang and Hou remain eager to dissociate themselves and their own social strata from people so far below them in the social scale. During our interviews, when listing the people arrested in the movement, neither Hou nor Wang thought to include them, although such arrests were widely reported in the press.

Given such feelings, the divide-and-rule tactics of the authorities may have better grounds for success than both the former protesters and Western scholars have been willing to admit. It does not bode well for

any future campaigns of protest from below. To be sure, conditions remain ripe for such a new explosion. Disillusionment is too widespread among the white-collar classes and the younger workers, and revulsion against the Beijing massacre too deep, to provide the Party leadership with much chance of rebuilding a mass base. But the various socio-economic strata remain at odds with each other in terms of mutual perceptions, resentments and suspicions. The next mass upheaval might well be hobbled, once again, by difficulties in crossing those divides.

Canberra
March 1990