6 The changing ruling elite and political opposition in China

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China is an anomaly among the countries included in this volume. Whereas these other ruling Asian elites do not claim to be the representative of any particular social group, the People's Republic of China (PRC), established as a one-party state in 1949, explicitly claimed to be a 'dictatorship' of the proletariat. Admittedly the situation has changed in China since Mao's death. Under Mao the state was totalitarian; under Deng, it has softened to become authoritarian and only in rhetoric clings to a class-based self-definition. There is now even talk in China about learning from the 'Four Little Dragons'. Guangdong, said Deng Xiaoping, should be the 'Fifth Dragon' in the not too distant future (Reuters, 27 February 1992). Thus, Deng is appropriating the idea of 'new authoritarianism' that was expounded by a group of intellectuals in China in 1988–9 (Rosen and Zou 1991). 'New authoritarianism' in substance is very similar to the 'soft authoritarianism' that has formed the tenet of the Singaporean ideology: soft on the economy, but authoritarian in the political sphere (Roy 1994: 231–42). Soft authoritarianism is the commonality towards which China and some of its Southeast Asian neighbours are converging.

In its rhetoric, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) today would prefer to characterise itself as a socialist democracy, impressing on its own people and the world ad nauseam that China possesses 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. The emphasis is on the 'uniqueness' of its Chineseness, a construct that is manufactured to fend off any critical efforts to measure China against anything that is called democratic. To locate this 'uniqueness', we have to begin with an examination of the nature of the Chinese state and its oppositional social forces.

Apart from identifying where opposition in China derives from, it is important to identify what is being opposed, whether it is (i) the official
International 1984). What should be underlined about this movement is that the intellectuals did not emerge within it as a leading force.

In the early 1980s, Deng and his supporters introduced a series of macro- and micro-economic reforms to lift the country out of economic stagnation. In the countryside agriculture was decollectivised and the free market allowed to flourish; this was followed by reforms in the industrial sector to give greater incentives to enterprises. Welfare socialism was to be gradually abolished so as to effect successful marketisation. China was to enter the global economy. Both foreign-funded and indigenous capitalist sectors were allowed to develop.

Economic liberalisation went hand in hand with limited political liberalisation. Individuals gained some personal and organisational political space from the reform process. Existing organisations tried to wrest more autonomy from the state, and new organisations proliferated as new social groups began to articulate their interests (Unger and Chan 1995).

In addition, political power was decentralised sectorally along bureaucratic lines and regionally to the localities. This led to the rise of bureaucratic sectoral interests, which some scholars have dubbed ‘fragmented authoritarianism’ (Lieberthal and Lampton 1992: 6–13). As the state transformed itself from totalitarian to authoritarian, various bureaucracies, the most organised and powerful institutions after the Communist Party, have manoeuvred for political turf, and more recently for economic turf. They have become active proponents of their own sectoral interests. Simultaneously, local governments are becoming more and more independent. Party edicts from Beijing are often thwarted by local authorities, especially in areas well-endowed with resources and local tax revenues.

On the surface, an emergent civil society is in the making in China – if civil society is defined as social groups struggling for political space vis-à-vis the state in a zero-sum game. However, if defined differently, as the freedom and dignity of the individual, as citizenship endowed with certain rights vis-à-vis the state and society, then whether civil society is emerging in China is debatable (Chamberlain 1994). Also debatable is whether civil society necessarily leads to a democratic political system. As argued in Rodan’s analysis of Singapore in this volume (Chapter 4), the expansion of civil society can take place without dismantling authoritarian rule. As economic and political liberalisation continues to deepen, the possibility of social groupings articulating their interests and forming themselves into a political opposition of sorts becomes a threatening reality to the ruling elite. The following strategy taken by the elite to pre-empt the development of any autonomous and organised political opposition.

POLITICAL OPPOSITION UNDER DENG

As part and parcel of the policy for limited liberalisation, the government’s strategy is to pursue a policy of co-optation and inclusion of the elite groups within society; but vis-à-vis ordinary people, the leadership pursues a policy of exclusion.

The ‘loyal opposition’ in China’s legislature and other forums

This kind of opposition involves two kinds of elites: portions of the intelligentsia and the new capitalists. Unlike under Mao, when intellectuals were denigrated as ‘the stinking ninth category’, and when anyone suspected of wanting to enjoy an income or lifestyle slightly above average was denounced as ‘bourgeois’, today the intellectual elites and successful entrepreneurs are portrayed in positive images and endowed with privileges in the formal political structure. The intellectuals are valued for their technical skills and the new capitalists for their adroitness in the primary accumulation of wealth. They are permitted by the party to articulate their respective interests by way of the so-called Democratic Parties (DPs) and the All China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACIFIC), which are prominently represented in the National People’s Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Committee (CPPCC).

The intellectual elite

Before 1949, while the CCP on the Left and the Kuomintang (KMT) on the Right competed for power, there were groups of well-known intellectuals who would not join either. They were no less idealistic, nationalistic, orpolitically committed than the Communists in their opposition to right-wing KMT politics. Ideologically they tended to be liberal social democrats who wanted to realise their socialist ideals through a democratic parliamentary system. Those who were inclined more to the Left were fellow-travellers of the Communists. Yet they were elitist and never cared to cultivate a mass base: ‘They were groups of figures enmeshed in a complex web based on personal relationships rather than modern political parties’ (Jeans 1992: 14; see also Spar 1981; Wong 1983; Van Slyke 1967). Historians characterising them as...
ultimately threw in their lot with the Communists. As one historian writes of one of the best-known of these figures:

Despite his multifarious activities on the fringes of the power structure, it was difficult for him to conceive of himself in a truly oppositional role. Indeed in their search for a new role, many of his contemporaries preferred, as did he himself, to pursue social and cultural reforms, rather than politics. Whatever their private convictions, they did not, in the final analysis, cross the boundaries of a political culture that devised for them a legitimate role as loyal opponents.

(Curran 1992: 105)

After 1949, the CCP was adept at co-opting them into playing satellite roles in the polity (Seymour 1987). The United Front Department of the CCP took charge of reorganising them into the eight Democratic Parties, each of which was assigned to recruit its members from one particular grouping: (i) two of the DPs were reserved for high-level academics in the social and natural sciences; (ii) two professional associations were reserved for doctors, educators, and journalists; (iii) one 'party' was to incorporate business people; and lastly, (iv) three were specifically for people with KMT, Taiwanese, and overseas Chinese connections. The CCP imposed strict limitations on the breadth and numbers of their membership. For example, they were not allowed to recruit from small towns or villages, from among peasants, workers, or ethnic minorities. This served to reinforce and perpetuate their elitist nature. At the same time, the Party placed the heads of the DPs into high-level deputy ministerial positions, providing them with high social status and material benefits. Within a few years the DPs acquired the reputation of being 'flower vases' of the CCP.

But these once politically active idealisers turned out to be unwilling to serve merely as puppets. When the Hundred Flowers Movement in 1956–7 presented an opportunity they spoke out with surprising alacrity, criticising the party for being dictatorial, debunking the collectivevisation and nationalisation programmes, and castigating emerging corruption. They held discussion forums, launched recruitment drives, and actively mobilised their local branches. Some demanded political independence and political equality with the CCP. The CCP's crackdown on the DPs was quick in coming – and thorough. Thousands of ordinary DP members were branded as anti-socialist and anti-party Rightists and sent off to the countryside or into labour camps. The DP them imprisonment, unlike many of their followers. The DPs were effectively silenced for the next twenty years (Hinton 1958: 39–46).

When Deng Xiaoping came to power, among the liberalisation policies he launched were moves to revive the DPs under the slogan of 'institutional multiparty co-operation under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party' (Chu and Huang 1987: 259). With the permission of the CCP in the 1980s, until the 1989 protest movement, all of the DPs rapidly recruited new members, doubling or even trebling in size (Table 6.1).

The largest and most prestigious of them, the Democratic League composed of high-level intellectuals and academics, expanded from 16,000 to 99,000 between 1983 and 1989. The DPs first urgently rejuvenated their ageing membership, not having recruited for more than twenty years. They engaged in proto-party activities, reaching a climax in 1988 and early 1989 when ferment in society reached new heights. DP journals advocated numerous reforms, which if put into practice would have meant the emergence of independent political parties. Some suggested rewriting the constitution to legalise the status of the DPs as political parties (see Solidarity News (Tuanjie Bao), 31 January 1988; CPPCC News (Zhengjie Bao), 3 March 1989). Others wanted equal status with the CCP, much as Japan's opposition parties enjoyed equal status with the Liberal Democratic Party even though the latter had monopolised the government for many terms (see Solidarity News, 31 January 1989). In Shanghai the municipal government began using the phrase 'non-Communist Party personage' rather than 'non-party personage' in polite recognition that there were more political parties than one, the CCP. There were calls for a more independent recruitment policy and for expansion of membership beyond the DP-restricted recruitment pool (see CPPCC News, 25 November 1988). Some advocated development of political party consciousness (see CPPCC News, 25 November 1988). Some even went further than their forefathers in the 1950s – calling for the establishment of horizontal linkages between the eight DPs. In other words, some DP members were willing to put aside their sectarian history to band into a kind of coalition vis-a-vis the CCP. One article specifically proposed that the DPs should collectively represent the interests of the intellectuals since the CCP claimed to represent peasants and workers (see CPPCC News, 5 July 1988).

Top CCP leaders, such as Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang of the reformist faction, were known to be supportive of the DPs. Just before the outbreak of the 1989 protest movement, Zhao was in the process of
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Democratic League</th>
<th>National Revolutionary Committee</th>
<th>Liberal Construction</th>
<th>Association for Protecting Democracy</th>
<th>Peasant* and Workers' Democratic Party</th>
<th>Democratic Party of China</th>
<th>Third Study Society</th>
<th>Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party</th>
<th>Federation of Industry and Commerce</th>
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<td>1983</td>
<td>18,000</td>
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<td>18,000</td>
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<td>1985</td>
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<td>1986</td>
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<td>1987</td>
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Judiciary, and legislature (Seymour 1992: 289–91). The head of the CCP’s United Front Department, which is the watchdog over the DPs, was himself a comparative liberal and encouraged democratisation within the DPs, though within limits. Encouraged by this liberal political atmosphere, in 1988 and early 1989 the Democratic League convened two forums to discuss sensitive issues. These decided to reject the leader the CCP had hand-picked for them, the famous Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong, and to change the League’s benign motto of ‘Do good work, do concrete work’, to ‘Democracy and science’. More personally challenging to CCP leaders was the suggestion that high-level officials’ children should make public their personal bank accounts. The Zhigong Party, with its wealthy overseas Chinese connections, made noises about becoming financially independent of CCP funding.

At the height of the 1989 popular protest movement some DP members came out into the streets both as individuals and as party members. From February to June various members in the top hierarchy of the DPs signed petitions calling for the release of political prisoners, urging the CCP and the government to open a dialogue with the protesting students and calling for the ideals of democracy and patriotism to be upheld. Of the fifty-seven National People’s Congress (NPC) Standing Committee members who signed an open letter urging the convening of an emergency meeting to dismiss Li Peng, at least nine can be identified as coming from the top echelons of the DPs. In an unprecedented development, the Beijing Autonomous Workers’ Federation that emerged on Tiananmen Square went to the DPs to seek help to have their organisation legalised (Seymour 1992: 303). In short, other social groups were beginning to see the DPs as both influential and independent of the CCP.

But the DPs could not hold onto their claims to independence after the 4 June crackdown. They entirely capitulated and reverted to mouthing support for the CCP. Yet their about-turn can also be interpreted as a sign of political maturity. As the Chinese saying goes, adept politicians retreat at the right time and advance when the time is ripe. Pragmatic DP leaders preferred to lie low at a time of suppression.

The 1989 upheaval coincided with the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In recognition of this, the CCP decided that to ward off further major disturbances in China, it was best to co-opt the intellectuals and professionals and to open up wider the channels for the frustrated intellectual elite to participate in the policy.
been the more assertive politically. It is also by far the largest, with a membership of about 150,000 in 1994. The pool from which it can recruit members is wider. According to a high-level member in the know, the CCP is particularly sensitive to the League’s activities.11

The China National Construction Association is made up of economists, business people, and government specialists involved in overseeing the economy. As reforming the economy has become the priority of the government, the prestige and influence of some of its leading members have increased. It is likely that over the next several years, they will move even closer to the centre of power, but whether they would want to transform the Association into a political party is doubtful. If they did, their elitist posture would deprive them of a mass base, and without the driving force of any sense of mission, given that their key members do not possess an articulated ideology, all they can do is to append themselves to the CCP’s ideology. To complicate matters, this is currently in a state of flux.

The capitalists

The other elite which the CCP is willing to incorporate into its fold comprises the newborn capitalists. Generally they are referred to in China as ‘entrepreneurs’, in that the term ‘capitalist’ cannot be applied in a state which espouses ‘socialism’. By social origin they are of three types: the new capitalists who rose from ground zero; the ‘bureaucratic capitalists’ or ‘nomenklatura capitalists’ who originated from the political elite and who sometimes still have one foot in the political realm; and the ‘red capitalists’ from the old moneyed families.

The new capitalists tend to have started off small as ‘self-employed labourers’ (gezi laodongzhe), and with wealth have attained the official social status of ‘entrepreneurs’. In the first half of the 1980s they were defensive about their success and felt that they were being discriminated against by government policies and corrupt local bureaucrats (Young 1991). With the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, the precarious nature of their status became evident when the government carried out a campaign against them, ostensibly to wipe out corruption (Chan and Unger 1991: 106–26). But more recently, as their numbers and assets have increased geometrically, reaching 184,000 ‘entrepreneurs’ by mid-1993, they have been granted a more positive official image (see People’s Run Economy (Minying jingji), 24 April 1994).

The nomenklatura capitalists are officials and their close kin who moved from the civil service into business.

The DP leaders who played a key role in the 1989 movement are currently either interned (Wang et al. 1993) or in exile (e.g. Hu Jia, see China: the changing ruling elite 171).

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deals, transforming power and state resources into private wealth. Understandably, their assets are difficult to estimate.

The 'red capitalists', too, had a better headstart than the self-employed labourers. The original 'red capitalists' came from prominent pre-revolution families of great wealth. They were used by the government under Mao in its contacts with overseas Chinese and sometimes were given official positions, hence 'red capitalists'. Under Deng they have been able to resume their business networks and in the 1990s they are hailed for helping in the effort to lift China out of economic stagnation.

The two most prominent of the 'red capitalists', Rong Yiren and Wang Guanying, are prime examples. Rong was from an extremely wealthy Shanghai family and had been appointed deputy minister of the textile industry in the 1950s. Wang's Tianjin pedigree combines wealth and power. His brother-in-law was none other than Liu Shaogqi, one of the handful of top CCP leaders (who later became Mao's arch-victim). Both Rong and Wang are eulogised today. Reportedly, Deng Xiaoping personally invited them to re-enter business and to make big money for the country (Beijing Daily (Beijing Ribao), 16 May 1993; Beijing Youth News (Beijing Qingnian Bao), 3 January 1993). In the 1980s, Rong headed the China International Trust and Investment Corp (CITIC), the biggest of China's 'state' investment companies, with an outpost in Hong Kong. More recently, he was appointed Vice President of China. Wang, for his part, was sent to Hong Kong in 1983 to found the Guangda Company, which has emerged as a powerful state development corporation. As one indication of the ambiguity in the distinction between state and private capital, the Guangda Company, ostensibly a state enterprise, includes in its title one of the Chinese characters of Wang's name.

To incorporate the interests of these three kinds of capitalists into the political structure, the All China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC, Gongsangliian) was revived at the beginning of the economic reforms, with Rong as chairman. Reportedly, Rong and other former capitalists were reimbursed the interest that had been owed to them by the government for the nationalisation of their properties in the 1950s, and with part of that large sum they contributed to the financial base of the revived ACFIC. It was granted a status equivalent to a sort of ninth Democratic Party. Like the DPs, the ACFIC has been placed under the supervision of the CCP's United Front Department, and state bureaucrats were sent to establish the ACFIC headquarters and branches in the provinces. The ACFIC was to be another 'bridge' between the state and function of the ACFIC was to implement 'political education' among its members (Liu and Shen 1992: 1), but within a few years it was instead largely pursuing its own members' interests.

In May 1993, the ACFIC established a national research organisation whose ostensible mission is to conduct research about private entrepreneurs. The organisation's real purpose is to create favourable publicity on behalf of the new capitalists. The array of celebrities invited for the opening ceremony in the distant city of Taiyuan, the provincial capital of Shanxi province in central China, was a reflection of the kind of influence and support the ACFIC was seeking. Participants included important people from the judiciary, the NPC, CPPCC, and CCP, and various sectors of the government. Also included were provincial-level officials, officials from the trade and industrial sectors, well-known academics and prominent private entrepreneurs who had recently risen into the NPC and CPPCC. The 140 participants (I was the only foreigner among them) rubbed shoulders and exchanged information. They had assembled for one common purpose — to raise the status of the ACFIC and 'private entrepreneurs'. Private entrepreneurs publicly poured out their grievances about the period of post-1989 suppression. Local officials from poor provinces pleaded for help in getting more private enterprises on their feet in order to enliven their failing economies. The atmosphere reverberated with a strong sense of historical mission and solidarity. The entire national conference, costing a great deal of money, was funded by three local 'private entrepreneurs'.

As can be seen, the ACFIC, though enjoying the political status of a Democratic Party, is quite different from the DPs. It has a broad class-based constituency and a burgeoning ideology, both of which the DPs lack. Moreover, the ACFIC had 620,000 members as of the end of 1992, half of whom were private entrepreneurs before 1949. The number of ACFIC members is twice that of all the eight DPs combined. The ACFIC can also afford to be financially independent, drawing on its investments and the wealth of its membership. The DPs' and the ACFIC's increased participation in politics as a 'loyal opposition' will only be meaningful if the NPC and CPPCC assume an increasingly independent stance as China's legislature and main consultative body. Their power has expanded in the past one and a half decades, though this is generally not recognised in the western press or among western China scholars. The bodies are routinely described as 'rubber stamps', as tools of the CCP, an image reinforced by photographs and television
raising their hands in unison when required to show support for CCP agendas.

Congresses indeed do not provide floors for open, heated debates or dissenting views. But the NPC and CPPCC are not as ineffectual as they seem. The CCP has granted much of China's law-making to the NPC (Tanner 1994), which is nursing its organisational strength and capacity. As O'Brien (1994: 101) would have it, the NPC is the site of 'interorganisational wrangling, bureaucratic articulation, and opportunistic organisational development'. Contrary to being a mere rubber stamp, the NPC has been exerting a moderating influence on the CCP's reform policies (O'Brien 1990). True, its members are constrained by a political culture which puts a premium on a formal show of consensus, combined with a pragmatic recognition that the CCP is in command. Thus a façade of unity at public meetings is maintained for general consumption. But once the CCP had begun instituting economic and political reforms from above, divided interests and heated debates surfaced behind closed doors, despite the continued display of unity. This is well demonstrated by my own research on the passage of Chinese labour legislation. The Labour Law, passed in July 1994, had gone through marathon debates and lobbying, entailing some three dozen drafts over the previous fifteen years. This reflected contrary interests that required political negotiations and compromises within the elite circle (Chan 1995). With the voting on Bills in the NPC no longer by public show of hands but by pushing individual buttons, non-approval has become much easier. Though Bills are still often passed with few dissenting votes or abstentions, this can be interpreted as a willingness by those with differing views to accept amended drafts and to compromise after genuine negotiations.

The public has also taken the NPC more seriously since the late 1980s. When the NPC convenes in Beijing, it is no longer unusual to see petitioners and lobbyists trying to contact delegates. According to an NPC delegate from Hong Kong whom I interviewed, several Guangdong peasants travelled all the way to Beijing to seek his support while the NPC was in session, protesting that their land had been taken away for urban redevelopment with little compensation. The NPC and CPPCC sessions, which always take place simultaneously in Beijing, have also attracted a lot of PRC and foreign press publicity. As a consequence, political dissidents, including well-known figures like Han Dongfang, Wei Jingsheng, and Wang Dan, have all used these occasions to gain worldwide publicity for their demands for democracy.

Hong Kong and western media, they do not reach the Chinese public, even within Beijing.)

Representation in the NPC and the CPPCC is determined by quotas: so many seats are assigned to each DP and each 'sector' of society. In this schema the peasants and workers are underrepresented by a large margin. This compares to the disproportionate representation for the high-level intellectuals in the DPs. I have calculated that, of the 2,081 delegates to the seventh CPPCC in 1988, at least 928 members can definitely be identified as representing the intellectuals, while a mere eighty-five sat as representatives for the 'agricultural and forestry sector', and sixty-four for the 'trade unions'. At the seventh NPC that same year, out of 2,970 delegates, the sectoral representation for workers and peasants comprised 23 per cent of the assemblage, intellectuals 23 per cent, officials 25 per cent, and the army 9 per cent. Worker and trade union representation in the NPC has been in gradual decline, from 27 per cent in 1978 to 11 per cent in 1993 (Peng 1994: 249–50). At the 1988 NPC, each rural delegate represented eight times as many 'electors' as delegates from urban areas. Worse still, these rural delegates are likely to derive from the rural moneyminded elite, whose interests do not normally coincide with those of ordinary peasants (Chan 1989: 81–2). Workers and peasants are being marginalised and excluded from the formal polity at a time when the legislative and consultative bodies are becoming increasingly important.

Opposition from outside the power structure

To the CCP, to the intellectual elite, and to the capitalists who share in the power structure, a perceived threat to social and political stability comes from three sources: the peasantry, the workers, and the so-called 'dissidents'. The former two pose a worry because a good many of them have been losers under the economic reforms.

Peasants and workers

For the first few years of the reforms the peasants were among the gainers. With a return to family farming in the early 1980s, agricultural productivity rapidly increased and so did peasants' income. But these levied off by 1985, in the wake of soaring prices for agricultural inputs and depressed government procurement prices for agricultural produce. In particular, the 120 million peasants who eke out a subsistence living in the poorest parts of China's hinterland, in regions where industrial
seaboard-biased government plans and local corruption. With the state budget running at a deficit and unable to support these regions, local governments have turned to extracting more and more from the peasants by imposing a myriad ad hoc taxes and levies on them (Chan 1989: 73–4). Worse still, year after year local governments have been issuing IOUs (known as white slips) for procured products, leaving the farmers desperate for cash. Annual orders from the central government to cease this practice have been to no avail. In 1992 and 1993, the problem came to a head. Throughout the inland provinces, peasant protests erupted. The most serious occurred in Renshou County in Sichuan Province, where 10,000 peasants occupied government offices and held out for days (Lam 1994: 2.23–2.24).

The workers’ conditions are better than the peasants’ because of decades of urban-biased policies. But under the enterprise reforms, marketisation, the creation of a labour market etc., the superior status, job security, and fringe benefits of the 110 million employees of state-run enterprises are progressively crumbling. In 1989, individually and in groups such workers had come out on demonstrations. Independent trade unions sprang up in many of the cities in protest against lack of representation by the official trade union, worsening conditions of employment, and runaway inflation (Walder and Gong 1993). These protests were soon crushed with brutality in the summer of 1989, while the official press sang the praises of the ‘proletariat’ in an effort to salvage the party’s injured legitimacy.

For a couple of years in the early 1990s, the government gingerly pushed state-owned plants to raise productivity by permitting them to lay off workers, but only to an extent that would not disrupt social stability. As of 1992, after Deng Xiaoping’s famous speeches in south China eulogising the role of the private economy, China’s political and economic climate underwent a dramatic change. Since then, as the non-state sector has expanded, the state sector has contracted. As the central government treasury continues to haemorrhage, state enterprises increasingly are allowed to go bankrupt. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into the reasons behind the economic troubles of the state enterprises, or to evaluate the merits and demerits of the bankruptcy policies. What concerns us are the social repercussions. Whereas for a number of years one-third of state factories were in the red, starting in 1994 the figure jumped to 50 per cent (Agence France Presse, 8 July 1994). In 1993, two million blue-collar workers lost their jobs in Heilongjiang, a province in northeast China beset by antiquated heavy-industrial state enterprises (China Daily, 31 May 1993). In Wuhan, a

than in Japan, by 1993 50,000 of the 170,000 steel workers had been laid off, with another 30,000 targeted over the next two years. In Shanghai 120,000 workers in the state industrial sector have been laid off at half pay. Of the 500,000 textile workers in Shanghai, 450,000 remain, but the target is to shrink this number to 250,000. Most affected are women above 35 years of age (China Labour Bulletin (Hong Kong), 3, May 1994: 8–9). Many other employees in state factories throughout China have not been paid for months because neither the state nor the local government has money available to meet the payroll.

A rash of wildcat protests erupted during 1994. Earlier worker resistance in the 1980s and the first years of the 1990s had not usually been manifested in head-on confrontations such as strikes but rather in a resort to such ‘weapons of the weak’ as absenteeism, go-slows, passivity, lax work ethics, and occasional sabotage.16 Over time, however, the intensity of industrial action has been ratcheted up. In the first months of 1994, as the government renewed its efforts to lay off workers, or in some cases state enterprises simply had no money to pay wages, 200,000 workers in the industrial northeast and in China’s interior went on strike or staged other militant actions. In the heavy-industrial city of Fushan, the local official union branches broke loose from central control and led the strikes (China Labour Bulletin, 3, May 1994: 8–9).

While blue-collar state workers are threatened with plant closures and unemployment, some ten million workers in the foreign-funded export-oriented industrial sector suffer another sort of problem—labouring in Dickensian conditions reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution. Some workers are forced to labour from ten to twelve hours or even longer each day, with no days off for weeks on end, at low pay, in poor and unsafe working conditions, with high accident rates, performing deskilled tasks set at break-neck speed for four hours at a time with only brief scheduled toilet breaks of one to two minutes. At two firms I was told of workers being made to rotate the bed space of their back-to-back bunks with workers on other shifts.

According to a survey carried out by Guangdong Province’s General Trade Union in 1994, 46 per cent of the workers surveyed normally work more than eight hours a day; 35 per cent reported that overtime is mandatory; 34 per cent said that there is no extra pay for overtime work; 32 per cent are paid a below-minimum wage. The logic of this management method is to squeeze as much surplus labour as possible out of these human machines, and to discard them once they are spent, for there is no job security or unemployment benefits.
export zones, wildcat strikes on the shopfloor are increasingly common in the foreign-funded enterprises. But these are less organised than the actions taken by the state workers. They usually flare up as single, spontaneous incidents, without support from workers in nearby factories. The workers, being rural migrants, are in a much more vulnerable position. Their hope often is that the incidents will press the local union offices or government labour bureaux to respond as mediators.

Political dissidents

Throughout the Maoist period, much as in Stalinist Russia, it required extraordinary courage – to the point of foolhardiness – to exhibit any truly dissident sentiments. Horrific prison conditions or execution awaited any such effort – and there were very few takers. The political accession of Deng Xiaoping began to provide far greater room for dissent, even though considerable risks were still entailed. If well enough known, however, a dissenter could expect a measure of protection from arrest. As described by a famous former East European dissident, Vaclav Havel, such dissidents are

a protected species who are permitted to do things others are not and whom the government may even be cultivating as a proof of its generosity; or it lends support to the illusion that since there is no more than a handful of malcontents to whom not very much is really being done; all the rest are therefore content, for were they not so, they would be dissidents too.

(Vaclav Havel 1985: 59)

This category of dissident embodies the following characteristics: they have already gained a high professional status or reputation within their own countries; they openly express views either in writing or in actions that are not approved by their governments; these views are interpreted by the foreign press as ‘democratic’, in contradistinction to their governments’ despotic and autocratic rule; though few in number, they are viewed from abroad as voices for the ordinary people who are either less brave or unable to put their thoughts down on paper; and as personalities they are deemed to be principled, idealistic, humanistic, courageous, and selfless. They are apt to be used by western democratic governments and their own governments as chess pieces in intricate diplomatic games; and this in turn is contingent on the fact that their own governments are eager to court the ‘democratic’ international community, and so find themselves vulnerable on charges of human-

In China, such political dissidents emerged only when Deng Xiaoping began to open China to the outside world and to enter into dialogue with western powers. Under Mao, when China refused or was deprived of a chance to have any dealings with the western world, the same dissident activities, sometimes even staged by the same individuals who in recent years have been elevated to the status of ‘dissidents’, had no protection. Thus martyrs like Yu Luoke and Zhang Zhixin could be tortured and executed by the authorities in the early 1970s for speaking up against the oppressiveness of the regime, yet did not gain dissident status on the world scene. Nor were peasants’ and workers’ protest actions protected as dissident activities, any more than they are now. Maoist atrocities, which committed several million to death, imprisonment, or exile to China’s desert regions, did not stir up as much publicity or persistent outcry from western democratic governments as when Deng today confines well-known dissidents to house arrest.

To ward off international criticism, the Deng government is employing new tactics: lavishing VIP treatment on some dissidents; or shortening their terms of incarceration; or exiling them abroad rather than to Chinese gulags, as had been the practice under Mao. Dissidents are dealt with like strategic cards, doled out one at a time when pressure from the west intensifies. Thus, in the few weeks preceding the announcement of the winner of the bid to host the Year 2000 Olympic Games, for which the PRC was a frontrunner, the Chinese government released one famous dissident every week. A similar game was played out in 1994 just before the United States Congress was to vote on whether China should continue to be granted most-favoured-nation status. In contrast, ordinary Chinese who have been caught for similar political violations, as was the case during the June 1989 crackdown, were subjected to brutal mistreatment and long jail sentences (ICFTU Briefing 1994; Han 1994).

But is the western media-created image of the Chinese dissidents as champions of democracy close to reality? Do the Chinese dissidents represent voices of the people? Are they the equivalent of the Polish intellectual dissidents at the height of the Solidarity movement who worked closely with workers and peasants as a civil society in opposition (Geremek 1992: 4)? The answer is that the demonstrators on Tiananmen Square in 1989 cordoned themselves off from ordinary people, so that their elite student/intellectual movement would not be contaminated (Walder and Gong 1993; Chan 1993; Perry 1992). This elitist attitude and their aspiration to ‘remonstrate’ as upright intellectuals with the powers that be (Esherick and Wasserstrom 1992:
enter the official channels by joining the DPs or seeking selection as delegates to the NPC and CPPCC. 18

Among those who lost out at Tiananmen were officials who had to flee the country because CCP General Secretary Zhao Ziyang’s faction had lost a power struggle within the party elite. 19 Others were imprisoned because their past protest actions were deemed too militant, despite the fact that they had recently tried to mend their ways. 20 Some had earlier tried to serve as advisers to the elite reformist political faction, which they believed could best further their interests or ideals. Yet others who had once been part of the power elite but had entered the private economic sphere and had been demanding too much liberty from the party also found themselves targets of suppression. 21

Subsequently, many of these intellectuals, as well as the younger, asset-student dissidents, came to reside abroad, having fled, accepted self-exile, or been exiled by the PRC government. Their behaviour since they left China has been disappointing to their supporters: internal factional squabbling, self-serving power struggles, problematic lifestyles, and undemocratic organisational behaviour have all aroused widespread disillusionment among the overseas Chinese community. Within China, their dissident activities today have minimal influence.

Very little in their writings expresses a concern for those peasants and workers who are clearly the main losers in the reform process, except to the extent that these exiles, like the political and economic elite back home, are worried about social instability. Just as there is today little substantive difference between the ideological beliefs of the CCP and the DPs, so the ideological beliefs of these dissidents have begun to converge with the changing ideology of the CCP. One has yet to find a faction among them that openly advocates universal suffrage, though much homage has been paid to the abstract idea of democracy. So long as the Chinese economy continues to boom and political liberalisation continues, with time these dissident exiles become increasingly irrelevant to political developments in China.

Five years after the 1989 upheaval, as noted above, disturbances again broke out among peasants and workers, accompanied by another spate of dissident activities. Somewhat different from the previous dissidents, these include some intellectuals who publicly call for protection of workers’ rights (Wall Street Journal, 4 April 1994). A group calling itself the League for the Protection of Working People of the People’s Republic of China, headed by a lawyer, a law student, and a veteran Democracy Wall Movement activist, sent its charter and a five-point proposal to the president of the NPC while it was in session.

Rights Watch/Asia 1994). The organisers were harassed and arrested. It seems finally that an equivalent of Poland’s KOR (Committee to Aid the Workers), which was comprised of Polish intellectuals and played a critical role in the birth of Solidarity, is in the making in China – except for this hitch in the League’s charter, which places demands on membership:

All citizens of the People’s Republic of China who accept the charter of this League, who are dedicated to the development of the cause of protecting the rights of the working people of the People’s Republic of China, who have a certain level of theoretical grounding and a reasonable ability to engage in socialist practice, may become members of the League if they apply personally and are approved by the managing directors of the League’s board.

(Human Rights Watch/Asia 1994: 8; emphasis added)

In short, Chinese intellectuals still condescendingly resist making common cause with the masses even when they are willing to go to jail in defence of their rights.

THE ELITES’ IDEOLOGICAL CONVERGENCE AND FUTURE SCENARIOS

Janina Frentzel-Zagorska (1992), in her comparison of Hungary’s and Poland’s transitions from authoritarian socialism to democracy, has posed two distinct models. The first is the Polish model in which disparate social groups blurred their distinctive interests and organised themselves under the banner of Solidarity to confront a dominant power structure – civil society versus the authoritarian state. The culture of opposition had taken such broad roots in society that finally the state capitulated and agreed to share power. The Hungarian model, in contradistinction, was characterised by three features: it was economy-centred, non-confrontational, and elite-centred (Frentzel-Zagorska 1992: 44). Here the Communist Party reformed the system and transformed itself to pre-empt the emergence of a coalesced opposition. To accomplish this, it formed a ‘grand coalition’ of the upper and middle-level party oligarchy and bureaucracy, managers of large and medium-sized companies, and the new stratum of entrepreneurs. The Hungarian reformist Communist camp, while still in power, liberalised the polity. Consequently, Hungary underwent a more controlled and evolutionary transformation (Frentzel-Zagorska 1992: 60–1).

Will China’s transformation approximate to either of these models?
Solidarity-type society-wide coalition in China is unlikely, since an intellectual camp with the wherewithal to help trigger broad organised opposition is simply absent. As noted, the DPs confine themselves to representing the interests of the high-level intellectuals. They only call for democracy within the broader elite. Mass democracy is not what they are seeking. The ACIFIC, for its part, enjoys support from its rank and file, but these are no ordinary citizens; they are members of the new rich who are gaining social prestige and seeking a legitimate political role. Will the DPs and the ACIFIC develop into real opposition parties, as in western democratic systems? The DPs with their narrow bases probably will not, though the ACIFIC on the surface appears to have that potential.

But the latter scenario is based on a misplaced perception that the ACIFIC’s capitalist ideology is opposed to the CCP’s so-called ‘socialism’. The question remains whether the CCP’s professed ideology still has any socialist content. For the time being, there is still economic socialism. But this is being eroded fast with the rapid expansion of the non-state sector. That state ownership has not been dismantled in one fell swoop is less a result of the ruling elite’s ‘socialist’ ideals than its fears of even more rapid worker dismissals and social instability. The system today is best characterised as ‘socialism with capitalist characteristics’. The offspring of high-level CCP officials are more eager to join the ACIFIC than the CCP.22 ‘Socialism’ is quietly moving towards convergence with capitalism, especially nomenklatura capitalism, as manifested in the semi-state/semi-private corporations of Rong Yiren and Wang Guangying. Among the DPs, the ACIFIC and the CCP, there seems to be little fundamental disagreement over ideology. The contention is over how to divide up power and wealth in a way that is perceived to be fair by those eligible to participate. The DPs will be junior partners, serving as handmaids to the new joint elite. Along with the ACIFIC they have become a sort of ‘loyal opposition’.23 Their common interests lie in defending their privileged positions and maintaining ‘stability’ during this major overhaul in the nation’s economic restructuring by ensuring that the peasantry and the workers remain acquiescent.

Thus, akin to the Hungarian model,24 a ‘grand coalition’ of elites has emerged, particularly a nascent alliance between the party and the new rich. The ‘civil society’ that is being erected is only for the elite, to the exclusion of a large sector of the population.

The state-sector workers and once-powerful state-sector industrial bureaucracies are falling by the wayside. Joining them are workers in the non-state sector who are subjected to poor working conditions. Today, these sectors are becoming restive. So are a sizeable portion of the peasants, the rural unemployed and underemployed, who, worse off than the workers, have no representation in the polity at all. Real opposition to the elite, here understood as violent disturbances, might emerge from among these millions of losers. This threat is well understood by the ‘grand coalition’ of elites and by the elite ‘dissidents’, and it unites them in a common fear of mass disorder. They have no solutions at hand except to keep the restive sectors at arm’s length, in the hope that continued economic growth will stave off mass disturbances from below.

NOTES

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1 A discussion on a small minority of those who went further than demonstrating will follow later in this chapter.
2 Constrained by space, this is a very truncated interpretation of the Cultural Revolution and the Red Guard Movement. For detailed analyses of the nature of the movement see Anita Chan (1982, 1985, 1992).
3 These are the China Democratic League (Minmeng) and the September Third Study Society (Jusan xueshe).
4 They are the Chinese Peasants’ and Workers’ Democratic Parties (Zhongguo nonggong minzu dang) and the China Association for Promoting Democracy (Zhongguo minzu cujin hu). As can be seen, the names given to some of these DPs had very little to do with the specific characteristics of their memberships.
5 This is the China National Construction Association (Zhongguo minzu jianggu hu).
6 They are respectively the Revolutionary Guomindang (Guomindang Geming Weiyluanhui), the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League (Taiwan Minzu Zizhi Tongmeng) and the Party for Public Interest (Zhigong Dang). They all have strong overseas Chinese ties.
8 The information on these two forums was obtained in June 1993 through interviews in Beijing with a Democratic League member who was an invited participant.
9 FBIS-CHI-89-100 (25 May 1989). Thanks are due to Mr Zhu Xiaoyang for laboriously checking off the names of the signatories of five petitions and this once letter (from February to May) to identify those who were members
of the DPs. Because the party affiliation of some of the signatories cannot be identified, the numbers of DP members are all underestimates.

My interview in May 1993 with the member of the China National Construction Association who introduced this bill to the legislature impressed on me the importance given to this victory by some of the DP leaders. Their optimism is built on the fact that henceforth they could legally participate in assemblies with the CCP on an equal footing.

This information was derived from interviews with the offspring of one of the best-known founding fathers of the League.

CITIC Pacific, described as one of the major players on the Hong Kong investment scene, is a branch of CITIC and is now headed by Kong's son, Larry Yong. The market capitalisation of CITIC Pacific has soared from HK$1 billion in 1991 to HK$30 billion in 1993 (International Herald Tribune 23 April 1993). Based on a monograph compiled by the CPPCC Eighth Congress's first plenum, issued in March 1993.

Interview carried out in 1993. Hong Kong delegates to the NPC are appointed by the Chinese government and are considered as part of the delegation from Guangdong Province.

Five years after the 1989 crackdown, the spring of 1994 witnessed a resurgence of dissent activities. Signed petitions were presented to the NPC, and dissenters sought out foreign correspondents to help publicise their protest activities. See Washington Post, 20 March 1994; Wall Street Journal, 4 April 1994.


It should be noted that the solidarity born out of opposition to the Polish ruling Communist elite in the 1980s, is today fragmented and quarrelsome. Polish society is in the process of restructuring itself politically.

Of course, there are exceptions to this generalisation. Fang Lizhi, the famous dissident scientist who sought protection from the American Embassy in Beijing in 1989, seems to be one of the very few who advocates genuine democracy (Fang 1990). Another one would be Wei Jingsheng, China's most famous dissident who was imprisoned for almost fifteen years for his Democracy Wall Movement activities in 1980. He was released just before the announcement of the host of the Year 2000 Olympic Games, but then was sentenced to a further fifteen years.

For example, Su Shaozhi and Yan Jinguis, Bao Tong and Chen Yizhi.

The two prime examples are Chen Ziming and Wang Junlue whose activities prior to and during the 1989 movement were recorded in detail in Black and Munro (1993). They had tried time and again to be included into the reformist camp of the political elite, but had been rejected because of their activities back in the 1976 Tiananmen uprising and the 1979-80 Democracy Wall Movement.

For definitions of 'loyal opposition', see William Saffire (1978: 288-90) and R. M. Punnett (1973: 20-1). See also Chapter 1 of this volume.

From a different angle, Kelly and He (1992: 58) have also come to the conclusion that the Chinese transformation is closer to the Hungarian variant.

REFERENCES


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