

Political Science in China: A New State of Siege

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A year has passed since the pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square captured the attention of the world and sparked a season of historic political change throughout the communist world. Unlike their counterparts in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union however, the millions of Chinese intellectuals, students, and workers who took to the streets throughout China last spring in the name of political reform were prevented from continuing their struggle by a brutal government crackdown against the demonstrations on June 4th.¹ According to the government, "patriotic demonstrations" had become a "counter-revolutionary rebellion" which threatened the capacity of the Chinese state to govern.

Today the demonstrators and the tanks have been removed from Tiananmen Square. Martial law has been lifted from Beijing and only non-uniformed security officers still lurk in the shadows of Beijing's streets and *hutongs*. Since the beginning of last summer the Chinese government has assured the world that daily life in China has returned to "normal." Indeed, one also has a sense that U.S. relations with the P.R.C. are also beginning to approximate normalcy. Western investment in China's ailing economy is growing again, many of the mild sanctions originally imposed by the Bush Administration against China have been relaxed, and high level members of the Bush Administration have traveled to China to meet secretly and in public with Chinese leaders.

But despite appearances all is not normal, especially not for China's social scientists. The discipline of political science in China played a major role in facilitating and encouraging the momentous events which transpired last spring.² Ironically, the

development of political science was directly encouraged by the Communist Party to help address China's problems of political modernization and reform. Now, political science and other social science disciplines are condemned by the government for helping to instigate the so-called "counter-revolutionary rebellion."

As a result, political science in China is under a new state of siege. Numerous social scientists have been arrested or put on "most wanted"

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lists; the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in downtown Beijing has been occupied by security forces and members of the PLA throughout much of the past year; and students and faculty in social science departments throughout the country, but particularly at Beijing University (referred to as Beida), have been targeted for "special treatment" by a regime intent on eradicating the roots of what it calls "bourgeois liberalization."

At the 1989 APSA Meetings in Washington, D.C., former President Jimmy Carter told a standing-room-only audience that we need to take greater responsibility for international members of the political science profession who are at risk because of the work they do and the ideals they hold. In that spirit, this essay will briefly touch upon the emergence of political science in China during the past few years and offer some information regarding the way in which political scientists, both faculty and students, have been treated in the aftermath of the gov-

ernment's crackdown against the pro-democracy movement last June.

The Emergence of Political Science

As any political scientist who has visited China in the last few years knows all too well, the development of the discipline, and of social sciences generally, is a very recent phenomena in the PRC.³ In 1987, the Communist Party formally acknowledged that political science could make an important contribution to China's political modernization and reform agenda. Five areas were specifically identified as having the greatest research priority by Chinese scholars: the study of political institutions, political power, public administration, personnel theory, and political theory.⁴ In order to carry out this research agenda Chinese scholars were convinced that they had a great deal to learn from the Western scientific study of politics. Support from the Party helped to legitimize the Chinese Political Science Association, which had been formed in 1980 to foster the development of the discipline and whose membership had grown significantly from 1984 to 1987. By the time of the Party's 13th National Congress in October of 1987, political scientists throughout the country were eager to make a contribution to debates about reform of the nation's political structure.⁵ The driving force behind much of this activity was the Institute of Political Science at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences headed by Yan Jiaqi, which brought together many of the nation's most creative and ambitious social scientists.⁶

The Party's position also encouraged the creation of new departments of political science which had long been in the planning stages. At

Beida, the creation of a new department of Political Science and Public Administration had been planned since 1978. However, it was not until 1987 that the University gave its final permission to create this new administrative unit. The new Department held its inaugural meeting of graduate students in December of 1987 and was officially brought into existence shortly thereafter. Professor Xiao Chaoren was named Director, with Professors Liang Zu, Li Jeng Peng, and Xie Qing Kui as Vice-Directors. According to Professor Xie Qing Kui, the Department intends to emphasize the study of contemporary Chinese politics, western political science methodology, and political theory, in addition to the study of public administration. The Department started its precarious existence with 36 faculty, taken mostly from the Department of International Politics, and 400 undergraduate students with only a handful of graduate students. Professor Xie said that the Department plans to grow to 80 faculty within the next 5-7 years. Recent events make this expectation dubious. Indeed by the winter of 1990 one junior faculty member confided that the new department faced the "danger of being abolished" and that it "was struggling for its existence."⁷

The new political science department at Beida was not China's first. Similar departments had already been established at Fudan University in Shanghai and at People's University in Beijing. However, given the importance of Beijing University in the Chinese educational system, the creation of a new political science department at this institution was viewed as an official endorsement for the study of political science in China.

I was teaching at Beida when the final decisions were being made to create the new department. My impressions were that most of the faculty in the Department of International Politics were fairly ambivalent towards the development of political science. Most of its members are older historians of international relations, Marxist ideologues, and party cadres. However, a few senior faculty along with junior faculty and graduate students exhibited great

excitement and anticipation over the development of the discipline and the role it might play in China's future. Indeed, I found their excitement to be contagious. Young political scientists in China are convinced that American political science is relevant to the problems of modernization and political reform faced by their leaders. Citing the careers of Woodrow Wilson, Frank Goodnow, Charles Merriam and others, they trustingly assume that the discipline of political science as practiced in America remains both relevant and political. Their faith was hard for me to match with appropriate enthusiasm, given a more detailed knowledge of what political scientists in America actually study. For my students and others I spoke with, political science has an inherently political purpose, not merely an academic one. Thus, they have been eager to embrace it. Perhaps Western practi-

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tioners can rediscover the potential purpose of political science from our young Chinese colleagues.

The Fate of Political Science

Unfortunately this contagion has been transformed into disappointment and fear as the Chinese government pursues its policies of retribution against social science in the name of political re-education and ideological purification. This year the number of students admitted to the freshman class at Beida was cut in half from approximately 1600 to 800. But there weren't any new students on the Beida campus this year anyway. All the freshman were shipped off to Shijianzhuang Military School for the PLA in Hebei Province for the entire year. Next year's freshman class, which is expected to go back up to 1600 students will also be required to take one year of mili-

tary service first. The State Education Commission has decided that upon their return to campus in the fall of 1990 no one in the current freshman class will be permitted to major in any of the social sciences. There are no new graduate students or teachers in the social sciences at Beida this year either. Nor have there been many foreign scholars teaching in the department this year. Students promised teaching jobs in the social sciences have been fortunate if they were able to remain students, otherwise, along with all other B.A. and M.A. graduates they have been sent to factories or the countryside to "experience labor," as one student put it.⁸

For the faculty and students who remain on campus much of the past academic year has been spent writing summaries of their activities during the "fifty days of turmoil and rebellion" and participating in ideological education sessions. In an effort to re-educate anyone whose mind may have been contaminated by the "lies and rumors" of "bourgeois liberalization" spread last spring, students and faculty were required to write a 5,000 word essay last fall evaluating their thinking and performance during the past year. Independent of these self-criticisms, students are being investigated for their participation in the pro-democracy movement by party cadres at the universities. In late October, a student provided the following commentary on the process:

Detailed investigations into the students' activities during April to June began this week, which will last at least one month. It is common to describe the mood of both teachers and students with the Chinese character meaning the color grey. The students feel depressed and lost. It seems [that] some threat over our heads may fall down at any time. Also, where is the hope? No one knows.

While students were promised that these essays would not be recorded, subsequently during the fall semester students were required to fill out the "confession and exposure form." According to one description of this task,

Those who were involved in the counterrevolutionary rebellion (the so-

called checked persons) must make a clear breast of their counter CPC [Chinese Communist Party] and counter socialism crimes. On the other hand, those who were not involved must expose and denounce the counterrevolutionaries. According to the stipulation of the university authority, all those whose ideological report does not meet the demands of the CPC or those who violate the rigid discipline of political studies are not granted registration. Consequently, we all have to behave ourselves in our studies, no matter what real attitude we assume toward our studies or what complaints we make in private.⁹

In order to curb the influx of Western ideas into China, the government has passed regulations which drastically reduce the number of students permitted to study abroad. Again, the social sciences and study in the U.S., Canada, and Australia have been targeted for harsher restrictions. Early in the fall students wrote with the news that after April of 1990 no social science graduate students would be permitted to travel to the U.S. for graduate study. Indeed, as of early February the Chinese government issued regulations which require all Chinese university graduates to work for five years before they can become eligible to study abroad.¹⁰ As one student struggling to leave the country to study political science abroad put it in mid-February: "You know what this means! The majority of students who applied to study abroad will be unable to get passports, even if they have been admitted to American universities." The government's action will effectively make it impossible for many of those students sympathetic to the pro-democracy movement to study abroad in the foreseeable future.¹¹ Of course, even for those students with valid Chinese passports there is no guarantee that they will be able to obtain U.S. visas to enter the United States.¹²

The social sciences in China are now part of the "suspended specialties." In July, *China Daily* explained that, "The suspended specialties mainly include those in the social sciences fields which the State has deemed for a long time to have turned out personnel not qualified for the socialist construction."¹³ This claim stands in sharp contrast to the

Party's previous decision, less than two years ago, to encourage the development and growth of political science. In practice this means that the opportunities for teaching and research in political science have been drastically reduced during the past year. For example, at Beida school authorities have ordered a 100 percent increase in the hours devoted to teaching Marxist philosophy, Marxist political economy, Mao Zedong Thought, the history of the CPC, and similar courses. As a result there are fewer Western-style political science courses being taught and when they are Chinese instructors are under orders to "provide a critical analysis" of this approach. For those teachers who persist in discussing certain topics there may be swift punishment. During the fall semester "one teacher was reported 'singing the praises for a multi-party system in class' and he and his col-

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leagues had to stop teaching for one week to do self-criticism." University authorities also responded to this offense by cancelling a number of other courses which contained what they called "Western ideology."

Political science research has been made very difficult and dangerous by prohibitions against the publication of writings about Western democratic theory and political institutions and by the closing of major research journals. The two major national political science journals in China—*Political Science Studies* and *Political Science Abroad*—have halted publication. Other journals and magazines such as *Theoretical Information*, *Reading Monthly*, and *Wei-Ding Papers* dare not publish political writings making it difficult for scholars to disseminate their research and engage in important debates. As an older graduate student put it, "Chinese political science has come to a halt." The following two quotations, the first provided in late October and the second in early January, provide sober assessments

of the research environment for social scientists:

Studies in the field of social sciences [are] inclined to be more conservative [now]. Some academic books on social sciences are forbidden to be introduced. As a matter of fact, it was hoped that changes in methods of doing research in social sciences might be possible and that free discussions in academic fields would be permitted so that we can analyze objectively what kind of political system suits us best. . . . But contrary to our desires, even the bases for this have been destroyed. Now a gloomy mood is omnipresent. . . . The good atmosphere of serious teaching and learning seems to have disappeared.

Chinese intellectuals are also in a severe situation: they are concerned about their countries' future, but they have no freedom of thinking, researching, discussing and speaking. They have no regular and effective ways to influence the political decision-making process. The only link between scholars and the officials was destroyed after the democratic movement. There is no political science, only dogma.

As depressing and tormenting as this may all seem the list of problems faced by social science faculty and students in the aftermath of the government's crackdown could be extended at some length. However, this enumeration should suffice to suggest the magnitude and thorough nature of the government's seige on political science and the social sciences generally.

Reaction of Chinese Students and Faculty

Chinese political science students and faculty are confused, disoriented, and angry. The discipline they entered in order to help their country down the long road of political reform is now the target of censure and condemnation. Even after the break for the Spring Festival in late January and early February "the mood of the students is characterized by hatred and fear. The mood of the faculty is to comply in public but to complain and oppose the government in private." A particularly bleak but informative portrait of student life at Beida arrived in early February:

Obviously students are low-spirited and less idealistic than before. There are less people talking about reform, self-actualization, literature, or philosophy; less people at bookstores; and more students absent from classes. The students face pressures in many ways: from the total change of the official tone towards the June event, from requirements for everyone to write down what they had done and thought in the earlier months, from their reluctant rejection of their own powerlessness, and from their worries of future job assignments. Some may even worry about possible punishments for their deeds or sayings.¹⁴

For a junior faculty member with a penchant for understatement, the government's policy means an end to his life's work:

I, as a teacher who believed in democracy, took part in it [the movement] actively. During this period, I wrote and published a series of articles about democracy, to tell the Chinese readers about democracy and what they should try to struggle for. But today, the crackdown of the democratic movement puts me in a difficult and dangerous position. Some of my friends have been arrested, more importantly I have to stop my research work. As my major field is democratic theories and practices, if I continue to write and publish this kind of paper I will get into serious trouble.

For another student who has been sent to the countryside for at least a year, the entire process, "seems to be a trial, a trial to test the people's patience, endurance, and the ability to hope."

It will be a long time before the social sciences are permitted to flourish in China again. Having been closely identified as a causal factor in last spring's "counter revolutionary rebellion," the Chinese government is likely to keep the brakes on the development of social sciences, and political science in particular, for quite some time. Western academics who are interested in the development of Chinese political science and committed to a democratic China should take whatever steps are necessary to assist our beleaguered brethren—those in the PRC and abroad. Where possible, we should individually and collectively aid the research capacities and facilities of

Chinese political science departments and do all that we can to nurture and assist Chinese students who want to study in the U.S. as well as those who are already here. They are, after all, China's best hope for a democratic future.

Despite the government's efforts to erase and reprogram the collective memory of an entire nation, Beida students have neither lost faith in political science nor in democracy. A graduate student says of the democratic movement:

It is just my dream! The very reason I am so interested in political science is that I dream of the day when democratic politics comes true in China. Therefore, I hope to promote political democratization in China through realistic empirical study. I think that crux of this kind of empirical work is not 'what democracy is,' but how to build (achieve) democracy in China.

The State Education Commission has decided that upon their return to campus in the fall of 1990 no one in the current freshman class will be permitted to major in any of the social sciences.

This hope is shared by a recent undergraduate now assigned to the cabbage fields of Hebei Province: "Yes, today in China, democracy is really a dream that inspires so many people to devote themselves to its pursuit." These courageous young political scientists have reminded me that our discipline exists for a reason: to help discover the conditions necessary for democratization and fulfill the democratic promise. This is a lesson we can all learn from those on the front lines of the struggle for democracy.

Notes

1. We have subsequently learned, by the government's own admission, that crackdowns

also occurred in a number of other major cities throughout China during this time period even though at the time these incidents were not widely reported in the Western press.

2. Of particular importance was the role played by Yan Jiaqi, former director of the Institute of Political Science at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences along with the many undergraduate and graduate students studying political science at Beijing University and People's University who took an active part in the intellectual debates about democratization which preceded the pro-democracy demonstrations. For a discussion of the debates about democratization which took place prior to the spring demonstrations, see Hao Wang and Mark P. Petracca, "Which Path to Take? Competing Strategies for Democratization in Chinese Intellectual Circles," Unpublished manuscript, Beijing University and the University of California, Irvine, November, 1989.

3. For a perspective on the development of political science in China, see Zhao Baoxu, *The Revival of Political Science in China*, Translated by David Chu (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1983) and Fu Zhengyuan, "The Sociology of Political Science in the People's Republic of China," Paper presented at the Conference of the International Collaborative Research Program on the Study of the Development of Political Science, Cortona, Italy, 1987.

4. This list was confirmed in separate conversations during the fall of 1987 with Liu Qingmin, editor-in-chief of *Political Science Abroad*, a publication of the Institute of Political Science at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Yan Jiaqi, former director of that Institute at CASS, and now a political refugee in Paris.

5. Subsequent debates about political reform and democratization between political scientists and others can be found in Chinese journals such as *Reading Monthly*, *Theoretical Information*, *Political Science Abroad*, *Studies in Political Science*, *Studies in CCCP*, *Contemporary Marxism*, and *Public Administration* as well as in newspapers and a wide-range of published monographs.

6. See Zhang Xiaogang, "Political Science Resurgent," *China Daily*, October 31, 1989, p. 1.

7. Specific references to correspondence or conversations with former colleagues and students in Beijing will not be made in order to protect the anonymity of these individuals.

8. One recent Beida graduate, who was promised a teaching job in Beijing describes the conditions at a "new assignment" in rural Hebei Province: "The people in this area are too impoverished, backward and ignorant. The peasants only know how to eat and how to bear children! When I saw these people in dirty rags I felt very sad—China is too backward, [the] Chinese people are too poor. Under these conditions, talking about freedom and democracy is divorced from reality. Now I am very pessimistic as to China's future."

9. The inability of a student to register is tantamount to being thrown out of your work unit, a most serious consequence indeed.

10. Students at Beida were aware of this impending regulation since mid-autumn of 1989. Hundreds of students, the "TOEFL

group" as one Beida faculty member called them, responded by applying for early admission to U.S. graduate programs in order to secure the necessary paper work before the regulation went into effect. Even though the intention of the government to implement this regulation was well-known in student circles, the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* only published reports about it in early February.

11. Ironically, President Bush vetoed the Pelosi bill, which would have extended the visas of current Chinese students studying in the U.S. indefinitely, on the grounds that his action would encourage the Chinese government to keep permitting students to study in the United States.

12. See Mark P. Petracca, "Let the Students Leave," *New York Times*, November 29, 1989, p. A22.

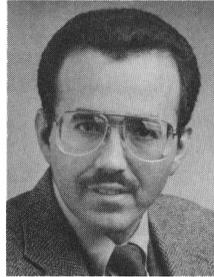
13. "Cuts in University Enrollment, Courses Noted," *China Daily*, July 22, 1989, p. 1.

14. A great number of social science students at Beida have been detained and questioned by security forces for the role they played either as advocates of democratization or as participants in the demonstrations.

About the Author

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