

Chinese Politics: Ten Years of Vacillation and Reform

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Tick, tock, tick, tock...the pendulum of Chinese politics swings back and forth...now to the left...now to the right...without pause, its movement mesmerizing. And just like the clock, the pendulum of Chinese politics also marks time by its unceasing oscillations.

It is not an easy task to critique the momentous events of the past ten years of Chinese political history. First came the call to reform in 1978 during the Third Plenum of the Communist Party's 11th Central Committee. This was followed by astonishing economic reforms in the rural areas where the new policies were gradually put into effect. There were even attempts at political reforms...the revision of the Party's leadership structure and the separation of the Party from the daily workings of government. But sudden reversals always followed on the heels of such reforms. The most notorious being the June 4th crackdown on the democracy movement in 1989 by armed troops using live ammunition. These dramatic fluctuations in policy make it difficult to understand what is really going on inside the Chinese political world. Why all this vacillating within the Party? Does it intend to continue to walk the path of reform, or has it decided to turn back? What elements lie beneath the surface that cause such abrupt policy shifts? And is it possible to forecast with any degree of accuracy what direction Chinese politics will take in the future? Before addressing this knot of questions, we have to review briefly the events of the past decade as they relate to the political and economic reforms and the intermittent reversals that seem to dog their progress.



Partial Reform

The reform movement was finally ignited by the Party's reaction to the disastrous effects of the Cultural Revolution. By 1976

the Revolution was in its tenth year and production had all but come to a standstill. The country was on the brink of civil war when the Party moved to "bring order out of the chaos". With the fall of the Gang of Four and the restoration of Deng Xiaoping to office, the main problem facing the party leadership was how to negate the effects of the Cultural Revolution and rebuild a new social order. The political reforms that followed had as their chief aim correcting the mistakes that had been made during the Cultural Revolution.

Reviving the Party Central Secretariat

The first step in the direction of political reform was to change the leadership structures within the Party itself. The Cultural Revolution had clearly exposed the folly of allowing supreme political power to be concentrated in the hands of a few. The reformers moved quickly to address this problem. In February of 1980, the Fifth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee revived the Party's Central Secretariat, which had originally been established at the 8th Party Congress in 1956 but had fallen into disuse. Under its new title, the General Secretariat of the Communist Party, it was now to serve as the administrative arm of the Politburo and its Standing Committee. In September of 1982, the 12th Party Congress replaced the office of Party Chairman with Party General Secretary. From this point on, Party Central would consist only of the General Secretariat, whose chief secretary would be a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo. He would also be responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Secretariat and act as the convener of the Politburo and its Standing Committee meetings. The offices of both the chairman and vice-chairman were abolished.

The reason for reviving the Secretariat was to avoid a recurrence of the situation which existed during the Cultural Revolution when Mao Zedong held absolute power over the country. While this move effectively limited the authority of the Party leader, it strengthened the position of the collective leadership in the Party's upper echelons.

Pruning the Ranks

As part of the reform of its leadership structures, the Party also began to prune its ranks. Led by Deng Xiaoping, who himself was counted among first generation revolutionaries, the Party began to groom younger members to assume top leadership roles. Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang came to the centre of the political stage under these circumstances. As a means of inducing the old guard

(who had said they would "work until they dropped") to step aside to make room for the second and third generation of cadres, the 12th Party Congress in 1982 established the Central Advisory Commission. The efforts to rejuvenate the upper echelons of the Party only saw results in early 1987 during the Party's 13th Congress. Deng himself, along with such veterans as Chen Yun and Li Xiannian, stepped down from their high posts on the Standing Committee of the Politburo and the Party Central Committee. On the surface, at least, it seemed to signal a changing of the guard.

It is worth noting here that forcing the old guard revolutionaries into retirement and abolishing life-long terms of office took place not only in the Central Committee, but also on all other levels of Party leadership. Along with setting limits on terms of office and retiring its elderly cadres, the Party presented a four point program for reform of the leadership structure: 1) rejuvenation; 2) specialization; 3) acquisition of practical skills; and 4) revolutionary methodology. The large number of aging leaders who had been rehabilitated following the Cultural Revolution now began to retire from all levels of leadership.

Readjusting the Party's Relationship to the State Government

Reforming the leadership structure was an effort at improving the internal machinery of the party, but there still remained the important task of readjusting the Party's relationship to the state government. One of the forms a totalitarian system readily assumes is total Party control over all government functions. This was the situation in China before 1978. In a socialist country, it is a matter of principle that the Party heads and controls the government, but a serious problem arises when the government's executive powers are also usurped by Party structures. The lines of distinction between Party and government then blur to the point of almost ceasing to exist. The results are an inflated Party bureaucracy which is incapable of turning out competent leaders, a government whose executive functions are seriously weakened, and the disruption of the balanced relationship between Party and government. Naturally, in such circumstances, mistakes are easily compounded.

The move to disengage the Party from the workings of government started in 1980. The first step was to eliminate duplication, beginning at the top where the Party and State both exercised leadership roles. In August of 1980 the Politburo, acting on a suggestion by Deng Xiaoping, drew up a new list of candidates for the State Council, which was then presented to the 3rd Session of the 5th National People's Congress. It retained Hua Guofeng as Party Chairman while removing him from the office of Premier of

the State Council. Deng Xiaoping, Li Xiannian and Chen Yun were also removed from their leadership positions in the People's Congress to rectify a system where top-level officials held multiple offices or several deputy roles.

The reforms re-affirmed the Party's mandate to set the direction, goals and policies to be followed, while the government was to be responsible for their implementation. A new Constitution was adopted at the 5th session of the 5th National People's Congress in November of 1982 along with laws regulating the functions of the National People's Congress and the State Council. The new legislation both enlarged the authority of the Standing Committee of the Congress and enhanced the power of the executive and judiciary branches. How effective was all this? From 1982 to 1984, the reforms were pushed forward on a national level so that a sizable reduction of personnel within the State Council and executive staffs took place.

Since 1980, the policy of reform aimed at separating the functions of Party and government has made some headway, but it has also been subject to recurring political disturbances. As long as the clarion call for reform sounded clearly, the movement towards relative independence in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government moved forward. But whenever the cold wind of opposition to liberalization blew up, the power of the Party greatly increased. From beginning to end the party's authority never became subject to any structural restrictions.

Separating Government from Economy Management

Related to the separation of Party and State was the question of the separation of government from the management of the economy. Reform of the communes was already in the works when the 3rd Plenum of the 12th Central Committee, meeting in October of 1984, altered the system of factory management. Previously, it was the Party committee which had full control over management decisions in state-run enterprises. Executive power was now given over into the hands of the individual factory manager, who was empowered to make policy decisions in matters pertaining to management and production.

Party reforms directed at the communes had an effect on all levels of local society. The monopoly that the communes held over other social organizations in their areas led to their complete dominance of village life. But in January of 1983 the Party's Central Committee decided to reform the system wherein government administration had all but been submerged in commune management. In October, the Party moved to separate village

governments from the communes' control. It also loosened its hold over social organizations by strengthening their relative autonomy.

Participation in the Political Process

If some notable results were achieved in reform of the leadership structure, and the reform separating Party and government functions was proceeding only with difficulty, then reforms allowing for mass participation in the political process were completely hamstrung. The only one worth mentioning was the introduction of direct elections for some representatives to People's Congresses at the grass roots level. In February of 1983, the Standing Committee of the 5th National People's Congress at its 26th meeting decided that representatives to people's congresses on the county level or below could be directly elected by the people, and moreover, multiple candidates could stand for office. However, representatives to people's congresses above the county level would continue to be elected by the lower level of people's congresses just as in the past.

This is a brief summary of the steps China has taken to reform its political system during the past decade. The reforms have not been completely effective. In 1987 Chinese leaders expressed their intention to study a proposal for reforming the entire political system. In October of that year, at the 13th Party Congress, preliminary proposals were also made to establish a nationwide civil service system. But such sweeping plans for further reforms never got off the ground. They were overtaken by the events of 1989, which, as we shall see, also brought about the abortion of the entire political reform movement.¹

Motivation for Reform

It is difficult to assess with any degree of objectivity the effects of the political reforms China has thus far managed to put into actual practice. But any analysis must begin with a search for their underlying motivation. Only when the leadership's motives for undertaking reforms become clear can we hope to weigh the relative value of their results. On the part of the Party leaders, it is obvious that in 1978 they were motivated by the urgent need to counteract the grave political errors of the Cultural Revolution. When the Great Helmsman, Mao Zedong, mobilized the masses against the Party, attacking many of its leading members, the Party found itself besieged from all sides and the country teetered on the brink of a civil war. This was a unique situation in the history of a

socialist nation, and it came about because high ranking Party officials began to challenge the supreme authority of its leaders.

Once the motivation of those behind the reforms becomes evident, then it is possible to understand recent deviations from the reform policy. Naturally, the leaders at the top were most zealous in their efforts to reform Party leadership structures since it served to strengthen their own collective leadership at the Party's highest level. They also had some vested interest in working for limited reforms directed at modifying the existing relationship between Party and government. Such reforms would restore order and effectiveness to the government, and reverse the debilitating situation brought on by the Cultural Revolution. However, there seems to have been no genuine willingness on the part of the Party leadership to allow the separation of Party and government to progress to a stage where the government might escape from under Party control.

Party officials had no intention of giving top priority to those reforms which would allow the populace a greater say in government. Their attempts remained superficial and half-hearted. They made sure elections to the People's Congress were confined to below the county level areas. In fact, the top Party leaders had serious misgivings about any opening up of the electoral process to the general population. They equated the popular democratic movements with those used by the powerful few to stir things to a boil during the Cultural Revolution. They labeled them as attempts at "mass democracy" and dismissed them entirely.

The fact of the matter is, however, one of the main reasons the Revolution was such a tragedy was not because of "too much democracy" but because of too little. Democracy could well have served to curb the use of absolute power concentrated at the top. Robert Dahl has described the democratic system as establishing a pluralistic form of government which allows for mutually competitive political forces (i.e. political parties) to co-exist within the body politic. This is the essence of a democratic system.²

A key element from the very beginning of China's political reforms has been the transfer of power out of the hands of a few and into a larger collective. However, there still exists no internal mechanism to restrain the use of absolute power by the collective, nor have any limits been placed on the party's control over state government and society as a whole. In short, there remains a lot of ground yet to be covered before China's political reforms reach their ultimate goal of establishing a truly democratic form of government. Efforts to correct the errors of the Cultural Revolution have met with only limited success. While there has been a real realignment of power among the collective leadership, there is still

no system of checks and balances moderating its use. The threat of control by a few has diminished, but the possible misuse of power by the larger collective is still very much present. The June 4th incident is a glaring example of how their high-level decisions can lead to disaster.

The Pendulum Swings

The political reforms begun in 1978 inaugurated a new era in Chinese politics. But because they lacked completeness, they were subject to periodic retrenchments. There is a Chinese saying: "A cold wind can bring an army of horses to a standstill." And in recent years it has been a feature of the Chinese political climate for the wind to blow either hot or cold. Each effort towards loosening the screws has been followed by a corresponding move to tighten them up again.

After the call to reform at the 3rd plenum of the Party's 11th Central Committee in 1978, the first item on the agenda was the reform of the rural economy. "Ideological liberation" and "truth from facts" were catchwords much bandied about at the time. All this helped to create a mood of reduced political tension, which soon spawned a large number of popular movements intent on taking part in the governing process. One of these democratic movements, "Beijing Spring", sprouted up and began to take shape in the capital in 1978. "Big character" posters appeared in ever increasing numbers on the "Democracy Wall" in the Xidan district demanding a speed up of the democratic reforms. But the soil was not ready to support these new plants, and the authorities hurried to uproot them before they could take firm hold.

Establishing Ideological Guidelines for Reform

In January of 1979, the party organized a working session of intellectuals to talk about several problems then confronting Chinese socialism and to suggest some ideological guidelines. All this took place in a relaxed political atmosphere. Among the Party theoreticians, there was no lack of willingness to open up subject matters previously considered off-limits. But towards the end, the discussion suddenly shifted to an address given by Deng Xiaoping, in March of the year before, concerning the need for establishing ideological guidelines for reform. His talk was entitled: *Upholding the Four Basic Principles*. The four principles enumerated in Deng's talk were: socialism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the Communist Party, and Marxist-Leninist-Maoist

thought. Deng was obviously setting up a framework within which the leaders of popular movements and Party theoreticians would be allowed to operate. At the same time, he was also setting boundaries to demands acceptable to the old guard. Deng's address, in its published form, was to become the obverse side of "open reform". And hereafter, the Party's ideological pendulum was to swing between these two poles.

In the years that followed, the Party mounted four "rectification" campaigns, although this time they were not to be referred to as "campaigns". Their purpose was to check the spread of heretical ideas, and they occurred in the years 1981, 1983, 1987 and 1989.

First Anti-Liberalization Campaign

At the beginning of 1981, Bai Hua's novel, *Bitter Love* came under fire by the critics. They claimed that the novel's message amounted to a repudiation of the socialist system. By July of 1981, the criticism of Bai Hua was elevated to a campaign against all forms of "bourgeois liberalization". Deng himself wrote a paper, *On the Question of the Ideological Front*, in which he criticised "the bourgeois liberalization tendencies found among artists and Party theoreticians." This was to be the first of the campaigns against liberalization in the new political era.

By 1983 events had reached a pass where things began to loosen up again in intellectual circles. In conjunction with the 100th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx, which was celebrated in March of that year, Hu Yaobang in his efforts to encourage further studies in Marxism quietly gave approval to Marxist scholars to delve into aspects of Marxist thought that had been restricted in the past. The two areas most heatedly discussed at that time were Marx's humanism and his theory of alienation. The debate reached unprecedented proportions. Within the short span of a few months, over 600 major treatises were published on these two themes alone, and most were in sympathy with humanism and alienation.

In the West, Marx's theory of alienation was accepted as a rediscovery of an important concept with important implications for such related topics as idealism and anarchism. In China, it was severely criticized by Party officials during the 1960's, and during the Cultural Revolution it was rejected entirely. But with the 1980's came a reopening of the discussion on both Marx's humanism and his concept of alienation, with the result that many of those who had opposed his ideas in the past, now became their strongest advocates. A case in point was Zhou Yang, who held the post of deputy director of the Party's Central Propaganda Bureau

during the '60's. Intellectuals such as Zhou, who had experienced firsthand the Cultural Revolution and the alienation of socialism's political power, began to appeal for a socialism with a more human face. Party officials, on the other hand, saw in the theory of alienation a negation of socialism itself and a repudiation of the Party's essential meaning and purpose. In October of 1983, they sounded the call to "eliminate spiritual pollution" and subjected intellectuals who supported the theory of alienation to heavy criticism. In the same breath, they struck out against other forms of "liberalization", among which they included popular literature and pornography.

Spiritual Pollution Campaign

The Spiritual Pollution campaign was the first large scale criticism campaign to take place since 1978. It had great momentum at the start but gradually petered out because of official vacillation on what direction it should take. The campaign also met with strong opposition from the general populace.

By 1984, the tension engendered by the Spiritual Pollution campaign began to ease off. Then, in 1986 something new and startling happened. In June of that year, Deng Xiaoping proposed a comprehensive reform of the whole political system. His proposal was taken up with great enthusiasm. Articles underscoring the need for reform flooded the media, multiplying like mushrooms after a heavy rain. But the anger and resentment in some circles at the slow pace of the proposed reforms gradually came to the surface. The Party leadership was openly accused of deliberate procrastination. This finally led to a series of nationwide student demonstrations in late 1986.

Student Demonstrations

The demonstrations began at the University of Science and Technology in Hefei in the Province of Anhui. On December 5 several hundred students took to the streets. The demonstrations quickly spread to Shanghai, Beijing and Nanking, and from there to other population centres throughout the country until over 20 major cities were involved. The students raised the banner of freedom and democracy. They lashed out fiercely against all forms of inequality both on and off-campus. They called upon the government to sit down with them and dialogue. When their ranks in Shanghai and Beijing swelled, the students gradually became more insistent in their demands.

As the demonstrations spread, the old guard revolutionaries among the Party's top echelons could hardly contain their anger.

The Standing Committee of the People's Congress meeting on December 26th, passed a temporary regulation intended to contain them. Permission to demonstrate now had to be obtained five days in advance from the government. Offenders would be acting outside the law and subject to arrest. In the initial phase of the demonstrations, the students had placed their hopes in Deng and his influence as the country's acknowledged leader. Student marchers in Shanghai carried friendly banners asking: "How are you, Xiaoping?" and "Xiaoping, where are you?" But the real Deng Xiaoping was not the kind of man the students thought he was.

On December 30th after meeting with members of the Central Committee, Deng issued the following statements: "We are clearly opposed to bourgeois liberalization." The statement went on to say that the student demonstrations were the results of "our not having taken a strong stand against bourgeois liberalization during these past few years." Deng added a warning: "There are those in Shanghai who say they have protectors on the Central Committee and the Committee is divided in whether to uphold the four basic principles or drop its opposition to liberalization. These people are not afraid to take to the streets and wreak havoc. But I tell them now that they should beware! For no matter where these protectors are, be they on the Central Committee or in local organizations, their ideological front is weak and they have lost their positions of strength. Working for bourgeois liberalization is a laissez-faire endeavour in which the good will gain no support and the wicked will lose their heads." Deng then said: "There is no way we will forego our methods of dictatorship. We will not only speak of such methods, but we will also use them should the need arise."³

Second Anti-Liberalization Campaign

Deng's statement became the first official document published by the Central Committee in 1987. From that time on the Committee adopted tougher measures to deal with the demonstrations. Students were forbidden to demonstrate without government permission; Liu Binyan, Fang Lizhi and Wang Ruowang, who were considered to be their backstage manipulators, were expelled from the Party; the Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang was held partially responsible and forced into retirement.

The lesson we learn from this second anti-liberalization campaign and the student demonstrations of 1987 is this: when the protests of a small number of intellectuals are taken up by a large number of students and ordinary citizens, and when political movements turn from the discussion stage to action in the streets, the Party's top-level leadership will not hesitate to adopt strong

measures to counteract them. This was confirmed by the events that took place during the demonstrations of 1989.

By the time the Party's 13th Central Committee convened in October of 1987, the first campaign against bourgeois liberalization had subsided. The Committee formally accepted the resignations of its elderly members and in the ensuing elections to choose their replacements, Deng Liqun, who from the start had been one of the Committee's strongest opponents of liberalization, was ousted from office. The Committee also introduced a bill outlining first steps towards a general political reform, admitting that adjustments were necessary on the grounds that socialism was still in its primary stage of development. This ushered in a new period of relaxation as political tensions abated. The pattern of loosening and tightening was once again repeating itself. Finally, the 1989 student movement and its subsequent suppression came on the stage.

Crackdown on Student Demonstrations

In January of 1989 Fang Lizhi wrote to Deng Xiaoping suggesting that, as part of the 40th anniversary celebration of the Party's coming to power, Wei Jingsheng and other political prisoners be granted a pardon. This was followed by a ground-swell of support from other intellectuals who also wrote in favour of the request. If this was the prelude, the sudden death of Hu Yaobang on April 15th served as the catalyst for the student movement which captured the attention of the whole world. The students used the occasion for mourning the death of the former Party Secretary to take to the street, eventually occupying Tiananmen Square. The demonstrators began with demands for democratic reforms and went on to denounce corruption within the government. When the Li Peng government countered by declaring martial law, the students turned their attacks on Li himself. What originally began as peaceful demonstrations by the students ended with imprisonment, exile and even death. The turning point in this highly complex situation is difficult to put in a few brief words.

The student demonstrations of 1989 were larger by far than those of 1986, and their impact on society was enormously greater. In 1986, only a few thousand students joined the marches. While this was considered unprecedented at the time, it was much smaller than the 1989 demonstrations when tens of thousands of students took possession of Tiananmen Square for several weeks. Moreover, the earlier demonstrations had little effect on society in general, while those of 1989 had a profound effect on the populations of Beijing and other cities throughout the country. In one demonstration in Beijing alone, over one million people marched in

support of the students.

The earth-shaking student demonstrations divided the leadership of the Party's Central Committee. On the Politburo only Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang and member Hu Qili took a soft line, advising caution and a peaceful dispersal of the student demonstrators. The others led by Li Peng and the old guard revolutionaries, who were manipulating the situation from behind the scenes, contended that the whole affair could only be resolved by taking an iron-fisted approach. As events were soon to prove, the hard-liners prevailed. On May 19th, Li Peng convened a meeting of cadres of the Military Commission which announced that martial law would take effect the next day. Li Peng had determined that the demonstrations were an open "rebellion" by a minority of persons who wished to deny the Party's leadership. He said that Party Central would take an unequivocal stand and use every effective means to quell the rebellion.⁴

At the time many people thought that this statement was meant merely to intimidate the students. But on June 4th the Party used armed troops firing live ammunition to silence all protest and to put the matter to an end. Large numbers of demonstrators were later rounded up and put in jail, bringing the 1989 demonstrations to a brutal close. Even after this show of force, there were some who persisted in the naive hope that Deng Xiaoping would suddenly appear and "set things right." He showed his true colors, however, when on June 9th he met with the military officers responsible for enforcing martial law, thereby indicating that he had been directing events from behind the scenes all along.

The repeated pattern of tightening and loosening in China's political scene during the ten years of reform had grown increasingly violent. Beginning with the suppression of the democracy movement and the promulgation of the four basic principles in 1979, moving through the first campaign against liberalization in 1981, the anti-spiritual pollution campaign of 1983, the second campaign against liberalization in 1987, and the final crackdown on the student demonstrations in 1989, all displayed a consistent logic. Only the intensity of the tightening up increased as the challenges to the Party became stronger.

Never-Ending Vacillation

The tide of political and economic reform reached its lowest ebb after 1989. Looking over the events of the past ten years, we must admit that economic reform is much easier to accomplish than political reform. This is especially true after June 4th. Before the crackdown, people were aware that many cadres from all echelons

of the Party openly supported and sympathized with the students. But this did not stop the top level leaders from stubbornly following their own path, causing people to wonder if there really was no way of restraining the exercise of absolute power at the top. If this is so, then it means that the political reforms of the last 12 years have been largely superficial. It also raises doubts about whether the Party, having failed thus far to completely resolve the issues which confronted it in 1978, will be able to continue to carry out basic political reforms in the years ahead.

Many think that the suppression of the 1989 student movement was an unexpected deviation from the norm. But a review of the repeated swings of the Chinese political pendulum since 1978 shows that the crackdown has had its antecedents. We may have been surprised by its unchecked ferocity, but not by the suppression itself. It was no chance happening. If these erratic political fluctuations puzzle us, perhaps a closer look at the larger China context will help us to put some of the pieces in place.

Factional Differences

Factional in-fighting seems to be the most popular explanation for what is happening. Here policy shifts are seen as political seesawing in a power struggle between reformists and conservatives.⁵ But this theory is too facile and does not stand up under a closer scrutiny of the facts. It is, for instance, quite difficult to pinpoint with any degree of accuracy what factions exist within top leadership ranks. In the past Deng Xiaoping was considered to belong to the reform group because he had been one of the pioneers of economic reform. But events have shown him to be a standard bearer for the conservatives also, in the swing back to the right. It is thus difficult to place him firmly in either camp.

We do not deny that factions exist among the Party's highest ranking leaders, nor do we deny that the alliances which bind them together are often quite tenuous. But we have to conclude that factionalism alone is not enough to explain the cyclical pattern of the political swings.

Generation Theory

There is a second theory, more prevalent in China itself, which has to do with "generation" differences. Those advocating the "generation theory" distinguish among the four "generations" co-existing within the Party. The first consists of the original revolutionaries - the old guard; the second comprises veterans of the Sino-Japanese War; the third belongs to post-Liberation China; and the

fourth are the products of the Cultural Revolution. The members of each of these generations have grown up together and have been shaped by the same historical experiences. Consequently they tend to share similar points of view.⁶

This concept throws more light on the reasons why top level leaders react differently to political challenges to their authority. The first generation tends to be over-sensitive and uniform in response when confronted with dissent. They seem to consider any form of dissent as an act of disloyalty in a life and death struggle. The comments of one of the old guard revolutionaries, Chen Yun, in reaction to the June 4th crackdown bears this out well. He said: "The People's Republic of China has undergone decades of struggle to build itself up. What was accomplished was paid for by the blood of countless revolutionary heroes. To have it possibly torn down in one day is nothing short of betrayal of the Communist Party." The reaction of the second and third generation leaders to dissent is more nuanced. They show signs of a broader understanding; and while retaining a certain sympathy for the old guard style of thinking, many of them have adopted a more open attitude.

The old guard revolutionaries took up the mission of rebuilding the country after the ravages of the Cultural Revolution. They wanted a China which would be economically prosperous and stable. There was little room for entertaining thoughts about democracy. Their revolutionary achievements were to be left intact as a legacy to be passed on to future generations. They never intended to carry out fundamental political reforms. Their mistake was to fail to see the close connection between economic and political reform. Their only recourse was to counter the demands for more democratic participation in the political process with a show of force. Because the old guard tenaciously holds on to its absolute power, the second and third generation leaders could bring little influence to bear in times of crisis. And in the recent crisis, what little influence they had, proved to be ineffectual. To function at all, they were forced to go along with the old guard.

The "generation" problem is closely connected to the problem of succession. As age begins to take its toll, the first generation is obliged to choose successors who share their way of thinking. Andrew Nathan points out that the June 4th tragedy had its roots in a dual crisis: 1) the challenge of dissent to the Party's authority, and 2) the struggle over succession within its own leadership ranks. If former Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang had succeeded in using the student movement to gain the upper hand in his struggle with Li Peng, the old guard was certain that he would then quickly move against them and oust them from power.⁷ They decided to move first by denouncing Zhao and crushing the student movement.

Conclusion

If our assumption is correct, i.e., that vacillation among China's top leadership is not so much the result of factional struggles as it is symptomatic of the deeper differences that exist among the "four generations", then we can conclude that a basic problem will be solved when the old guard revolutionaries are finally removed from the political stage. When this happens, China will have more enlightened political affairs. At that time when China's top leaders no longer need to put up with the threat of divisive turmoil nor interference from the military, they will be able to handle challenges to their authority. Shorter periods of constraint will then give way to longer periods of relaxed political control.

We can suppose that in future years the swings of the Chinese political pendulum will not be so violent nor so extreme as in the past, but the vacillation will continue. They are unavoidable as long as political power remains concentrated at the top where policy is influenced by power struggles among the leaders. A more basic reason is that China still faces the challenges of economic development whereas the aims of political reform are somewhat muddled. China will grope ahead, then, taking two steps back for every three steps forward. But the difference between this kind of movement and the present situation of repeated swings is that it gives promise of a future where modest progress will replace chronic regression.

Notes

1. For further understanding of China's political reform movement, consult the following:
 Hong Chenghua: *Political Reforms since the Party's 3rd Plenum of the 11th Central Committee*.
 Wang Feixin: *Theory and Practise behind the Political Reforms since the Party's 3rd Plenum of the 11th Central Committee*.
 (Beijing: The Spring and Autumn Publishing Press, 1987), pp.19-29.
2. Cf. Robert Dahl, ed., *Regimes and Oppositions*, (London: Yale University Press, 1973) pp. 1-26.
3. Deng Xiaoping, *Take a Firm Stand to Oppose Bourgeois Liberalization*" from *Creating a Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (Revised and Enlarged Edition)* (Hong Kong: Joint Book Store, July 1987), pp.134-135.
4. Li Peng, *The People's Daily*, May 20, 1989, p.1.
5. For a theoretical study of factionalism, cf. Andrew Nathan, *A Factionalism Model for CCP Politics*, *The China Quarterly*, No. 53, (1973) p. 44.
6. Vera Schwarcz, *Behind a Partially Open Door: Chinese Intellectuals and the Post-Mao Reform Process*, *Pacific Affairs*, (Winter 1986-1987) p. 586.
7. Li Anyou (Andrew Nathan), *Prospects for Chinese Democracy*, " *Intellectuals*, Winter Edition 1990, Vol. 5, No. 2, p.21.