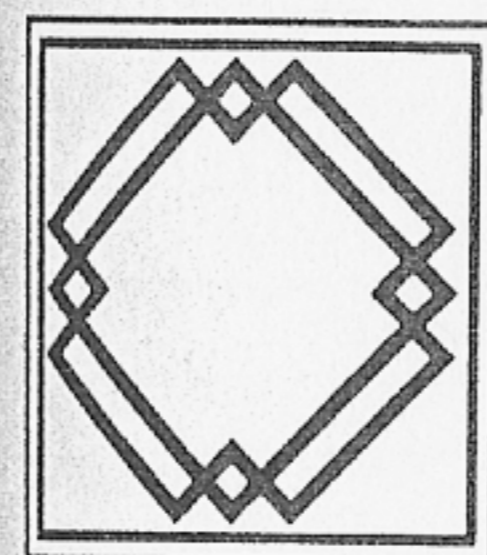


STUDENT PROTESTS IN
TWENTIETH-CENTURY
CHINA

THE VIEW FROM SHANGHAI

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EPILOGUE

THE MAY 4TH TRADITION IN THE 1980'S

WHEN I SET OFF FOR SHANGHAI in August 1986 to research the events treated in the preceding chapters, youth movements comparable to those of 1919 and 1947 seemed a thing of the past. Student demonstrations had occurred periodically after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. In the early 1950's, for example, students had marched to call for an end to American involvement in Korea, and later in the same decade educated youths had participated in the Hundred Flowers Campaign. In 1966-67, students had played key roles in the Red Guard Movement that launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, and in 1976 they had taken part in the April 5th Movement that helped signal the end of that "revolution." More recently still, students had joined other dissident intellectuals and workers in writing posters and giving streetside speeches criticizing the government during the Democracy Wall Movement of the late 1970's, and protests involving educated youths had taken place in Chinese cities throughout the first half of the 1980's. In 1980, for example, 87 students in the city of Changsha in Hunan Province staged a hunger strike to protest the government's attempt to keep a non-CCP member from running for local office. And just one year before I arrived in China, youths in Beijing and several other cities had staged a series of anti-Japanese demonstrations. But, although all these post-1949 events shared some features with the great student-led mass movements of the Republican era, none qualified as bona fide successors to struggles such as the May 4th Movement.

The students who took part in the anti-American demonstrations of the early 1950's, for example, though angered by the imperialist actions of a foreign power, had a relationship to China's own rulers very different from

that of their predecessors of 1919. May 4th activists had opposed native oppression and corruption as well as foreign aggression, but the anti-imperialist student movement of the early 1950's was directly sponsored by the new CCP regime.¹ Since there was no anti-government dimension to these anti-American marches, they had more in common with the GMD-engineered anti-Soviet "protests" of the 1940's than with the marches of 1919.

The Red Guard Movement, a much more complex and important struggle, also had a loyalist dimension that made it fundamentally different from May 4th-style struggles. Students involved in the Cultural Revolution employed many of the same tactics as their pre-1949 predecessors: they too wrote wall posters to express their grievances, surrounded municipal buildings to gain the attention of political leaders, and demanded free passage on trains bound for the capital. In addition, since the Red Guards were as concerned with influencing the laobaixing as earlier generations of educated youths had been, they relied upon many of the same stylistic devices in their propaganda—such as using drawings of tortoises and other kinds of animal imagery to vilify their opponents.² Such similarities aside, however, because of their general rejection and hatred of Western culture as well as foreign imperialism, their anti-intellectualism, and their intense personal loyalty to Mao Zedong, the Red Guards need to be placed outside the May 4th tradition. They themselves acknowledged this by singling out the Boxers rather than the student protesters of 1919 and 1935 as the heroes from the past with whom they identified most closely.³

The student activism that accompanied the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the campus struggles of the late 1970's and early 1980's, by contrast, did involve youths who thought of and presented themselves as inheritors of the May 4th tradition. In some cases protesters involved in these events even spoke of their efforts as part of a "new May 4th Movement," and in all cases they showed a fondness for many of the tactics examined in earlier chapters, such as staging mass actions on holidays and days of national humiliation (the first anti-Japanese protests of 1985 took place on the anniversary of the September 18th Incident of 1931), turning funeral marches into events that criticized the government (the April 5th Movement began with ceremonies marking Zhou Enlai's death), and using streetside lectures to spread their ideas (such lectures were common during the Democracy Wall Movement).⁴ Such similarities and continuities aside, however, neither the Hundred Flowers Campaign nor the student protests of the 1970's and early 1980's evolved into full-fledged equivalents to the movements examined in earlier case-study chapters. The April 5th Movement of 1976, the Changsha protest of 1980, and the anti-Japanese

agitation of 1985 all proved short-lived. And although the Democracy Wall Movement lasted a good deal longer, like the Hundred Flowers Campaign of the 1950's, it never developed into a broad-based mass movement.

THE REBIRTH OF THE MAY 4TH TRADITION

My image of May 4th-style popular struggles as a thing of the past was shattered in December 1986, for in that month a new student movement strikingly like those of the Republican era swept the nation.* I first heard about this new movement in the second week of December, when foreign teachers at Fudan University (where I was living) began to hear rumors that youths at the University of Science and Technology (Keji daxue) in Anhui Province (whose vice-chancellor at the time was the dissident Fang Lizhi) had staged two protests calling for more democracy. Foreign newspapers such as the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post*, which was available for sale in local hotels, soon confirmed that protests had taken place on December 5 and on the anniversary of the December 9th Movement. These papers also carried reports of other early December protests in Wuhan and Shenzhen, although the main issue in Shenzhen had not been democracy but a proposed tuition increase.⁵

Fudan itself remained fairly quiet until December 18, even though (as I would learn later) this was not true of other local campuses. Well before December 18, students at East China Normal University (Huadong shifan daxue) had marched around their campus protesting compulsory morning exercises, poor living conditions in the dorms, and the quality of cafeteria food. During this same period, their counterparts at Tongji and Jiaotong began to put up wall posters calling for increased political reforms and complaining about campus living conditions. Tongji's and Jiaotong's position in the vanguard of Shanghai's pro-democracy struggle was no accident. Fang Lizhi had given guest lectures at these two schools earlier in the fall of 1986, and (in part because of these lectures) students at Tongji and Jiaotong had established informal study groups before the Anhui protests to discuss methods for bringing about political change.

Unaware of these developments in other parts of the city, I spent the

*My discussion of the 1986–87 protests is based primarily upon firsthand observation of events in Shanghai, discussions with Chinese and Western participants and observers, and newspaper reports. Western wire service reports and translations of relevant Chinese-language press accounts can be found in the December 1986–January 1987 issues of Foreign Broadcast and Information Service (FBIS), *Daily Report: China*. A lively narrative of the protests can be found in Schell, *Discos and Democracy*, pp. 211–44.

morning of December 18 in the Fudan library scanning newspaper reports on the campus unrest of the 1940's and wondering whether Shanghai students would take to the streets to show their support for the new movement. I got my answer around noon when a Chinese friend told me that, given my scholarly interests, I might want to investigate what was happening at Fudan's front gate. Arriving at the gate, I saw a column of some 200–300 youths marching through the campus. Most of their banners simply identified the marchers as students from nearby Tongji University, but some of the placards carried political slogans such as “Long live democracy” (*Minzhu wansui*), “Down with bureaucratism” (*Fandui guanliao-zhuyi*), and “Democracy, freedom, equality” (*Minzhu, ziyou, pingdeng*).

Most of the crowd that had gathered seemed as surprised by the march as I was. In fact, since the Chinese press had not carried any reports on the protests in Anhui and Wuhan, I was better prepared for an event like this than some onlookers, although by December 18 many Fudan students and professors had heard about the other protests through Voice of America or BBC radio broadcasts, foreign newspapers, or word of mouth. The best informed of the observers told me that the Tongji students had come to the campus to chide Fudan students for being so slow to join the new student movement and to publicize a citywide march planned for the following day.

I spent the next morning at Tongji University reading the student wall posters, which by then completely covered all the bulletin boards in the center of the campus ordinarily reserved for official announcements (see photographic section). These posters were a varied lot. Some bore poems celebrating “democracy” (*minzhu*), a term whose meaning was seldom defined clearly; others were filled with factual accounts of recent student protests, such as the Anhui demonstration of December 9. Still others contained allusions to youth movements of the Republican era and calls for contemporary students to show as much bravery and patriotism as the heroes of 1919 and 1935. Many challenged Shanghai students to prove that they were as concerned with the fate of the nation as their counterparts in Anhui by staging demonstrations in the center of the city.

Later that same day I watched the first of these demonstrations. Early in the afternoon a large crowd of protesters converged on the headquarters of the Shanghai municipal government, a building that stands on a section of the Bund once part of the International Settlement. Many of the protesters, perhaps 2,000–3,000, had marched together for several miles from the Tongji and Fudan campuses north of the city in order to reach this destination. Other members of the crowd had come from campuses east of downtown Shanghai, such as Jiaotong and Huadong; still others were not students at all but curious passersby. Many demonstrators carried placards,

some of which were nothing more than crude banners made of sheets or dish towels, bearing school names or simple slogans celebrating democracy. There was little chanting and, aside from abortive attempts at choruses of the “Internationale,” to which few people appeared to know all of the words, little singing either.

The marchers had no clear sense of purpose once they reached the municipal government headquarters. After standing in front of the building for a half-hour or so and calling on the mayor to come out and speak to them, they tried to march down Nanjing Road. This plan was thwarted, however, by a police blockade. Since the demonstrators had no desire for a physical confrontation with the police officers—who for their part looked on the protesters with bemused expressions and seemed uninterested in interfering with the event as long as it kept within certain limits—the marchers headed up Fuzhou Road instead, a narrower street without the same symbolic resonances or commercial importance as Nanjing Road (see photographic section).

The column of demonstrators snaked along Fuzhou Road until it reached People's Square, a space in the center of the city where the Shanghai Race Course once stood and the headquarters of the local Communist party now stands. There the crowd broke up into groups of a few dozen to a few hundred people each, who clustered around youths giving speeches from atop makeshift platforms. A large contingent of police also gathered at People's Square as these speeches began, but rather than try to disrupt the rally, the officers contented themselves with cordoning off the area so that workers and other ordinary citizens would not be able to join the crowd. The only dramatic event that took place during this protest before I left to return to Fudan late in the afternoon came when one youth scaled the fence separating the party headquarters from the public part of the square. He was subsequently taken away by the police stationed in front of the official building.

I heard widely conflicting stories about how the protest ended later that evening and what took place during the early hours of the following morning, and it remains difficult to sort out truth from rumor. According to all accounts, some students went back to their schools directly from the People's Square rally, but others formed a column and marched back to the Bund. The main point of disagreement relates to what happened after these last protesters reached the Bund. Some wall posters and oral reports claimed that a core group of youths remained on the Bund quite late on the night of December 19, and that the police eventually moved in to force them to return to their schools. According to the most extreme of these accounts, the police arrested or beat up several dozen students. I never found any solid confirmation of beatings or formal arrests. Trustworthy

sources did agree, however, that police officers forced some students who did not want to leave the Bund to accept offers of free transportation (on buses supplied by the local authorities) back to their campuses.

Whatever actually occurred, the important thing in terms of the development of the movement was that most students believed that incidents of police brutality had taken place. This gave activists a stronger basis for organizing mass actions and a clearer focus when it came to articulating their goals and formulating demands. Prior to what wall posters at Fudan and other campuses dubbed (in time-honored fashion) the "December 19th Incident," local youths had nothing approaching a developed political agenda and were united only by a vague feeling of discontent arising from a variety of disparate grievances, ranging from the poor quality of campus food, to the CCP leadership's tardiness in introducing meaningful political reform, to the fact that Chinese security guards had roughed up a Tongji graduate student for dancing in the aisles during a recent concert by the Western pop group Jan and Dean. As news of the alleged beatings spread after December 19, however, issues of free speech and assembly came to the forefront and the student movement gained a clearer sense of direction.

The Fudan wall posters I read after December 19 were as varied as those at Tongji in terms of style and substance. I saw everything from poems to a lengthy essay comparing the current "December 19th Movement" to the great youth struggles of 1919 and 1935 to a translation of a *Far Eastern Economic Review* article on the Anhui protests of early December. The one element common to most if not all of these posters was the idea that the main goal of the present movement should be to fight for the right to protest itself. Thus, for example, posters that described the December 19th Incident invariably ended with demands that the police stop interfering with the nonviolent protests of patriotic students, which were legal acts according to the nation's constitution. Posters that focused on the official press's silence about the student demonstrations in Shanghai and elsewhere had a similar thrust; they generally ended by calling on the press to tell the people what was really going on. This and a related call for the official media to allow protesters air time to state the reasons behind the current unrest became two of the core demands of the student movement. A third was that local officials should engage in a meaningful dialogue with student leaders.

Not content with simply putting up wall posters condemning the December 19th Incident, Shanghai's students staged additional demonstrations in the center of the city on each of the next several days. These protests generally resembled the December 19 one: they usually began at the Bund and ended with rallies at either People's Square or back at the water-

front. There were some differences, however. First, at least on the two days immediately following the initial demonstration, each new march drew a larger crowd than the last; by Sunday, December 21, according to estimates by some reporters, 20,000–30,000 people were on the streets.⁶ This was in part because the number of schools involved in the movement grew steadily: genuinely angered by the same grievances and intent that their alma mater not appear any less patriotic than its counterparts, on each successive day students from several new schools would journey downtown, waving school banners to show which institution they represented.

Another difference was that the later protests were more coherent, less anarchic affairs than the first. This was in part because the December 19th Incident gave students a clearer focus. It was also because students got better organized and more experienced at demonstrating as time went on. During the initial march and rally on December 19, students spent much of their time milling about aimlessly, chatting happily among themselves, and waiting for someone else to do something. There was more organized chanting during later marches and (thanks to the appearance of wall posters with the words to the "Internationale") more effective singing. Students also succeeded in marching up Nanjing Road during some of their later demonstrations, a symbolic victory in their battle with the police, who remained remarkably restrained in their behavior toward the protesters during the days that followed the alleged incidents of brutality.

The demonstrations in the heart of the city were the highpoint of the Shanghai movement, but students either planned or carried out several other mass actions as well. A visit by Shanghai mayor Jiang Zemin (the man promoted to the post of CCP general secretary in 1989 after Zhao Ziyang's fall) to Jiaotong University to try to convince students at his alma mater to refrain from political activities, for example, turned into a protest gathering of sorts when students heckled the mayor for spouting empty platitudes and challenged him with difficult questions that he obviously did not want to answer. Student activists at Fudan and other schools also engaged in shouting matches with members of official student bodies, which protesters claimed were unrepresentative organizations filled with "running dogs" handpicked by the authorities. Then, finally, wall posters appeared throughout the city calling on youths to stage a general classroom strike on Monday, December 22, to complement the ongoing series of demonstrations.

This ambitious strike never took place, however. As the new week started, the Shanghai movement began to wind down instead of intensify. One reason for the movement's decline was that the authorities' patience with the protests was clearly running out. One thing that had emboldened

youths in Shanghai and other cities was a feeling that powerful figures within the CCP leadership might look favorably upon pro-democracy activities. Students had attributed a great deal of significance to the fact that in November the leading official newspaper, *Renmin ribao* (People's daily), had published a number of articles praising Anhui's University of Science and Technology (whose administrators were experimenting with running that institution along more democratic lines). The youths viewed articles such as these, as well as the restraint the authorities showed in dealing with the early December protests, as signs that a faction within the ruling elite (that might even include Deng Xiaoping) was as frustrated as the students were with the slow pace of political reform. The youths who marched on December 19 did not feel, therefore, that they were taking any great risk by protesting. Nor did they think that CCP leaders had any cause for concern, since the protests were intended not to attack either the party or its basic policies, but simply to help speed up the implementation of reforms that were supposed to be in the works. By the time the citywide student strike was set to start in Shanghai, however, school administrators and party officials had begun to send clear signals that participants in further, more militant protests would be risking their futures.

The authorities relied primarily upon propaganda rather than force to convince Shanghai's students to return to classes and stay off the streets. The Public Security Bureau pasted official notices on bulletin boards near protesters' wall posters that warned students not to be misled by a "small group of malcontents" trying to stir up trouble on local campuses. Radio broadcasts and newspapers criticized the city's educated youths for creating traffic problems and preventing laborers from going to and from work. School administrators and official student organizations took part in this propaganda campaign as well, by pasting up posters of their own that expressed sympathy for the protesters' goals but cautioned that further demonstrations would hinder rather than help the cause of reform. To back up this point, a few of these posters noted that derogatory comments about leading reformists within the party had been heard during some protests. Official propaganda pieces also used the specter of the Cultural Revolution to denigrate the new protests by claiming that the "democracy" for which the students were clamoring seemed the same as the "great democracy" that the Red Guards had favored, and by reminding readers and listeners that the young activists of the 1960's had also used anonymous wall posters.

These references to Red Guardism were effective, despite the fact that many of the most active protesters in 1986 were freshmen and sophomores of nineteen or twenty, and hence too young to remember much about the excesses of the Cultural Revolution firsthand. Even the youngest protesters had heard horror stories about those dark years from relatives,

however, and the idea that they had anything in common with the anti-foreign Red Guards was appalling to many students in 1986, since these youths wanted the authorities to widen, not close, the new "open door." The idea that pro-democracy protests might inadvertently strengthen the hand of opponents of reform within the party also worried students, for they remained convinced that leaders such as Deng Xiaoping (then still considered an ardent reformer) had recently put China on the right path. One indication of this concern was that as soon as official notices condemning the protests as hurting the reforms began to appear, students (who until then had tended not to mention specific political leaders in their writings) began to insert praise for Deng in some of their wall posters and banners.

Pragmatic fears about their own futures also played a role in making students abandon their plans for more militant protests. The case of the disputed events of December 19 aside, the police do not seem to have resorted to strong-arm tactics in Shanghai in 1986. Nonetheless, as soon as the official propaganda campaign against the movement began, youths were well aware that new actions would involve serious risks. Rumors that the party was compiling a blacklist of protesters and that student activists might face imprisonment or at the very least jeopardize their chances of being assigned to a good job after graduation were heard everywhere. Whether such written blacklists existed was irrelevant, because from December 19 on video cameras had routinely scanned the crowds that gathered outside the municipal government building, and students knew that the authorities could use these visual records to identify protesters. The youths, though supportive of Deng Xiaoping, also remembered his treatment of the last protesters he had criticized for going too far: "If you want to know what democracy means," some student banners read, "ask Wei Jingsheng" (a leader of the Democracy Wall Movement incarcerated at the end of that struggle who remained a political prisoner in 1986).

A mixture of factors thus contributed to the decline of the Shanghai protest movement in 1986. Concern that the struggle was hurting the cause it sought to help, worries about the form repression might take, political inexperience, lack of direction, and insufficient organization within the movement all played some part in getting students to return to their campuses. By Christmas, the demonstrations in Shanghai had stopped and—thanks to the efforts of special janitorial brigades—the bulletin boards of all local campuses once again displayed only officially approved notices. But although Shanghai had emerged as the main center for student activity on December 19 and was the site of the largest demonstrations of the year, the 1986 democracy movement did not end when that city's youths stopped marching. Students in Nanjing, who had been fairly quiescent during the first weeks of the month, staged a number of demon-

strations in late December.⁷ The educated youths of Beijing, who had also been comparatively slow to join the movement, continued to participate in dramatic protests—including a New Year's Day march to Tiananmen Square and public burnings of official newspapers that had criticized the student struggle—up through the first days of 1987.⁸ Nonetheless, by mid-January the last of the campus protests had ceased.

Aftershocks from the movement continued to be felt for some time, however. As soon as the demonstrations stopped, the party leadership instigated a purge of several prominent reformist figures and launched a general campaign against "bourgeois liberalization," the trend official propagandists blamed for filling students' heads with incorrect ideas. The highest-ranking victim of this campaign was CCP general secretary Hu Yaobang, a leading proponent of reform whom the party's elder statesmen held responsible for the pro-democracy protests, even though he had issued no public statements supporting the demonstrations and few student wall posters or banners had praised him. Party propagandists never spelled out the precise nature of Hu's supposed role in the movement; instead they contented themselves with blaming the former general secretary for creating the unhealthy ideological atmosphere that made the protests possible and for failing to suppress the demonstrations once the troubles began. The official press also attacked several leading dissident figures within the intelligentsia, including the astrophysicist Fang Lizhi and the journalist Liu Binyan, for helping to stir up discontent.

Whereas these prominent intellectuals were expelled from the party and deprived of some of their posts, few student leaders were punished directly for their actions. A small number of workers were jailed for committing acts of violence—in most cases helping to overturn cars or other vehicles—during specific demonstrations. The police seem to have spent much less energy tracking down student protesters; most of the educated youths arrested or brought in for questioning during or after the movement were released from custody after at most a few hours. The only repercussions most students suffered, in fact, was that they had to spend part of summer 1987 doing community service in rural areas as part of a government program aimed at instilling their generation with a new spirit of self-sacrifice.

THE 1986–1987 "DEMOCRACY" PROTESTS IN PERSPECTIVE

The protests of late 1986 and early 1987 were important because they were the first sustained series of student demonstrations in the People's Republic not directly sponsored or explicitly encouraged by top party officials. As

such, they were a throwback of sorts to pre-1949 mass movements. The students who took part in Shanghai's December 19th Movement borrowed some of their rhetoric from the Democracy Wall Movement of the previous decade. In addition, although they vehemently denied any similarities between themselves and the Red Guards, the demonstrations of the late 1960's, as well as those that accompanied the April 5th Movement of 1976 and various struggles of the early 1980's, provided the students of 1986 and 1987 with important scripts from which to improvise.* Nonetheless, though indebted in many ways to various events of the Communist era, the December 19th Movement had most in common with student struggles of the Republican period, particularly those of the Civil War years.

The events of late 1986–87 resembled most closely those of 1947, for the Anti-Hunger, Anti-Civil War Movement of that year also evolved gradually out of a series of sporadic protests triggered by disparate causes. In both the late 1940's and the late 1980's, poor living conditions and inflation played a prominent role in stirring up student discontent, but demands for more free speech and complaints about police brutality ended up at the center of the struggle. In addition, in both spring 1947 and fall 1986 student protesters staged one of their first important protests on a politically charged date (May 4 in one case and December 9 in the other) that the party in power reserved for official celebrations of a revolutionary anniversary. Some of the slogans participants in the two movements

*The connections between the Red Guard Movement and the protests of the late 1980's, including those of 1989, are difficult to assess at this time. Any speculation inevitably leads to controversy, because of the way in which official propagandists tried in both 1986 and 1989 to discredit student activism by conjuring up images of the "ten years of chaos" of the Cultural Revolution (see below). The contrasting implications of four facts indicate the complexity of the issue. (1) Many participants in the 1986 and 1989 protests were convinced that their actions and ideas were in no way comparable to those of the Red Guards. (2) Protesters can be influenced in subtle ways even by past movements from which they wish to dissociate themselves; this was clearly the case in 1986 and 1989. (3) Some of the recent actions that looked most like resurrections of Cultural Revolution symbolism were in fact infused with new, quite different meanings: for example, whereas Red Guards carried pictures of Chairman Mao to prove their devotional loyalty to the Great Helmsman, in 1989 similar representations (though often of a younger, pre-Cultural Revolution Mao and sometimes showing Mao alongside other deceased party leaders such as Zhou Enlai and even Liu Shaoqi) were used largely to suggest that current powerholders were falling short of the ideals of earlier leaders of the CCP (see Esherick and Wasserstrom, "Acting out Democracy"). (4) Some of the older graduate students and younger teachers who marched alongside and advised undergraduate protesters during the late 1980's were former Red Guards, as were some of the intellectuals who supported the movement from the sidelines (for a case in point, see Human Rights in China, *Children of the Dragon*, pp. 43–46). For interesting, though at times conflicting, discussion of supposed and real tactical and ideological similarities between the Red Guards and the protesters of the late 1980's, see Yi Mu and Thompson, *Crisis at Tiananmen*, esp. p. 28; A. Chan and Unger, "Voices from the Protest Movement"; and Schwarcz, "Memory, Commemoration, and the Plight of China's Intellectuals."

shouted were even similar or identical—"Long live democracy" figured prominently in the protests of 1947 and 1986 alike—as were many of the tactics they used and the march routes they followed. Virtually all the older Chinese in any kind of official capacity with whom I spoke during and immediately after the December 19th Movement echoed the official party line that protests of the Communist era differed in all respects from those that had helped bring the CCP to power. The similarities to past events were so clear in 1986, however, that men and women who had taken part in the Anti-Hunger, Anti-Civil War Movement as youths usually admitted informally that what students were doing in the era of Deng Xiaoping was indeed strikingly like what they themselves had done in the time of Jiang Jieshi.

Despite these and other points of similarity, the December 19th Movement differed from the Anti-Hunger, Anti-Civil War Movement (and indeed from all the great student struggles of the Republican era) in certain basic ways. Most important, the students of 1986 did not make concerted efforts to mobilize workers to support their cause. Although a large number of individuals not connected with academic institutions joined the marches in Shanghai and other cities in 1986, students not only seemed uninterested in trying to capitalize upon labor discontent but also sometimes actively discouraged workers from joining their movement. For example, one reliable source told me of instances in which workers went to People's Square in Shanghai and, standing just outside the police cordon, called out "We support you, younger brothers" to the youthful protesters. Instead of responding happily to these calls, the students told the workers to go home.

There were several reasons for this lack of interest in worker support. One was elitism on the part of some student protesters. As educated youths, proud of their status as intellectuals, many protesters simply viewed their movement as too high-minded a concern to interest workers. Although on the surface their calls for more "democracy" would appear to have been broad-based appeals for support without any kind of class basis, many student propagandists invested this term with distinctly elitist connotations. Although the most commonly used and best English-language translation for the Chinese term *minzhu* is "democracy," as used in many wall posters the term had little or nothing to do with things such as universal suffrage or political pluralism. Instead, the authors of these posters often implied (as did Fang Lizhi in some of his 1986 speeches) that the most important step the CCP could take to make China more "democratic" was to grant the intelligentsia a stronger voice in political affairs.⁹

But there was another reason besides elitism that made educated youths refrain from trying to mobilize workers in 1986: many students still

thought that Deng Xiaoping's regime was essentially on the right track and feared that if workers became involved, the movement would take on an anti-reform hue. They knew that the best way to appeal to laborers was to emphasize issues such as inflation and the new price hikes scheduled for 1987. It would have been easy for students to focus on these topics, since intellectuals like workers in state enterprises were on fixed salaries and hence among those most vulnerable to the hardships caused by price increases. Nonetheless, although all the students I talked with admitted that cost of living problems had played a role in fostering discontent on their campuses, educated youths consistently steered away from making inflation or the price hikes central issues. They feared that any such move would imply criticism of the recent economic experiments with free markets and hence aid the anti-reform camp within the CCP leadership, the very people students claimed were standing in the way of democratization.

One other basic difference between the protests of late 1986 and the great pre-1949 mass movements was that neither anti-imperialist nor anti-foreign sentiment played a major role in the December 19th Movement. Incidents involving foreign powers were a direct cause of the student struggles of 1919, 1925, and 1931, and even though the Anti-Hunger, Anti-Civil War Movement was triggered primarily by domestic incidents, student anger over the behavior of U.S. troops stationed in China and the GMD's reliance on Western aid helped lay the groundwork for the protests of spring 1947. In 1986, by contrast, student protesters were not critical of any foreign power. Anti-foreign feelings have never disappeared completely as an influence on the behavior of Chinese students, as the anti-Japanese protests of 1985 and the anti-African incidents of December 1988 show all too clearly.¹⁰ Nonetheless, in the 1986 protests, as far as I could tell, anti-foreignism was not a factor: if the students referred to foreign powers at all, it was to praise those that were more "democratic" than China.

The comparatively limited scope and effectiveness of the December 19th Movement also differentiated it from the great student struggles of the Republican era. Although demonstrations occurred in cities throughout China in 1986 and early 1987, the fight for democracy did not evolve into a true national movement. Students in different parts of the country did not come together, as their predecessors of 1919 and other years had, to form an umbrella union capable of coordinating nationwide protest activities. Nor did youths in individual cities establish sophisticated, highly bureaucratized local protest leagues. Even in Shanghai, where the December 19th Movement reached its peak, protest actions were generally carried out in an ad hoc fashion throughout the struggle. In part because of their lack of organizational structures, the protesters of 1986–87 also

proved unable to carry through any sustained mass actions other than marches and rallies. Thus no equivalents to the dramatic train commandeers of the 1930's and 1940's or the long-term classroom boycotts of the Warlord era took place at this time.

A final contrast has to do with the comparative ease with which the authorities were able to end the December 19th Movement. The student movements examined earlier never ended until either the participants felt they had won important concessions from the authorities (as happened with the dismissal of the "three traitorous officials" in 1919) or those authorities had used mass arrests and violence to cripple the struggle (as happened in 1947). In 1986 and 1987, however, the CCP leadership was able to end the student unrest without making major concessions to the protesters or using force to crush the movement. In sum, although the democracy protests of the mid-1980's marked a revival of the May 4th protest tradition, the movement that emerged was a relatively minor affair compared to the great student struggles of 1919, 1925, 1931, and 1947.

THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT OF 1989

If the events of 1986 proved that May 4th-style student activism was alive and well in the China of Deng Xiaoping, those of 1989 showed that educated youths were still capable of leading major as well as minor mass movements.* The People's Movement of 1989, which began in April and ended soon after the Beijing Massacre of June 4, was in one sense a continuation of the December 19th Movement. The student protesters of 1989 rallied around the same watchword of *minzhu*, a term that they too tended to either define in the elitist fashion outlined above, or use in an all-encompassing sense to connote a loosening of political and cultural constraints.¹¹ The protesters of both years also shared many of the same specific complaints: in 1989, as in 1986, the slow pace of political reform and the poor quality of campus living conditions helped inspire youths to take to the streets. Moreover, the connections between the democracy struggles of 1986 and 1989 go far beyond the goals and grievances participants shared: there were also important continuities in personnel. Many

* Here and elsewhere in this section, my information comes largely from discussions with Chinese and Western observers of and participants in the student protests of 1989. In order to protect the anonymity of Chinese informants, I never give specific names to refer to information they have provided, although I credit Western informants where appropriate. In addition, in both cases, wherever possible I provide citations to relevant document collections, articles, and the like. The Bibliographic essay provides an overview of these sources, but I should mention here that my basic understanding of the struggles has been shaped most profoundly by the following four essays, all of which are by scholars who were in China in spring 1989: Pieke, "Observations"; Esherick, "Xi'an Spring"; Saich, "When Worlds Collide"; and Yasheng Huang, "Origins."

campus activists of 1989, including some of the struggle's leaders, such as Liu Gang, received their initiation into the world of street politics during the December 19th Movement.

As strong as these similarities and connections between the two movements were, however, the events of 1989 were quite unlike those of 1986 and 1987 in terms of the militancy of student demands and the effectiveness of student actions. One reason for this difference was the students' greater disenchantment with the political situation as a whole. As a result the participants in the People's Movement were less wary of bringing economic as well as political issues to the fore and of looking for popular support outside the confines of the campus. A number of events during the years since 1986 had alienated the already disenchanted academic community still further from China's rulers. Rumors and verified reports of high-level corruption and nepotism increased markedly in the late 1980's, for example, and just before the spring protests began, the party announced that it would abandon its recent experiments with allowing college graduates some freedom in job selection and that henceforth the state would once again assign them to posts as it saw fit. Even in April 1989 few student protesters felt that the party should be displaced as the nation's ruling party, although by the end of the movement this situation began to change dramatically. From the very start of the 1989 protests, however, student protesters had a much stronger sense than had the participants in the December 19th Movement that China's problems stemmed from deep-rooted causes rather than one or two specific policy decisions.

There was still a good deal of elitism within the student movement when the new round of protests began in April 1989. Throughout the spring, many educated youths were ambivalent at best about bringing workers out onto the streets; during some early demonstrations educated youths even roped their brigades off from the general populace to prevent members of the population at large from joining their marches.¹² Nonetheless, on the whole, the campus activists of 1989 were more interested than their predecessors of 1986-87 in gaining the support of non-students. During May and early June in particular, students frequently called on teachers, journalists, and even policemen and soldiers to join them on the streets. In a move reminiscent of the May 30th Movement, some student lecture teams descended on factories to try to bring workers into the movement as well. And support from all these and other social groups was forthcoming: spectators cheered when student demonstrators passed, journalists marched for a free press, donations of food and drink poured into Tiananmen Square during the student occupation, and workers in various cities formed independent labor unions.¹³

In addition to growing out of a more deeply rooted sense of discontent

and evolving into a more broadly based mass movement, the People's Movement soon began to outstrip its predecessor in many ways. The student organizations of 1989 were much more sophisticated than those of 1986–87, in part simply because campus activists had spent the intervening years meeting together informally in dorm rooms and cafeterias to talk about political issues and establish the personal ties so vital to the formation of effective campus leagues. The “democracy salons” that evolved out of these informal gatherings were crucial to the growth of the 1989 movements: just as May 4th activists had honed their organizational and oratorical skills in speechmaking corps during the early spring of 1919, key figures in the People's Movement—Wang Dan, Wuer Kaixi, and Shen Tong—were active participants in or leaders of campus study societies before they emerged as heads of student protest leagues.¹⁴

The student movement of 1989 also differed from its immediate predecessor in terms of the range of mass actions the participants staged, the attention the world press accorded the protests, and of course the severity of the suppression. In terms of its overall impact and importance, in fact, the People's Movement had most in common with the great youth movements of the Republican era, although it differed from these struggles in several important ways. Anti-imperialism, for example, though a constant feature in pre-1949 student unrest, had no more significance in getting students out onto the streets in 1989 than it had in 1986, and in contrast to the May 30th Movement and the student struggles of the 1930's and 1940's, during the People's Movement there was no organized opposition party with a significant presence on Chinese campuses to fan the flames of campus unrest.

There were differences as well between past and present relating to student tactics and propaganda. Hunger strikes of the sort students staged in 1989, though not without precedent in Chinese history, were not a central part of the Republican-era student protest repertoire.* The students' fa-

*As other scholars have noted, stories of heroes denying themselves food in order to draw attention to political or social injustice can be found in dynastic histories more than 2,000 years old (Watson, “Renegotiation of Chinese Cultural Identity”), and Chinese Buddhists have a long tradition of using fasting as a protest technique (Pieke, “Ritualized Rebellion”). Closer to the present, Shanghai silk weavers used a hunger strike as a collective bargaining tactic during a Republican-era labor dispute (Elizabeth Perry, pers. comm.). Such precedents aside, the tactic became an integral part of the Chinese *student* protest repertoire only recently, with the Hunan strike of 1980 being the pivotal event in this process (Yi Mu and Thompson, *Crisis at Tiananmen*, pp. 42–44), and even in 1989 educated youths still frequently described their fasts as an adaptation of the methods of Gandhi and other foreign practitioners of nonviolent resistance. This said, the novelty of the hunger strike even as a student tactic should not be overstressed; throughout the twentieth century educated youths have turned frequently to related techniques that carried similar symbolic connotations of self-sacrifice and commitment, such as swearing oaths to persevere until death to achieve a goal and committing suicide to draw attention to oppression. For further discussion of this point and relevant citations, see Esherick and Wasserstrom, “Acting out Democracy.”

mous Goddess of Democracy statue was also a novelty, as was the use participants in the movement made of recently coined foreign terms (“glasnost” and “people power” appeared on some banners) and recently developed communication technologies (such as fax machines and television broadcasts), and the prominent roles that Wuer Kaixi and other members of national minority groups assumed in student protest leagues.¹⁵ The sustained student occupation of Tiananmen Square itself, furthermore, had no real Republican-era precedent. The festive atmosphere that accompanied some stages of this occupation—the rock music, dancing, and jubilant behavior of students in May led foreign journalists to speak of a “Chinese Woodstock” and an “almost millenarian sense” among protesters¹⁶—also set the act apart from the typical May 4th-style mass gathering.

There were, finally, basic quantitative differences between the 1989 movement and its Republican-era equivalents. Although some pre-1949 student-led marches had involved tens of thousands of educated youths, professors, and ordinary citizens, these demonstrations were no match for the biggest mass actions of 1989: reporters estimated that no less than one million people took part in some Beijing protests, and the largest demonstrations in provincial cities such as Wuhan, Chengdu, and Shanghai attracted crowds in the hundreds of thousands.¹⁷ If the size of the protesting crowds exceeded anything seen before 1949, the numbers of people affected by the state-sponsored violence that followed these marches was also unlike anything seen during previous May 4th-style mass movements. As earlier chapters have shown, Chinese and foreign powerholders used violent methods to suppress student struggles throughout the Republican period. Between May 1925 and March 1926 scores of unarmed demonstrators were killed when first members of foreign-run police and defense forces and then later soldiers and guards in Chinese-run units turned their guns upon protesting crowds, and in 1947 the GMD launched a sustained campaign of mass arrests and intimidation to terrorize dissidents. The sheer level of carnage seen in the June 4 Massacre and related events in Chengdu was, however, unprecedented in the annals of Chinese student movements.*

*As a participant in public forums and seminars on the People's Movement, I have heard panelists and members of the audience compare the bloodshed of 1989 to a variety of other events, including the GMD's Party Purification drive of 1927 and violent suppression of dissent on Taiwan in 1947; the CCP's Anti-Rightist Campaign of the 1950's and Cultural Revolution purges; and the massacres of Korean and Burmese students in the 1980's. All of these events, some of which involved higher death tolls than the massacres of June 1989, are indeed analogous in one way or another to the violent repression of the People's Movement. Nonetheless, if we limit discussion to May 4th-style protests that ended in bloodshed, the March 18 Tragedy of 1926, in which the death toll was high but clearly not comparable to that of June 4, remains the event closest to the massacres of 1989. For a discussion of similarities

These and other contrasts and novelties notwithstanding, the similarities between the 1989 struggle and the mass movements examined in earlier chapters are more striking than the differences. This is especially true of student tactics, since the youths of 1989 relied heavily upon many traditional May 4th protest forms. Like their counterparts of 1919 and other years, these youths held mass rallies, marched through city streets waving banners emblazoned with the name of their school, petitioned the authorities, and gave streetside lectures to publicize their cause.

The continuities between past and present are also evident in patterns of organization and mobilization. During their dramatic occupation of Beijing's Tiananmen Square, for example, educated youths formed a shadow bureaucracy much like those their predecessors had established to coordinate pre-1949 mass actions (see Chapters 2, 4, and 5). In 1989, as so often before, students set up a sophisticated protest league complete with specialized bureaus to oversee tasks such as sending representatives to speak to foreign reporters, preventing unauthorized personnel from interfering with strategy meetings by student leaders, and supplying medical aid to sick or injured protesters.¹⁸ As in the past, students even took on the roles of police officers at times, directing traffic near the Square and apprehending several people for splattering ink on a giant portrait of Chairman Mao.¹⁹ In addition, although little concrete information has come to light thus far concerning the way in which protest leagues evolved and student leaders were selected, preliminary evidence suggests that the pre-existing ties and experiences described in Chapter 5 as key factors in Republican-era mobilization may have played equally important roles in 1989.*

between the violence of March 18 and June 4, see Barmé, "Blood Offering." For a clear account of what exactly took place on June 4, 1989, which rightly takes pains to dispell some of the incorrect impressions left by the initial media coverage—for example, it emphasizes that most of those killed were not students but members of the laobaixing and that most of the violence took place near, but not in, Tiananmen Square—see Munro, "Who Died in Beijing, and Why."

*Craig Calhoun's "Beijing Spring" is one of the firsthand accounts that addresses issues of this sort most directly. Calhoun argues (p. 442) that much organizing in 1989 "came through the borrowing of templates from other settings" and that class monitors often evolved into key figures in the mobilization process, since they were "as prepared to organize food for hunger strikers" as they ordinarily were to supervise the "circulation of course materials." Francis, "Progress of Protest," notes in a similar vein that the highly organized nature of official campus life ironically served to prepare educated youths for new protest roles. The political experience Shen Tong, Wang Dan, and Wuer Kaixi had gained through participation in study societies and democracy salons in early 1989 has already been noted above, but it is worth pointing out that at least one of these youths, Wuer, had also honed his leadership skills in another setting: his high school's student council (Yu Mok Chiu and Harrison, *Voices from Tiananmen*, p. 155). Heads of provincial protest groups were also frequently youths used to playing leadership roles. To give but one example, a female student leader of the People's

There are strong similarities as well between the propaganda techniques youths used in 1989 and those examined in Chapter 8. Protesters once again used a variety of different "languages" to communicate with different audiences, and once again not all of these languages were verbal. The students used animal imagery in their propaganda (see, for example, the Shanghai wall poster portraying Li Peng as a gorilla included in the photographic section); they smashed small bottles to show their displeasure with Deng Xiaoping, whose given name is a homophone for small bottle; and they wore distinctive clothing—headbands covered with slogans and "Science and Democracy" T-shirts—that announced their political views.

Once again, student texts intended for the laobaixing focused on key words and readily accessible symbols with relevance and emotive power for Chinese of all classes. After June 4, for example, blood-related imagery reminiscent of that propagandists had turned to following the massacres of the mid-1920's figured prominently in student publicity drives. In Nanjing, students covered wall posters with the character *xue* written in red ink to symbolize the blood of martyrs.²⁰ In Beijing, youths displayed bloody shirts taken from the backs of victims of the June 4 Massacre. And, in Shanghai, students at Fudan turned the entire front gate of their university into a call for mourning and revenge. First, they placed a mourning band on the national flag flying above the gate to symbolize the death of China. Then, quoting from Lu Xun's famous essay on the March 18th Massacre of 1926, "More Roses Without Blooms," they wrote the slogan "blood debts must be repaid in kind" in bold letters across the top of the gate.²¹

As in the past, student communications with the laobaixing also stressed nationalist themes. Even though anti-foreign and anti-imperialist slogans were absent this time, educated youths continued to define their struggle as a patriotic one, an effort to "save the nation" (*jiuguo*) from corrupt officials. Students made this point through a variety of means, ranging from pasting up posters detailing specific acts of corruption committed by officials and their children to joining with teachers and actors to perform comic cross-talk dialogues mocking CCP leaders.*

In still another parallel to past propaganda activities, students turned to different techniques and stressed different themes when trying to reach foreign audiences as opposed to the laobaixing. In an effort to gain the

Movement in Qufu had been a department representative (a post similar to a classroom monitor, but with a higher status and wider responsibilities) before the struggle started.

*One of the most interesting of these propaganda performances used comic cross-talk and operatic techniques to satirize Li Peng (who was portrayed as a conniving prostitute currying the favor of an old man) and Deng Xiaoping (as the elderly patron). I am grateful to Henry Rosemont, Jr., who witnessed the display, for describing this performance.

support of the world community, the students of 1989 wrote some of the slogans on their banners in English and—especially at the time of Gorbachev's visits to Beijing and Shanghai—Russian, as well as other foreign languages, and they tended to downplay “patriotic” concerns in these communications and emphasize the democratic aspect of their movement. They also used other techniques to make their struggle seem comparable to those of earlier protesters in other lands, from wearing shirts covered with slogans such as “We shall overcome” to citing parallels between their use of hunger strikes and those of dissidents in foreign nations to covering their banners with quotes such as “Give me liberty or give me death.”²²

The specific foreign analogies and symbols protesters invoked in 1989 were often recent ones, but there was nothing new about Chinese students using allusions to non-Chinese events to make sense of their own actions and to gain the support of foreign observers. As Chapter 8 has shown, as early as 1919 Chinese students were invoking images of the Magna Carta and other Western icons and comparing their fight against Japan to the Allies' fight against Germany to gain foreign understanding of and support for the May 4th Movement. When Shanghai students carried an effigy of the Statue of Liberty during several mid-May parades (see photographic section), and when youths in Beijing erected their famous Goddess of Democracy in Tiananmen Square later that same month, they were following a time-honored tradition of incorporating Western symbols into their propaganda campaigns.

These statues were more complex icons than this last comment suggests, however, for while they evoked one set of images for foreign observers, they evoked others for Chinese citizens. The Goddess of Democracy, for example, was not an exact copy of the Statue of Liberty, although Western press accounts often implied that this was the case. The Goddess combined elements borrowed from that sculpture with motifs reminiscent of effigies of Chinese popular deities and was similar in other ways to the Socialist-Realist representations of Communist heroes and heroines that grace PRC monuments. The Shanghai Statue of Liberty was a faithful copy of the work that stands in New York's harbor, but its use as the centerpiece of a parade gave it special connotations in the Chinese context, since representations of gods were traditionally carried in a similar fashion, and during the Cultural Revolution large white effigies of Chairman Mao were used in the same way during National Day spectacles. Thus, as in the past, not only did the students of 1989 produce separate texts to appeal to different audiences, they also created texts whose resonances depended on the cultural background of the observer, just as the references to “national extinction” and representations of tortoises that filled Shang-

hai student propaganda of the Warlord era had different connotations for native and foreign citizens of Shanghai.*

As for official responses, the parallels between the events of 1989 and those of the Republican era remain strong, for virtually everything the CCP did had some kind of pre-1949 equivalent. The official call for public meetings with specially selected student “leaders” in April was reminiscent of Jiang Jieshi's effort over a half-century before to undermine the December 9th Movement by convening an equally contrived national student conference. When China's Communist rulers issued statements dismissing the popular protests of 1989 as the creation of a handful of troublemakers beholden to a foreign power, imposed martial law to try to keep people off the streets, and organized obviously phony pro-government rallies to bolster support for their regime, they were also using measures to which their pre-1949 counterparts had turned to suppress earlier expressions of discontent.²³ Even the “big lie” propaganda campaign after June 4, during which officials claimed that no massacre had taken place and that soldiers rather than protesters had been the main victims of violence, was not completely unprecedented: in 1925 and 1926, the authorities had tried in a similar fashion to keep people from knowing how many demonstrators had been killed in confrontations and to claim that soldiers and policemen involved in these events had acted only to protect themselves.²⁴

Ironically, many of the top CCP officials conducting the repression of the People's Movement and the accompanying campaign of misinformation began their own political careers as student protesters and radical propagandists. Both Qiao Shi (the national minister of security) and Jiang Zemin (who was Shanghai party secretary during the protests and CCP general secretary during the campaign to discredit the movement that followed the June 4 Massacre), for example, were active in the Shanghai youth movement during the Civil War years. Yao Yilin (a senior vice-premier and a member of the Politburo's Standing Committee) was a leading figure in the December 9th Movement of 1935, and Deng Xiaoping's involvement with underground newspapers, during the time he spent in France as a student and organizer, earned him the title of “Dr. Mimeograph.” Even this irony of former protesters taking charge of suppress-

*For the construction and meaning of the Chinese statues of “liberty” and “democracy,” see Yi Mu and Thompson, *Crisis at Tiananmen*, p. 72; Human Rights in China, *Children of the Dragon*, pp. 116–23; and Gladney, “Bodily Positions and Social Dispositions.” Gladney highlights the similarity between these statues and the effigies of Mao carried during parades of the Cultural Revolution era, and notes that the protesters had recently been reminded of these parades by clips in the influential film *He Shang* (River elegy), which was openly shown in early 1989 before being banned as subversive. For pictures of the white Mao statues in question, see *China Reconstructs*, Dec. 1966, p. 3; and *Beijing Review*, Oct. 3, 1969, p. 7.

ing and discrediting renewed outbreaks of student unrest was nothing new, however; the same thing had occurred during the Nationalist era. Shao Lizi, a participant in one of the earliest Shanghai campus strikes in 1905 and a key adviser to the student activists of 1919 and 1925 (see Chapters 1, 2, and 4), is but one of the most famous cases in point. By the 1930's both Shao and his longtime comrade in arms Yu Youren had risen to prominent positions within the Nationalist regime; these and other former activists played a part in the GMD's campaigns to contain campus unrest during the 1930's and 1940's.

Another point of continuity between past and present has to do with the importance of factional splits within the ruling party. Many details about the intraparty divisions, alignments, and realignments within the CCP during spring 1989 remain obscure. It is clear, however, that disagreements within the Chinese leadership over how best to deal with the earliest student protests profoundly influenced the development of the movement. Whether the result of genuine ideological divisions, personal rivalries between individuals and cliques loyal to specific leaders, or (most likely) a combination of both, these disagreements were responsible for much of the hesitancy and inconsistency that characterized the party's initial official responses to the protests of April and early May. These disagreements helped the movement expand: as in 1986, the lack of clear signals made protesters feel that at least some people in high positions supported their calls for swifter reforms, a belief that later events—for example, Zhao Ziyang's tearful meeting with students at Tiananmen before his fall from power—indicate may have been well founded. Here again, the parallels with events of the Nationalist era are striking, for (as Chapters 6, 7, and 9 have shown) factional divisions within the GMD played comparable roles in the growth of pre-1949 student movements, such as the anti-Japanese struggle of 1931 and the Anti-Hunger, Anti-Civil War Movement.

MAY 4TH STREET THEATER IN 1989

It was by no means clear at the outset that the protests of 1989 would evolve into a struggle comparable to the great student movements of the Republican era. Some similarities and continuities between past and present began to emerge, however, from the moment the first mass actions took place in mid-April. The students who took part in these gatherings improvised upon one of the most deeply entrenched scripts in the May 4th repertoire, which had been revived and given additional meaning during the April 5th Movement of 1976: the funeral march of protest. Students

marched to honor Hu Yaobang, whose stature within the academic community—as a symbol more than as a person—had risen so dramatically after his purge in 1987 that upon his death from a heart attack in 1989 students treated him up as a “martyr” for the cause of *minzhu*. The long-dormant democracy movement had begun to show some signs of revival earlier in the year. Fang Lizhi and other dissidents had, for example, already launched a petition campaign aimed at persuading Deng Xiaoping to release Wei Jingsheng and other political prisoners.²⁵ In addition, student activists at various campuses had begun to discuss ways to use the seventieth anniversary of the May 4th Movement to draw attention to China's current problems.²⁶ Hu's death in April was nonetheless crucial for the development of the new movement, since it gave students a specific issue around which to rally.

If the echoes of the past were loud as soon as students held their initial marches of mourning, however, they became a roar during the weeks that followed. When student groups formed teams of bicyclists to spread news of protest events and official reprisals from one part of the capital to another, they were reviving a tactic used in Shanghai during the May 30th Movement. When students in various cities converged on railway stations to secure passage to Beijing to present their demands in person to representatives of the CCP, they were following closely in the footsteps of many past generations of protesters. When student propagandists, angered by official attempts to use memories of the Cultural Revolution to discredit the People's Movement, distributed handbills claiming that members of the current regime were responsible for creating “turmoil,”²⁷ these youths were using the same technique to turn the tables on their detractors that publicists for the May 30th Movement had when accused of Boxerism (see Chapter 8). And when the student leader Chai Ling bit her finger and used her own blood to write out a placard criticizing Premier Li Peng for his opposition to the student struggle, she was turning to a method of protest that her predecessors of 1915 and 1919 had also used.²⁸

The loudest echoes of the past, however, probably came one month before the massacre, on the seventieth anniversary of the May 4th Movement. The party had planned to commemorate this day with much pomp and circumstance, since official histories credit the May 4th Movement with paving the way for the founding of the CCP and the fall of the warlords. As a key event in the party's own myth of origins, and an event that symbolizes many of the values of patriotism, self-sacrifice, newness, youth, and revolutionary ardor that constitute the political “center” in Communist China, the anniversary of the May 4th Movement has always been a time for official rituals intended to reassert the CCP's legitimacy. Traditionally, the main feature of these rituals has been speeches (sometimes

by May 4th veterans) recounting the events of 1919 and calling upon contemporary students to emulate the spirit of patriotism of the heroes who fought warlordism and imperialism. Such speeches have always ended, however, with reminders that since the CCP is now in power the best way to live up to the May 4th spirit is to study hard to help the party build socialism or (in recent years) achieve the Four Modernizations, not to stage new protests. The commemoration festivities the CCP leadership had planned for 1989 were presumably much like those of past years, the only difference being that since this was the seventieth anniversary of the event the scale would be grander.

Student protesters upstaged these official festivities, however, just as their predecessors of the Civil War era had upstaged GMD anniversary commemorations, by presenting an alternative May 4th street theater celebration of their own at Tiananmen Square. By carrying banners that criticized the current regime's failure to live up to the democratic ideals championed by the youths who fought the warlords, the student participants demonstrated that their ideas and those of the CCP's leaders concerning the contemporary relevance of the May 4th Movement differed considerably. The students' choice of Tiananmen Square for this alternative celebration in 1989 had a double meaning: this was the square to which the original protesters of 1919 had come; and this was the square where the party's most important official ceremonies are traditionally held. By choosing to hold their rally at Tiananmen Square, the students of 1989 made two clear statements: that they, not the party elders, were the true inheritors of the May 4th legacy; and that the struggle against oppression begun in 1919 had not ended in 1949.

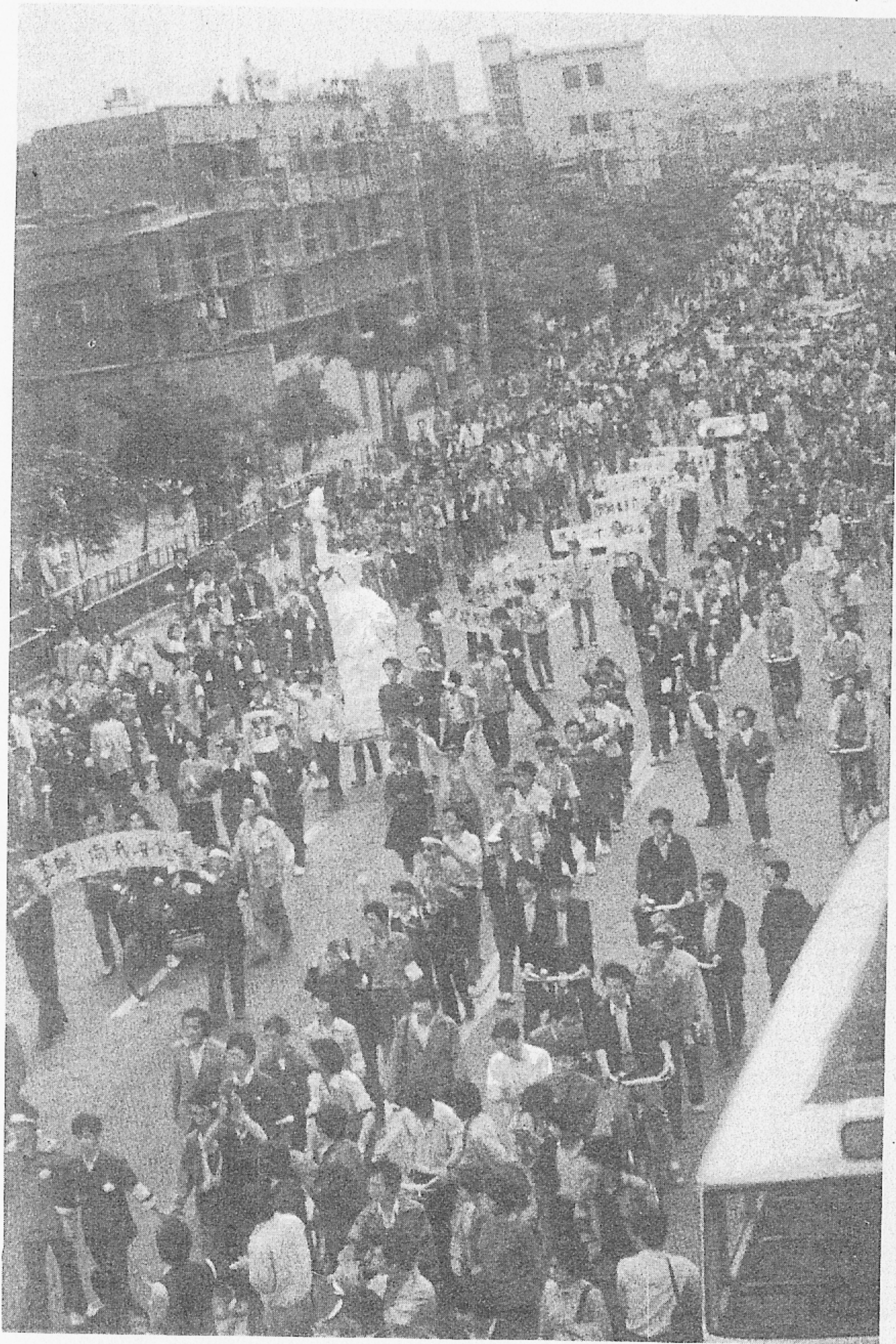
The student performance on the May 4th anniversary had crucial symbolic implications: it was nothing less than a theatrical attack on the CCP's hegemony. By laying claim to the most sacred political location in the nation's capital and by disputing the party's interpretation of one of the key episodes in its own story of the Revolution, students challenged the CCP leadership's claim to reside at the political center and to represent the nation's core values. Throughout the weeks that followed, participants in the 1989 struggle continued to press this attack with new forms of subversive street theater that reinforced the idea that they, rather than the party leaders, were the true successors to the heroes of May 4th. As in the case of the May 4th anniversary protest itself, the locations students chose for their protest contributed to the efficacy of this symbolic attack: perhaps their most inspired decision was to set up headquarters on and around the Monument to the People's Heroes in the heart of Tiananmen Square, since this memorial sculpture is covered on all sides by marble friezes of key events from the Chinese Revolution and includes one panel devoted exclusively to the events of 1919 (see photographic section).



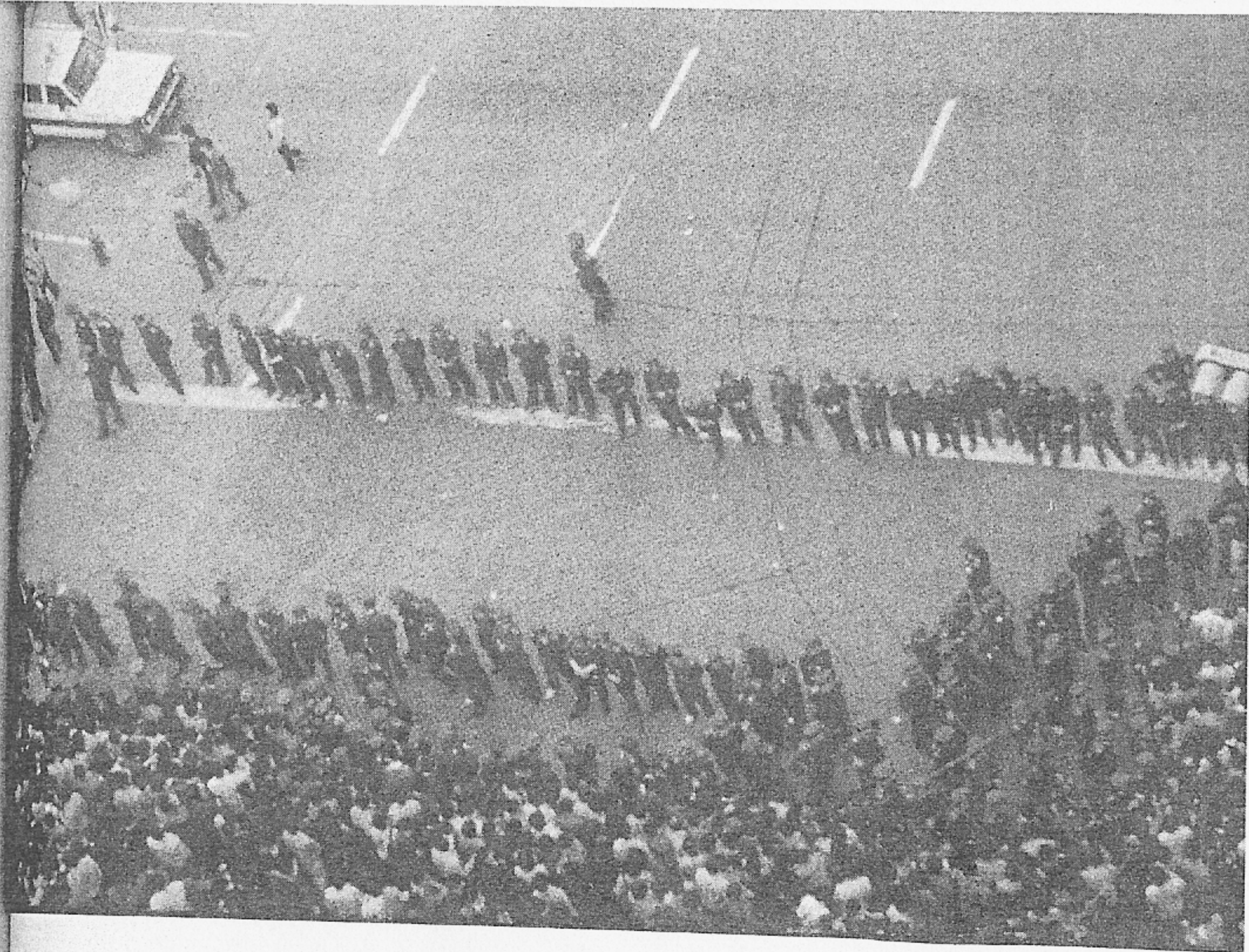
Fuzhou Road, Shanghai, December 19, 1986. The slogan on the banner in the center reads "Down with bureaucratic authoritarian rule; Fight for freedom and democracy." The smaller characters to the right identify the banner as the work of Tongji students (*photo courtesy Anne E. Bock*)



Bulletin board at Tongji University, December 18, 1986. The wall posters range from slogans demanding more political openness to detailed accounts of protests in other cities. Students read them avidly, and some even recited the contents of selected posters into cassette recorders. Campus security guards discouraged foreigners from reading the posters, and one asked me to leave soon after I took this photograph.



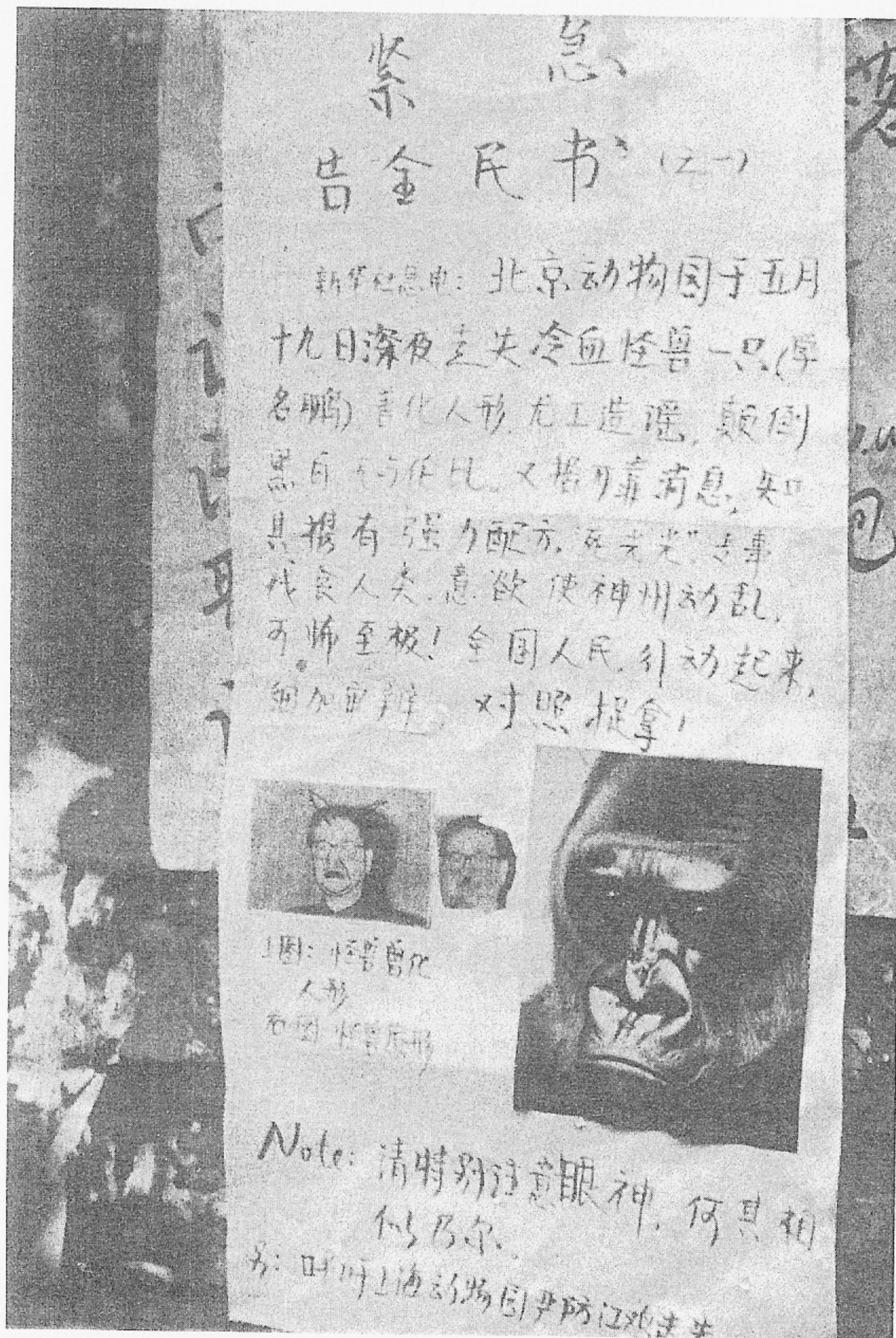
Demonstration in Shanghai, late May–early June 1989 (photo courtesy Deborah Pellow)



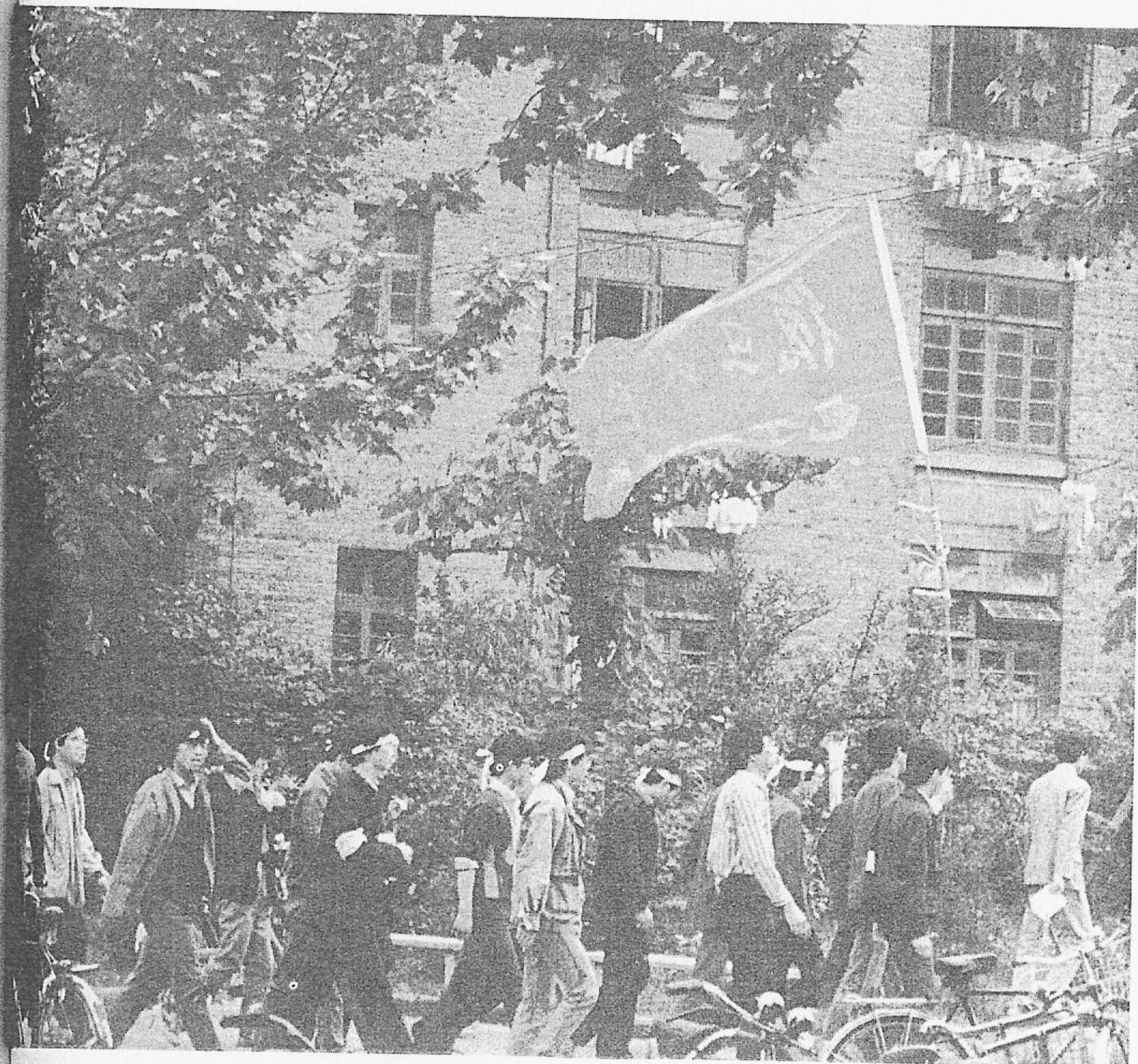
Police cordon trying to contain a demonstration in Shanghai, late May–early June 1989 (photo courtesy Deborah Pellow)



Protesters use buses to bring Shanghai to a standstill, late May–early June 1989 (photo courtesy Deborah Pellow)



A student poster that appeared in Shanghai in spring 1989. The poster, which purports to be a copy of an official news release, says that a "monstrous cold-blooded beast," which goes by the name of Peng and can assume human form, escaped from the Beijing Zoo on May 19 (the date that Li Peng gave a speech harshly criticizing the student movement as an act of "turmoil"). The poster calls on the whole nation to watch for this "man-eating" demon, which is known for creating "turmoil." The picture on the right shows the monster's original form; those to the left, the human form the beast has assumed. A brief note at the bottom admonishes authorities at the Shanghai Zoo to keep watch over "Chicken Jiang," a reference to Jiang Zemin, then head of the Shanghai CCP (from the Charles L. and Lois Smith Collection on Contemporary China, Harvard-Yenching Library)



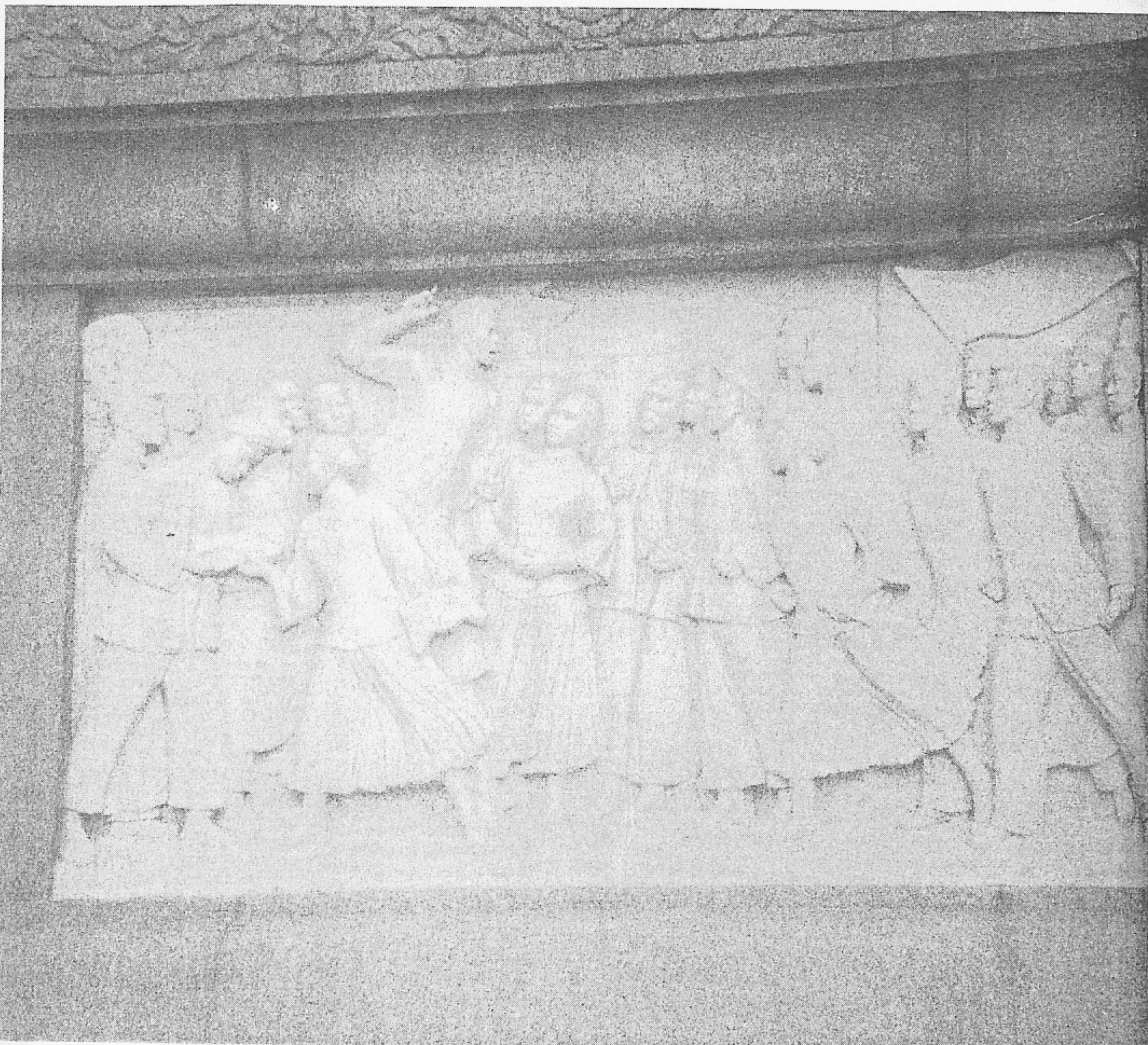
Fudan University students returning from a demonstration in May 1989. The flag they carry is inscribed with the name of their department (electrical engineering?) as well as of their school (from the Charles L. and Lois Smith Collection on Contemporary China, Harvard-Yenching Library)

As important as the symbolic possession of the May 4th tradition was for students, they also pressed their attack by using drama to challenge other kinds of official myths and to parody or lay claim to other symbols and values sacred to the Communist order. The hunger strike, for example, was, among other things, a powerful challenge to the CCP's image of itself as a party committed to ideals of self-sacrifice and selflessness. By publicly refusing to eat, in some cases to the point of courting death, the hunger strikers showed that Communist "saints" such as Lei Feng were not the only youths willing to die for the good of the country. The uses students made of the Goddess of Democracy and Statue of Liberty were likewise dramatic challenges to the party's ability to control the creation and use of sacred icons.

A series of additional student attacks on the CCP's hegemony occurred during Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to China in mid-May. The CCP had planned to make as much symbolic capital as possible out of Gorbachev's visit, the first by a top Soviet leader in nearly thirty years, by holding a number of public reviews and meetings. The general theme China's top officials hoped to stress was that the leaders of the PRC and the Soviet Union were once again on the same track toward progress, since both groups were now interested in experimenting with political reforms and economic restructuring without abandoning either Marxism or one-party rule. The fact that China's move toward reform predated glasnost and perestroika by several years made this theme especially appealing, since it implied a reversal of precedent in which the CCP was now serving as a role model for the Soviets.

Deng Xiaoping's plans for Gorbachev's visit were knocked off kilter by the student movement, which continued to grow and gain support from journalists, workers, and other non-students throughout early May. Since students and their supporters had effectively taken over Tiananmen by the time Gorbachev arrived, the party scrapped its plans for outdoor ceremonies on the square. Adding to the loss of face the party suffered from the inconvenience this caused, students carried banners and wrote group letters to Gorbachev whose main thrust was that China was no longer leading the Soviet Union in terms of reform, but had in fact fallen behind. Throughout Gorbachev's stay, students continued to embarrass the CCP leadership by holding demonstrations that competed with official events—including a march in Shanghai that drew attention away from the Soviet leader's visit to that city—and by implying that Deng had much to learn from his Russian counterpart when it came to democratization.

The various attempts of students to undercut the effectiveness and subvert the meaning of official ceremonies in 1989 is reminiscent of the events of the Civil War era described in Chapter 9. In the 1940's, as in the 1980's, youths often staged protests on anniversary dates and revolutionary holi-



One of several marble friezes on the Monument to the People's Heroes in central Beijing, this sculpture depicts the patriotic activism of students during the May 4th Movement. The students of 1989, who presented themselves as inheritors of the May 4th tradition, used the Monument as a central gathering place during their occupation of Tiananmen Square (*photo courtesy Anne E. Bock*)

days (such as Women's Day, May Day, and May 4th) that the ruling party itself was trying to use to bolster its legitimacy, and marked the arrival of a foreign dignitary with calls for more democracy.

Other aspects of the protests of 1989, besides this tendency to subvert official ceremonies, were reminiscent of the Civil War era. When groups of student lecturers tried to convince soldiers to join rather than suppress the popular movement and called out slogans such as "Chinese people do not beat up Chinese people," for instance, they used arguments and appeals to patriotism much like those that participants in the Anti-Hunger, Anti-Civil War Movement had once used to sway GMD policemen. In some cases the student protesters of 1989 even sang the exact same tunes their predecessors had sung: the most bizarre example of this is that, just as their counterparts of 1947 had once done, contemporary youths turned "Frere Jacques" into a protest song by putting new words to the traditional French air.²⁹ The students' concern with bureaucratic corruption, their anger at the government's attempts to use official youth groups to control campus life, and their indignation at the distorted reports on popular protest carried in official news organs—these too were reminiscent of the 1940's.

SHANGHAI SCENES

What role did Shanghai's students play in the People's Movement? During the first weeks of the struggle, Shanghai students essentially followed the lead of Beijing protesters.³⁰ Like their counterparts in the capital, as well as educated youths in cities throughout China, they too took to the street to mourn Hu Yaobang in April.³¹ They too had filled their city's streets and squares with throngs of demonstrators (see photographic section) and groups of hunger strikers in May.³² And they too had covered the walls of their campuses with defiant posters attacking corruption and calling for free speech—a theme that took on special meaning in Shanghai thanks to the government's suppression of a leading local reformist newspaper whose editor, Qin Benli, was accused of fostering discontent and presenting the People's Movement too favorably.³³ Local observers were treated to impressive sights and sounds throughout April and May. A memoir by a foreign teacher describes, for example, "stunning scenes" such as "seeing the conductor of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra carrying a bouquet, preceded by two motorcycles, walking ahead of the brass section of the orchestra playing 'The Internationale' while hundreds of thousands [of protesters and spectators] roared approval."³⁴

Despite the drama of such events, until June 4 Tiananmen Square remained the heart and soul of the People's Movement. It was only after the

Massacre, when further protests in the capital began to seem little more than attempts at group suicide, that students in cities far from Tiananmen, particularly those in provincial industrial centers such as Shanghai and Wuhan, became of central importance. In the aftermath of June 4, Shanghai's educated youths, acting (at least according to some sources) on orders from Beijing-based student organizations,³⁵ tried to bring business and transportation in their city to a standstill by using buses as barricades to block all major thoroughfares (see photographic section), a task that members of local radical labor unions helped them accomplish. Students and workers also gathered en masse at the city's North Station, the site of so many protests of the 1930's and 1940's, to obstruct railway traffic and thus make the blockade of the city complete.

The organizers of these actions, which were similar to those taking place simultaneously in Wuhan,³⁶ saw them as the first step toward a general strike, whose goal would be to pressure the government to ease its policy of repression and perhaps even convince one or another party leader to come out in support of the People's Movement. There was, however, another more practical reason for erecting barricades in the streets and blocking the tracks: doing so could help prevent a local replication of the massacre in central Beijing.

Whatever the inspiration for the blockade, by June 5 Shanghai was at a standstill. The situation grew tense during the following days. Protesters, in some cases calling themselves members of "dare to die" squads (a name taken from anti-imperialist struggles of the past), squared off against the worker militias the party had organized hastily and assigned the task of clearing the streets.³⁷ Confrontations between protesters and their foes sometimes turned violent, especially after a train plowed into a crowd near the North Station, killing several people and injuring many more.³⁸ And, despite the efforts of worker militias, protesters kept their barricades in place through June 7.

The de facto general strike imposed by the barricades never evolved into a full-fledged *sanba* of the type seen in 1919 and 1925, however. Although many citizens were angered by the violence in Beijing and the local bloodshed at the North Station, many were also scared of the reprisals that sustained militance could bring. When Shanghai's mayor gave a carefully worded speech on June 8—which could be interpreted either as a defense or guarded condemnation of the June 4 Massacre and contained a promise not to use force locally—and then dispatched additional teams of militia, the protesters abandoned their attempt to paralyze the city. The local People's Movement ended the following day, as it had begun, with marches of mourning. The difference was that now instead of demonstrating in honor of a dead official, the several thousand protesters who gathered

on June 9 came to pay homage to the martyrs killed in and around Tiananmen Square.

THE LEGACY OF 1989

As this is being written in September 1990, the long-term impact of the People's Movement remains uncertain. The parallels with earlier periods are so close that it is tempting to look to the past for clues concerning China's future course. It is tempting to compare, for example, the CCP of today with the GMD of 1947. In both cases we see ruling parties struggling to retain or regain their hold on the Mandate of Heaven after rounds of popular protests. In both cases we see parties that have tarnished their images at home and abroad through campaigns of repression aimed at preventing new outbursts of urban unrest. And in both cases we see parties so afraid that any mass gatherings will turn into a protest that they are unable to carry out even their most sacred rituals in a public fashion. Just as the GMD toned down its celebrations of the Double Ten holiday and Sun Zhongshan's birthday in 1947, in the aftermath of the June 4 Massacre, the CCP abandoned its plans to mark the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic with lavish spectacles. On October 1, 1989, instead of being filled as in past years with enormous crowds representing all strata of society, Tiananmen Square was surrounded by armed guards who allowed only members of the People's Liberation Army and carefully screened civilians to enter the plaza and take part in the ceremonies.³⁹ And to match this loss of control of a key sacred space, in late 1989 the CCP was so scared of symbols associated in any way with the People's Movement that it banned all impromptu singing of one of the party's most revered songs: the "Internationale."⁴⁰

The analogy between 1947 and the present is problematic, however, in two key regards. First, there is at present no civil war in China's countryside, nor even clear signs that a majority of Chinese peasants are dissatisfied with the ruling regime.⁴¹ Second, there is no opposition party comparable to the CCP of the 1940's capable of capitalizing on urban disaffection. Despite the similarities between the Civil War era and the present, therefore, history does not provide any definite answers to the question of whether the CCP will be able to resolve its legitimacy crisis through internal reform or suffer the fate of its predecessor.

One thing that is clear from the events of 1989 is that campus activism will continue to play a role in shaping China's future. (A new round of student protests, possibly triggered by an anniversary celebration or the death of a hated or beloved figure, may well have already taken place by

the time these words appear in print.) Despite seventy years of cultural transformation and political upheaval, students have retained their ability to challenge the legitimacy of ruling elites by appropriating or undermining hegemonic rituals, myths, and ideas. The May 4th tradition, in sum, remains very much alive, with its repertoire of action and symbolic power very much intact.

China's future will be determined in part, therefore, by how successful new generations of students are at keeping this tradition alive and making it serve their goals. It is important to remember, however, that these youths will inherit a complex tradition, which is fraught with internal contradictions and ambiguities as well as with power. This is easy to forget, because throughout the past seven decades writers, activists, and propagandists have continually set about transforming the flesh-and-blood student protesters of history into mythic heroes. In the process, these mythmakers have often oversimplified both the protesters themselves and the meaning of key events.

1989 AS MYTH AND HISTORY

The May 4th Movement provides the clearest example of this mythmaking process. As already noted, CCP propagandists have invested the events of 1919 with sacred significance. For them the May 4th Movement serves as a prologue to the Revolution; they present it as the first national struggle in which members of all classes joined together to fight imperialism and as the event that led to the formation of the Communist Party. Other writers in China and abroad have created a competing image of the May 4th Movement as China's road not taken. For them, the anti-imperialist protests of 1919 and the accompanying New Culture Movement represent China's great flirtation with cosmopolitan ideals of science and democracy, and the years 1917-22 stand out as a brief period when enlightened intellectuals committed to nonviolent change took center stage. Both these images of the May 4th Movement also stress the cultural iconoclasm of the struggle and claim that its participants were dedicated to breaking away from the restrictions of an authoritarian Confucian tradition that placed too much emphasis upon hierarchical relationships and constricting social roles, thus hampering individual freedom and egalitarian modes of behavior. In both these images, student protesters are presented as having been opposite in every way to the unpatriotic, traditionalist, and authoritarian officials they attacked.

There is a factual foundation for both of these heroic images of May 4th; if this were not true, neither image would be effective as a historical

myth.⁴² As earlier chapters show, however, it is hard to fit the actual events of 1919 into either framework without distorting the historical reality. The elitism of Chinese students toward non-intellectuals that shows through in comments by student union leaders on the violent tendencies of the loafer class (see Chapter 8), for example, contradicts the vision of multi-class solidarity in the CCP May 4th myth. The poison scare and attacks on Japanese nationals alluded to in Chapter 2, on the other hand, are hard to reconcile with the image of May 4th activists as cosmopolitan figures that is a central part of the non-Communist myth. Finally, the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of student associations and groups of ten, which were so similar in form to Confucian systems of social control (see Chapter 2), makes attempts to portray May 4th iconoclasts as breaking free from traditional patterns of behavior extremely problematic.

A similar, and similarly problematic, mythmaking process, to which Chinese dissidents as well as Western journalists and scholars have contributed, has already begun for the People's Movement. Like their predecessors of 1919, the students of 1989 have been heroicized in accounts that present them as unselfish men and women, whose egalitarian ideals, commitment to democracy, nonviolent actions, and disdain for corruption, bureaucratism, and authoritarian traditions (this time in Communist as opposed to Confucian guise) make them the complete antithesis of rulers such as Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping. Once again, student protesters have come to represent China's road not taken, its chance to break away from entrenched problems and start anew. Once again, historical complexity is in danger of being reduced to a handful of slogans ("Long live democracy"), icons (the Goddess of Democracy), and images (the lone protester confronting the tanks near Tiananmen Square).

As with the May 4th myths, this representation of the People's Movement has a solid basis in fact. Many students acted bravely with little or no regard for their own safety. Many protesters wrote posters that demonstrated a passionate desire to create a freer society. Many educated youths insisted on the importance of nonviolent resistance even after the state showed its readiness to use guns. And there were certainly participants in the struggle who were committed to paying whatever price was necessary to save their nation from the perils of corruption and nepotism.

The image of the People's Movement as a purely democratic and non-violent one, and of the students of 1989 as heroes capable of creating a wholly new enlightened and egalitarian society, is, nonetheless, seriously flawed. Although official reports invariably exaggerated attacks on soldiers and the like, participants in the People's Movement, including in some cases students, did turn to violence at various points in 1989. Some looting did take place, crowds did set fire to armored vehicles, and some soldiers

were killed by angry citizens. It is also clear that not all campus activists were fully committed to egalitarian ideals in 1989, and indeed that some felt disdain toward the *laobaixing*. Two foreigners who were teaching in China have reported, for example, that some of their pupils were horrified by the thought that introducing democratic reforms would mean that uneducated peasants as well as intellectuals would be allowed to vote.⁴³ The tendency of many educated youths to go along with one part of the official line regarding the random acts of violence that accompanied some early demonstrations and to attribute all rowdy behavior to "bad elements" and "workers" who had infiltrated student ranks is another indication of elitism of this sort.⁴⁴

Students were also not completely committed to democratic practices and egalitarian principles when it came to the operation of protest leagues. Some journalists and scholars drew attention to this fact during the People's Movement,⁴⁵ and later reports on the organizational activities of dissident leaders outside China since June 4 add weight to these comments. Recent reports, often by writers generally sympathetic toward Chinese dissident groups, have criticized such things as misappropriations of funds by protest leaders, the insensitivity of student organizers toward the needs of worker groups, and the appeal that ideas associated with the "new authoritarianism" have for student activists and their mentors.⁴⁶

These kinds of criticisms remind us of several things. First, the activists involved in the People's Movement were flesh-and-blood individuals not mythic heroes, and as a result their ideals and their actions were not always in perfect accord. Second, we need to go beyond simply calling the protests part of a "democracy" movement and explore the question of what exactly the term *minzhu* meant to Chinese activists in 1989. It is ethnocentric to assume that Chinese are incapable of instituting democratic practices or to hold Beijing's protesters to unrealistically high standards of behavior and claim that they should be viewed as democratic only if some ideal form of transparently open politics took place on Tiananmen Square. It is equally ethnocentric, however, to assume without close investigation of student texts and actions that the term *minzhu* as used in 1989 was exactly analogous to what Westerners mean by democracy.⁴⁷

Perhaps more important than either of these points, the kinds of problems alluded to above remind us that the dominant political culture will leave its imprint upon even the most radical of struggles and most millenarian movements, simply by making certain patterns of behavior and modes of discourse seem a natural part of the landscape. Throughout the preceding chapters I have highlighted the similarities between the words and deeds of May 4th-style protesters and those of the ruling elites they challenged. I have emphasized that an ability to usurp, appropriate, and

adapt official modes of communication and ceremonial forms helped to empower student movements. I have also stressed the importance of patterns of daily life in facilitating campus mobilization and coherent mass action. As the events of 1989 remind us, however, the tendency of protesters to improvise from familiar social and cultural scripts is a double-edged sword: it can lend power to a struggle but can also lead protesters to (often unintentionally) reproduce inequities embedded in the status quo within their own movements.

The hierarchical and highly bureaucratized nature of the organizations students formed during both the Republican and Communist eras is perhaps the best illustration of this point. This phenomenon should not be seen as proof that educated youths were somehow insincere in their concern with democracy or their criticisms of official bureaucratism. Rather, it should be interpreted as an indication of just how entrenched certain patterns of organization have been throughout modern Chinese history.

I do not mean to argue, as Lucian Pye does in a recent essay, that Chinese political culture is an immutable force that will continually frustrate all those who seek genuine reform or radical change.⁴⁸ As I have tried to show throughout the preceding pages, political culture needs to be understood as a fluid entity rather than as a static one. Hegemonic forms of practice may change slowly, but they do change, and protests, though shaped by these forms, can also play a role in transforming them.

I also do not mean to imply that the occupation of Tiananmen Square was a simple reproduction of the CCP regime in miniature. Students broke away from official political and cultural patterns in a variety of ways. There was a great deal more freedom of expression in the Square than in government-run parts of China, and ordinary students had a greater say in the decisions of protest leagues than ordinary citizens have in Central Committee policy formation. The very fact that youths took on leadership roles in the Square had radical implications in a society governed by a small band of elders. In addition, the power exercised by women such as Chai Ling, whose status within the movement was higher than that of any female official within the CCP regime, also marked a break from the dominant order, a break that was matched in symbolic terms when students used "goddess" statues in ways reminiscent of official uses of icons celebrating deified male heroes such as Mao.⁴⁹

This said, it is true that student forces *did* reproduce many features of the CCP regime during their occupation of Tiananmen Square, and this is a reminder of the staying power of some hegemonic forms. Here again, the case of female activists is instructive. As important as individual women assuming top leadership roles was, it is worth remembering that most of the heads of protest organizations were male.⁵⁰ The fierce factional

infighting in Tiananmen Square, during which protesters resurrected old Cultural Revolution labels such as "renegade" and "traitor" to attack their enemies, is another example of the persistence of entrenched political habits.⁵¹

What does all of this mean for historians interested in disentangling myth from history, a task that is always at best problematic and in the case of events such as the People's Movement especially so? Most basically, it means that we should be suspicious of simple explanations and unambiguous interpretations. Rather than focus on a few key images and slogans that seem to sum up the "crisis of 1989," we should highlight the diversity of the symbols and street theater performances that made the People's Movement such a powerful and dramatic event. Rather than tell a tale of a few specific heroes and heroines, we should try to gain some insight into the background and activities of as wide a variety of the participants as possible, the followers and compromisers as well as the leaders and martyrs. We should try, in short, to shed light on the complexity and contradictions as well as the bravery and horror of 1989. Above all, we should continually remind ourselves of, and try to understand, the influence that inherited traditions of mass action and contemporary patterns of politics and daily life, as well as new ideas, had upon the fight to start China toward a new future in 1989.