Proletarian Counter-Protest in the PRC

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Introduction

Contentious politics, it is often suggested, is in essence a claims-making process by which aggrieved societal challengers deploy various "weapons of the weak" to press demands upon the mighty state—a modern bureaucratic machine capable of crushing protesters with overwhelming force. The iconic photograph of a lone Chinese protester defying armored tanks in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989 epitomizes this conventional image. From this perspective it

follows naturally that the study of contention has focused on societal grievances and resources, based on three assumptions: (1) a confrontational dichotomy between state and society; (2) a normally passive state that reacts only when provoked; and (3) social actors whose campaign against state power is often thwarted yet remains autonomous. The classic social movement agenda follows these discursive lines.

However, when we carefully examine many of the canonical cases of political contention, including China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Democracy Movement, we find that these conventional assumptions are often weakly supported at best. The boundary between state and society may be blurred; the state may act not as a passive responder to societal claims-makers but as a proactive and resourceful mobilizer of counter-protest itself; social protesters may serve as critical sources of state legitimation and control. Political contestation, history shows, is not only a weapon of the weak, but a powerful tool of the state for realizing its own political goals in times of perceived crisis.

Cases of state-mobilized contention can be found across a range of regime types, authoritarian and democratic alike. Under Communist regimes, the role of the "proletariat" in these events is often especially salient.[1] In light of the signal importance of the proletariat in Marxist-Leninist ideology, it is not surprising that Communist regimes should routinely claim to speak in its name. But words alone are often inadequate for legitimizing state policy, especially in instances when the regime faces serious social unrest. At such moments of perceived crisis, Communist regimes may elect to enlist the participation of loyal workers in state-supportive demonstrations intended to delegitimize and demobilize the opposition. Unlike repression by the police or military, proletarian action has the advantage of political correctness. Beyond such ideological considerations, reliance on state-organized squadrons of workers to neutralize other social forces may promise more pragmatic advantages. This is especially true when the threatening social movement in question is composed largely of students. In responding to contention on the part of idealistic young students, whose movements typically generate widespread public sympathy among urban residents, intervention by unarmed workers is less apt to alienate the populace than naked suppression by professional state security forces.

[1] It should be noted that the Chinese term for "proletariat" (无产阶级), which literally means a class that lacks property, can refer to peasants and workers alike.

This is not to say that workers in Communist countries are mere pawns in the hands of Machiavellian party leaders, amenable to being deployed against students or other social elements at will. Workers of course have their own interests and inclinations to which Communist authorities must be duly attentive if they are to succeed in enlisting the proletariat as an effective ally. Official trade unions are an obvious vehicle for recruiting worker support, but unions are inherently limited in that their reach generally does not extend much beyond the workplace itself. *Charismatic mobilization*, or "the ability of a leader to mobilize people without the benefits or constraints of formal organization," can play a critical role in this process.[2] Use of revolutionary rhetoric and other resonant symbolic resources may move the proletariat to rally as a counterweight to other social groups in support of the regime. Even so, workers are not all of a piece. The different experiences and positions of industrial workers in different places suggest that the methods and outcomes of proletarian counter-mobilization will vary systematically from one setting to another.

From its earliest days to the present, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has regarded the mobilization of workers as essential for attaining and retaining political power. During the revolutionary era, proletarian patrols (工人纠察队) were deployed by the CCP in Guangzhou, Shanghai, Wuhan and other key industrial centers to embolden and empower protests by students and other urban residents. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, however, the workers' role was transformed into that of guardians of the Communist state.[3] Consistent with this turnabout in status, the PRC has organized proletarian counter-protests directed against students at several critical junctures in its history. De-mobilization of student Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution in 1968 and de-mobilization of student democracy activists in the 1989 Tiananmen Uprising both involved large-scale state mobilization of worker counter-protests that varied across time and space – most notably between China's political and intellectual capital of Beijing and its industrial capital of Shanghai. Examining such critical junctures as they played out on the ground in different urban settings

[2] Joel Andreas, "The Structure of Charismatic Mobilization: A Case Study of Rebellion during the Chinese Cultural Revolution," *American Sociological Review* (2000), vol. 72: 437.
[3] Elizabeth J. Perry, *Patrolling the Revolution: Worker Militias, Citizenship and the Modern Chinese State* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

affords insight into shifting state-society relations. The inquiry may also illuminate similarities and differences among authoritarian regimes more broadly.

The PRC is not alone among Communist party-states in turning to proletarian counter-protests to tame dangerous student movements. As Ekiert and Kruszewska show, in March of 1968 workers in Poland were actively mobilized by the government to suppress student protests.[4] These efforts – while surely less unpopular than the application of raw military force alone – were nevertheless not conducted without opposition. During a rally at the University of Warsaw, workers attempting to disperse student demonstrators reportedly triggered violent clashes. According to the state newspaper, students shouted insults at the workers who had occupied their university courtyard, and then proceeded to pelt the unwelcome intruders with snow, stones, and coins.[5] But as was also true in China, proletarian counter-protests could make for effective state propaganda. Official accounts of the confrontation at the University of Warsaw portrayed the students "as out of control, causing brawls in the streets, and aggressively positioned towards workers . . . while the state apparatus and workers step in to restore order and calm."[6]

Workers' Propaganda Teams in the Cultural Revolution

Whether the Chinese Communist Party in 1968 directly borrowed techniques of proletarian counter-protest from its Polish counterpart cannot be established without access to currently closed central Party archives. But regardless of whether or not the replication was conscious, the Polish scenario was reproduced with uncanny resemblance just a few months later in China, when unruly Red Guard students were suppressed by so-called Workers' Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams (工人毛泽东思想宣传队）organized by the state apparatus.

The Chinese case occurred two years into the so-called "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (无产阶级文化大革命), Mao Zedong's ultimate effort to save his revolution from slipping into Soviet-style routinization by cultivating committed "revolutionary successors"

[4] Grzegorz Ekiert and Dominika Kruszewska, "Manufactured Ambiguity: Party-State Mobilization Strategy in March 1968 Crisis in Poland (2016).
[5] Ekiert and Kruszewska, 2016: 13.
[6] Ekiert and Kruszewska, 2016: 13.

among the youth of China. Initially Mao pinned high hopes on idealistic students as the best guarantee that his own revolution would not follow the "revisionist" road of the Soviet Union, but by the summer of 1968 antagonism among competing Red Guard units – all claiming to represent Chairman Mao's true revolutionary line – had escalated into violent struggle at universities around the country.[7] At Peking University, armed conflict using handmade spears, iron bars, and giant slingshots fashioned from bicycle tires had claimed the lives of several students. At neighboring Tsinghua University, the country's premier engineering school, the weapons manufactured by rival student factions were more sophisticated – and even more deadly. Guns, grenades and tanks had led to 18 fatalities and 1100 injuries, including 30 that left the victims severely crippled.[8] With even Mao having grown tired of the Red Guards' fratricidal squabbles, the stage was set for a presumably less fractious force – the industrial proletariat – to quell the campus unrest and attempt to put Chairman Mao's revolutionary crusade back on track.

When the first contingent of Workers' Propaganda Teams entered Tsinghua University in July 1968, the reaction from contentious students in Beijing was no less hostile than that of student protesters at the University of Warsaw. Tsinghua had just experienced more than three months of violent conflict between warring student factions of Red Guards in which a radical contingent known as "the Regiment" had gained the upper hand. The dramatic confrontation between students and workers was recounted by William Hinton, an American leftist who received a detailed briefing on the incident during a visit to Tsinghua three years later:

> Suddenly at 10 A.M. on the morning of July 27, 1968, huge crowds of workers . . . appeared before the campus gates. Each carried a little red book of Chairman Mao's quotations . . .
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> The workers, many of them clad in T-shirts and shorts, just as they had come off the night shift, surged forward. They took up positions around selected campus buildings, especially those that were important to the respective factions. With shirts clinging to perspiring backs and sweat dripping on the open pages of their red books, they began to read aloud and punctuate their reading with

[7] Andrew G. Walder, *Fractured Rebellion: The Beijing Red Guard Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[8] Li Haiwen (李海文), "'工人阶级必须领导一切' 发表前后" (Before and after the Publication of *The Working Class Must Lead in Everything*) in *炎黄春秋*, vol. 3 (2011): 33.

> slogans shouted in unison. "Use reason, not violence. Turn in your weapons. Form a big alliance!" . . .
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> At three o'clock, a signal shot unleashed a hail of rocks, bolts, nuts, and bottles of black ink from all the strongholds of the Regiment. Before the workers could even assess the injuries on numerous stunned and wounded comrades, detachments of spearmen charged their ranks. In the ensuing melee, the center of which shifted with lightning speed and chaotic illogic from one section of the campus to another, spears found their mark, hand grenades exploded, pistol and rifle shots rang out, and workers' blood began to flow. "Black above and red below" was the way veterans of the incident described their appearance in the eerie hours that followed – black from the ink bottles that broke on their heads and red from the blood that flowed from their wounds . . .
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> When peace finally returned to Tsinghua in the early morning hours of July 28, five workers lay dead, 731 nursed serious wounds, 143 had been taken prisoner, and many of the prisoners had been beaten. Yet no group of workers had counterattacked, no students had been harmed.[9]

Hinton's account, faithful to the political orthodoxy of the day, may well have exaggerated the degree of restraint exhibited by the Workers' Propaganda Teams. Even so, it reflects the state's presentation of the working class as the righteous antidote to student protest run amok. The narrative is consistent in tone with official Polish justifications of proletarian counter-protests in 1968 as having restored calm in the midst of unbridled student turmoil.

In the Chinese case, the Workers' Propaganda Teams that showed up unexpectedly at the gates of Tsinghua University were composed of employees from more than sixty factories in the Beijing area, led by a team of soldiers from the 8341 Army, the central security regiment that answered directly to Mao Zedong. The propaganda teams, it soon became clear, operated not only with the assistance of the military, but also with the approval of Mao himself. While state leaders had probably initially hoped to present the propaganda teams as a "spontaneous" proletarian upsurge, the unfriendly reception that the workers encountered at Tsinghua triggered a more transparent approach. In the early hours of July 29, Mao summoned five of

[9] William Hinton, "Hundred Day War: The Cultural Revolution at Tsinghua University," *Monthly Review*, vol. 24, no.3 (July-August 1972): 185-187. See also 唐少杰，*一叶知秋：清华大学 1968 年"百日大武斗"*，香港中文大学出版社，2003 年，1-14 页

Beijing's most influential radical student leaders to a face to face meeting to clarify his position. In response to the charge by Tsinghua's Regiment leader that the Workers' Propaganda Teams were being manipulated by a sinister hand, Mao famously replied, "If you are looking for a sinister hand, I am that sinister hand. I sent the team. You will have to blame me."[10] In these times of extraordinary uncertainty and turmoil, Mao elected to dispense with deception in favor of direction.

Reflecting this top-level sponsorship, the Workers' Propaganda Teams were well organized from the start. On the afternoon of July 26, the day before the teams marched on Tsinghua, Mao Zedong had convened a meeting at his residence of members of his personal armed guard. Pointing to a map of the Tsinghua campus spread out on the carpet, Mao issued instructions on how to advance on the university.[11] That evening, delegates from dozens of local factories were called to a strategy meeting at the Xinhua Printing Plant, chaired by members of the 8341 Army and the Beijing Garrison Command. The printing plant was selected as the staging ground for the operation because it had recently overcome severe factional strife with the aid of soldiers from the 8341 Army. The 62 factories that agreed to participate in the Tsinghua takeover were asked to provide transportation for their own workers; in cases where factories lacked the necessary vehicles, however, the Beijing Municipal Revolutionary Committee offered to supply them. In this way more than 30,000 workers – separated according to industrial sector into seven "columns" plus one "regiment" under the direct command of the 8341 Army – were rapidly assembled. The columns included representation from the industries of metallurgy, instruments, machinery, textiles, construction, chemicals, and a mixture of critical enterprises (such as generator plants) controlled by central government ministries. The regiment was made up of workers from Xinhua and two other printing plants. The third column, comprised of machinists, was the largest with some 6,000 members while the regiment was the smallest with about 2,000 members. In addition to these 30,000 officially organized workers, thousands of other workers in the Beijing area streamed to

[10] Hinton, 1972: 213.

[11] Tang Shaojie (唐少杰), "清华大学工宣队始末" (The Workers' Propaganda Teams at Tsinghua University from start to finish) in *炎黄春秋* (April 2015).

the university gates on their own once they learned of the centrally approved plan to pacify the conflict ridden campus and put an end to Tsinghua's "Hundred Day War."[12]

News that the Workers' Propaganda Teams were operating with the blessing of Chairman Mao greatly bolstered their authority. A former deputy party secretary at Tsinghua recalled, "I thought, the propaganda teams were sent by Chairman Mao, the 8341 Army is Chairman Mao's personal guard, I ought to trust them."[13] Thanks to such sentiments, the teams succeeded in quelling the violence at Tsinghua within less than twenty-four hours. However, it would take another full year of intensive political work before the Workers' Propaganda Teams declared victory in subduing the deep-seated factional hostilities that had riddled the university community since the heyday of the Red Guard movement.[14] And even after their proclaimed victory, the teams retained control of the university administration until the death of Mao and arrest of the Gang of Four (comprised of Mao's widow, Jiang Qing, and three fellow radicals from Shanghai) in the fall of 1976.[15]

The Tsinghua teams employed a wide array of familiar propaganda techniques, relying on loudspeaker broadcasts, big-character posters, mass forums and smaller meetings to disseminate Chairman Mao's latest instructions. The teams quickly formed about a hundred smaller units to fan out across campus, visiting both classrooms and dormitories, in order to ensure that everyone was aware of their mission.[16] Shortly after the arrival of the propaganda teams at Tsinghua, students, faculty and staff were assigned to political study groups in their respective departments, each of which in turn reported to a column of the Workers' Propaganda Team. For example Column Three, the largest column comprised of machinists, assumed responsibility for mechanical engineering – the premier academic department at the university. Column Five, made up of construction workers, supervised civil and agricultural engineering. Column Six, composed of chemical workers, oversaw chemical engineering. And

[12] Hinton, 1972: 189-190.
[13] Liu Bing (刘冰）， *风雨岁月：1964-1976 年的清华* （Stormy years: Tsinghua in 1964-76） (Beijing: Contemporary China Press, 2010): 126.
[14] Hinton, 1972: 215.
[15] Tang Shaojie (唐少杰), "清华大学工宣队始末" (The Workers' Propaganda Teams at Tsinghua University from start to finish) in *炎黄春秋* (April 2015).
[16] "Workers' Mao Tse-tung's Thought Propaganda Teams in Colleges and Schools," *Peking Review*, vol. 11, no. 43 (October 25, 1968): 13-16.

so on. The elite regiment commanded by the 8341 Army took over the offices of the old university administration and Communist Party Committee.[17] Although there was a certain logic to these assignments, the fact that the average educational level of work team members did not exceed middle school, and that the great majority of team members had not previously engaged in any sort of educational work, presented obvious obstacles in fulfilling their mission to remake the country's leading universities.[18]

Charismatic Mobilization: The Mango Cult

Despite such handicaps, within a week of their occupation of Tsinghua the Workers' Propaganda Teams were given a powerful psychological boost that more than compensated for their objective shortcomings. On August 3, Mao Zedong had received a box of several dozen mangoes from the Foreign Minister of Pakistan who was in Beijing on an official visit. Master of symbolic politics that he was, Mao (whose Hunan peasant palate may not have fancied the unfamiliar taste of mangoes) immediately re-directed the exotic fruit as his personal gift to the Tsinghua Workers' Propaganda Teams. The gift was accompanied by a statement from Mao indicating that the working class, as China's leading class, should direct the superstructure: henceforth workers' propaganda teams were to take permanent charge of higher education. As Mao's directive put it, "Realizing the proletarian education revolution requires working-class leadership . . . Workers' Propaganda Teams will remain in schools for the long term to participate in the overall mission of struggle-criticism-transformation. Moreover, they will lead the schools forever (并且永远领导学校)."[19]

[17] Hinton, 1972: 223.
[18] Tang Shaojie (唐少杰), "清华大学工宣队始末" (The Workers' Propaganda Teams at Tsinghua University from start to finish) in *炎黄春秋* (April 2015).
[19] Hinton, 1972: 227.

Mao's charismatic intervention had an electrifying impact on the Tsinghua campus that soon reverberated in cultish ceremonies around the country. William Hinton explained:

> The gift of mangoes and this statement of support had a profound effect. Few people slept at all that night. Everyone wanted to see and touch the mangoes that came directly from Chairman Mao, and everyone wanted to discuss this extraordinary idea that the propaganda teams, far from being a temporary, emergency expedient, were a form of permanent supervision over higher education. If the workers could not contain their joy, most students and staff members were also carried along in the great wave of enthusiasm that Mao's act generated. The original mangoes were preserved, put in glass cases, and displayed in the reception rooms of key factories. Later numerous models of these mangoes were made and displayed by all the other factories that had taken part in the pacification of Tsinghua. A veritable cult arose around these mangoes, as if they were some religious relic – a hair of the Buddha, a nail from Christ's cross.[20]

At the Beijing Textile Factory, for example, "the wax-covered fruit was placed on an altar in the factory auditorium, and workers lined up to file past it, solemnly bowing as they walked by."

[20] Hinton, 1972: 227.

When the wax coating proved unable to prevent the precious relic from rotting, members of the factory revolutionary committee peeled the mango and boiled it in a giant cauldron: "Another ceremony was held, equally solemn . . . . Each worker drank a spoonful of the water in which the sacred mango had been boiled." A wax replica of the original mango was soon placed on the altar and "workers continued to file by, their veneration for the sacred object in no way diminished." When Mao's personal physician reported this situation to the Chairman, "he laughed. He had no problem with the mango worship and seemed delighted by the story."[21]

Although the Cultural Revolution was ostensibly intended to replace "feudal superstition" with secular Marxism-Leninism, the PRC was not above cultivating quasi-religious symbolism for purposes of charismatic mobilization. In addition to the wax and plastic mango replicas displayed on makeshift altars in factories and workers' homes across China, the mango motif appeared in a variety of designs on colorful posters, Mao badges, household enamelware, quilt covers, pencil boxes, candy and cigarette wrappers, mirrors, and other items of daily use.[22] While most workers may have been unsure about what a mango actually was, they quickly grasped its magical and redemptive potential. The religious enthusiasm surrounding the mango cult even spread to workers with "bad class backgrounds," who were cheered by the prospect that their current status as factory workers might finally lay to rest the stigma of their "counter-revolutionary" origins. Wang Xiaoping, a worker at Beijing's Number One Machine Tool Plant who had long suffered on account of his family's class background, remembered:

> Everyone was to receive a mango, a replica of the real fruit originally given to a member of our factory's Workers' Propaganda Team by Chairman Mao. Wax models had already been made, one for every person. What is a "mango?" Nobody knew. Few had ever heard the word, let alone seen one. Knowledgeable people said it was a fruit of extreme rarity, like Mushrooms of Immortality . . . To receive such a rare and exotic thing filled people with a surge of excitement . . .
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> That day was indeed a festive one for the factory. People were wild with joy. They shouted "Long Live Chairman Mao!" and "Long Live

[21] Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (London: Random House, 1994): 503.
[22] Color photographs of these items can be found in Alfreda Murck, ed., *Mao's Golden Mangoes and the Cultural Revolution* (Zurich: Scheidegger and Spiess, 2013): 150-233.

> the Proletarian Cultural Revolution!" A few senior female workers mounted the platform, so excited that they wept . . . The next day, wax mangoes were distributed. I got one. It lay in a rectangular glass box, gold colored and kidney shaped. Everyone held their wax model of the sacred fruit solemnly and reverently. Someone was even admonished by senior workers for not holding the fruit securely, which was a sign of disrespect to the Great Leader . . . The mangoes were said to have been placed in the most conspicuous place in everyone's home.[23]

The Cultural Revolution witnessed the climax of a process of mass mobilization via charismatic "emotion work" that had characterized the Chinese Communist revolution from its inception.[24] The religious overtones of this longstanding practice became especially pronounced during the Cultural Revolution as Mao, nearing the end of his own life, sought to keep his revolutionary legacy alive by cultivating worthy successors.[25] Disillusioned by the Red Guards' violent factionalism, the ageing Chairman turned away from students in favor of workers as a more reliable force for ensuring revolutionary immortality. Magical mangoes were a potent prop in

[23] Wang Xiaoping, "1968: My Story of the Mango," in Alfreda Murck (2013): 37-38, 43.
[24] Elizabeth J. Perry, "Moving the Masses: Emotion Work in the Chinese Revolution," *Mobilization*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2002): 111-128.
[25] Robert Jay Lifton, *Revolutionary Immortality: Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1968).

this quest, worshipped as sacred symbols of the direct link between the charismatic leader and his faithful followers.

The mango cult formed part of a quasi-religious craze that was sustained both by the growing veneration of Mao Zedong as revolutionary prophet and by general relief at the prospect of replacing callow and impetuous students with more mature and restrained workers as the mainstay of state-mobilized contention.[26] Parades around the country featured mango replicas amidst portraits and statues of Chairman Mao.

If anyone failed to grasp the significance of the sacred mission being entrusted to the proletariat by the paramount leader, the National Day Parade on October 1, 1968 hammered home the point. The central section of the 400,000-person parade, reviewed by Chairman Mao

[26] Elizabeth J. Perry, *Anyuan: Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012): Chapter 6.

from atop Tiananmen, was composed of worker representatives recruited from all over China marching behind a huge banner inscribed with the slogan, "The working class must lead in everything," and carrying aloft gigantic mango replicas to signify Mao's gift to the Tsinghua Workers' Propaganda Teams. As Daniel Leese notes, "Read as a political script, the 1968 National Day parade heralded the end of the Red Guard turmoil and a return to Communist Party dictatorship in the name of the working class."[27]

Nationwide "Education Revolution"

That the time had come for capricious Red Guard rampages to give way to carefully orchestrated worker propaganda teams was made clear less than a month after the Tsinghua occupation in an essay by Shanghai journalist (and later Gang of Four member) Yao Wenyuan entitled "The Working Class Must Lead in Everything." Both the title and much of the content of Yao's highly publicized essay had actually been formulated by Mao himself. Moreover, on the same day that Yao's essay appeared in print (August 24, 1968), a joint proclamation was issued by Party Central, the State Council, the Central Military Commission and the Central Cultural Revolution Group which called upon the whole country to follow the lead of Beijing's Workers' Propaganda Teams in seizing control of all institutions of education from primary to tertiary.[28] With these authoritative pronouncements, the idea of a "great proletarian cultural revolution" assumed new meaning: the working class would occupy the superstructure and intellectuals would be relegated to a disparaged category known as "the stinking old ninth" (臭老九).[29] The anti-intellectualism that henceforth infused the Cultural Revolution marked a sharp break with the Chinese tradition of respect for those with learning; it was, however, quite similar to the Polish state's juxtaposition in 1968 of "degenerate intellectuals" versus hard working laborers as a rhetorical strategy for de-legitimizing student protests.[30]

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[27] Daniel Leese, "Designing Spectacles: The 1968 Beijing National Day Parade," in Murck, ed., 2013: 59.

[28] "中共中央，国务院，中央军委，中央文革关于派工人宣传队进学校的通知," (Party Central, State Council, Central Military Commission, Central Cultural Revolution Group proclamation concerning sending Workers' Propaganda Teams into schools) in *无产阶级文化大革命有关文件汇集* (Collection of documents concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution), #7, Central Party Office and State Council Secretariat, eds. (Beijing: October 1968): 105-106; Tang Shaojie (唐少杰), "清华大学工宣队始末" (The Workers' Propaganda Teams at Tsinghua University from start to finish) in *炎黄春秋* (April 22, 2015).

[29] Li Haiwen, 2011: 35.

[30] Ekiert and Kruszewska, 2016: 16.

After Mao's much publicized gift of mangoes to the propaganda team at Tsinghua, similar teams quickly seized control of 59 other institutions of higher education in Beijing, including the prestigious Peking University and People's University, the Beijing Aeronautics Academy, the Physical Education Academy and 10 art academies.[31] Following the publication of Yao Wenyuan's celebrated article, the practice spread still further. Workers' Propaganda Teams were no longer confined to Beijing, nor were they limited to the educational sector; they became a nationwide vehicle for exerting "proletarian" control over a range of enterprises and government offices.[32]

In Yao Wenyuan's home base of Shanghai, where factory workers comprised a much larger proportion of the urban population than in Beijing, workers' propaganda teams assumed a major role in municipal governance. A team of 26 cadres from the Workers' General Headquarters (a radical faction that had seized power in the city) was established to exercise control over the various departments of the municipal Revolutionary Committee.[33] Wang Hongwen, a former factory security guard and leader of the Workers' General Headquarters who would also later be named as a member of the infamous Gang of Four, clarified the broad mandate of the workers' propaganda teams in Shanghai: "Not only should they go to universities, middle and elementary schools to turn around and stabilize the 'unbearable chaos' to be found there, but they must also go to all realms of the superstructure, into all units where struggle-criticism-transformation has not yet been completed, to replenish all aspects of state agencies and all levels of 'revolutionary committees,' and also to resolve problems at the more than 400 units with serious longstanding issues."[34]

In response to Wang Hongwen's call, more than 90,000 factory workers were mobilized to occupy every Shanghai college campus and school as well as to take charge of municipal

[31] "北京市革命委员会关于召开工人和解放军毛泽东思想宣传队负责人会议情况报告" (Situation report on the conference of responsible people from the Workers and Liberation Army Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Teams convened by the Beijing Municipal Revolutionary Committee) in *无产阶级文化大革命有关文件汇集* (Collection of documents concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution), #7, Central Party Office and State Council Secretariat, eds. (Beijing: October 1968): 120.

[32] Xiao Jianguo (肖建国) "我当了一回工宣队" (I joined a round of Workers' Propaganda Teams), in *作家* (October 1997): 60.

[33] Shanghai Cultural Revolution Materials Small Group, ed., *上海文化大革命史话* (History of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai) (Shanghai Party Committee: 1992): 578.

[34] *上海文化大革命史话* (History of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai) (Shanghai Party Committee: 1992): 579.

cultural, educational, public health, finance and trade departments and district and county government offices. Eleven thousand workers assumed control of the 26 institutions of higher education in Shanghai; 52,000 workers occupied the middle and elementary schools; 5,800 workers seized control of the more than 400 enterprises marred by "serious longstanding problems;" several thousand workers each were dispatched to the municipal medical and public health, trade and finance, and science and technology administrations; another several thousand apiece took charge of the district, street, and county governments; and more than 500 handpicked workers oversaw the municipal party and government offices. Wang Hongwen emphasized, "Workers' propaganda teams must be leaders, not functionaries."[35]

Despite the unusually broad mandate of the Shanghai Workers' Propaganda Teams, their primary focus – as in the country as a whole – was centered on institutions of higher education. Due to the disruption of the Cultural Revolution, only a small number of students and faculty remained on college and university campuses at this time. Even so, workers' propaganda teams were dispatched in overwhelming numbers to pacify what were regarded as key nodes in the political superstructure. At universities and institutes considered to be only moderately problematic by the Workers' General Headquarters, the ratio of propaganda team members to students and faculty was approximately 1:2; in cases deemed more problematic (because of their role as hotbeds of criticism of Zhang Chunqiao, the fourth member of the radical Gang of Four) the saturation by work team members reached a parity ratio of 1:1.[36]

On August 24, the day that Yao Wenyuan's essay calling upon the working class to exercise all-round leadership was published, students and faculty at all the Shanghai universities staged public demonstrations in celebration. The following day, more than 10,000 Workers' Propaganda Team members occupied Fudan, Jiaotong, East China Normal, and some 20 other universities in the city. The teams first assembled by columns at designated spots near university campuses. Once in place, the members – sporting Mao badges on their chests and

[35] *上海文化大革命史话* （History of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai）(Shanghai Party Committee: 1992): 580.; "上海市革命委员会关于落实两个布告解决四百多个老大难单位问题的情况报告" (Shanghai Revolutionary Committee situation report concerning implementation of the two directives on resolving problems at the more than 400 work units with serious and longstanding problems) in *无产阶级文化大革命有关文件汇集* (Collection of documents concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution), #7, Central Party Office and State Council Secretariat, eds. (Beijing: October 1968): 93.

[36] *上海文化大革命史话* （History of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai）(Shanghai Party Committee: 1992): 581.

clutching copies of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (the "Little Red Book") in their hands – separated into units behind flags and marched boldly into the campuses. In stark contrast to the hostile reception that the Tsinghua Workers' Propaganda Team had initially encountered in Beijing the month before, the Shanghai teams were greeted with the celebratory sounds of cymbals and drums and festive banners inscribed with slogans such as "Learn from the working class; salute the working class!" and "Welcome, Chairman Mao's trusted envoys!"[37]

The warm reception that the workers' teams evoked on Shanghai campuses was not only a reflection of the unusually high prestige that the proletariat enjoyed in China's industrial capital. During the weeks between the advent of Workers' Propaganda Teams in Beijing and their subsequent introduction to Shanghai, Mao's personal support for proletarian counter-protest had been made manifest. As a result, local authorities and workers scrambled to emulate and outdo the Beijing model. A few days after workers' teams marched onto Shanghai's university campuses, the municipal Revolutionary Committee convened a meeting of all the group leaders (团长) and commissars (政委) of the Shanghai propaganda teams to share with them the experiences of their northern forebears in the occupation of Tsinghua University and Peking University. In particular, team leaders were informed that the Beijing teams had conducted campus sweeps in the course of which they uncovered large stashes of battle weapons, pornographic novels, and "black materials for bombarding the proletarian headquarters" (炮打无产阶级司令部的黑材料). Thus instructed, the Shanghai teams were quick to follow suit.

At Shanghai Normal College, where an unruly faction had occupied the International Office (a remnant of the pre-Cultural Revolution period when the college hosted a number of Vietnamese foreign students), the investigation was particularly intense. After some allegedly incriminating materials were discovered to have been removed from the International Office, the campus was placed under lockdown and the more than 1,000 propaganda team members fanned out to stage raids on all student dormitory rooms and faculty apartments. Ceilings and floors were pried open, and book bags, suitcases, quilts and other personal items were

[37] Li Xun (李逊), *革命造反年代：上海文革运动史稿* (The age of the revolutionary rebels: a history of the Shanghai Cultural Revolution movement) (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2015): 1172-1173.

unceremoniously inspected. When the sweep failed to uncover much in the way of weaponry, pornography, or "black materials," however, the municipal leadership concluded that it was a waste of time to focus on secondary colleges. Instead, the major universities – especially Fudan, Shanghai's premier comprehensive university – should be the main target. Fudan had been the center of criticism of Zhang Chunqiao, and the Shanghai leadership was anxious to root out any lingering opposition. A thorough investigation of all those at Fudan involved in the attack on Zhang Chunqiao netted a cache of personal letters, notes, and other documents that would later serve as the main body of evidence for counter-criticisms against Zhang's accusers.[38]

During the eight years that Workers' Propaganda Teams held sway over higher education, public criticism sessions, group political study, and practical labor experience dominated the college curriculum. The propaganda teams themselves devoted considerable attention to scouring the local environs in search of incriminating evidence for "class education exhibitions" intended to politicize the campus community. At Hangzhou University, for example, the Workers' Propaganda Team fashioned an exhibit from a large, dusty bundle of discarded old clothes that they discovered in a campus dumpster. The tattered items, it turned out, had been thrown away by a recent graduate of the university, originally from a poor working-class family, whose pre-Cultural Revolution "bourgeois" education had apparently made her feel that such unattractive apparel no longer suited her. The entire university was mobilized to view the display of discarded clothing, which was promoted as "a wrathful indictment of the heinous crimes caused by the revisionist educational line pushed by China's Khrushchev."[39]

Once campuses had been emptied of unruly Red Guards (largely through the Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Campaign that resettled tens of millions of them in remote rural areas), the Workers' Propaganda Teams recruited a new type of university student, known as Worker-Peasant-Soldier Trainees (工农兵学员), to take their place. The new students were admitted not on the basis of competitive entrance examinations (as had been the case before the Cultural Revolution), but on the recommendation of their work unit (commune, factory or military barracks) – supposedly in recognition of their advanced political

[38] Li Xun, 2015: 1176-1179.
[39] "Workers' Mao Tse-tung's Thought Propaganda Teams in Colleges and Schools": 13-16.

ideology and activism but often on the basis of personal connections. The current president of China, Xi Jinping, entered Tsinghua University as a worker-peasant-soldier trainee in 1975. Like many fellow trainees, Xi could claim membership in the "Red aristocracy" thanks to his father's revolutionary credentials.

The Workers' Propaganda Teams presided over an "education revolution"（教育革命） in which the teams themselves acted as the university leadership and their newly recruited worker-peasant-soldier trainees served as shock troops for "revolutionary" initiatives directed primarily against faculty members. In the course of the Tsinghua occupation, Workers' Propaganda Teams relied upon the active participation of the trainees to spearhead a dozen different political campaigns aimed at discrediting and remolding the beleaguered faculty. In these campaigns, more than a thousand people – about 20% of the entire Tsinghua faculty and staff – were subject to aggressive investigation. Of those investigated, 167 were charged with serious political crimes; of these, 20 committed suicide.[40]

Efforts to reform the faculty and administration were not confined to campus. At Nanjing Teachers' College, for example, instructors and cadres were sent to neighboring factories and villages to conduct social surveys intended to gather ideas for a "new-style socialist university."[41] Sometimes the off-campus experiences occurred under remote and harsh conditions. In 1969 the Tsinghua Workers' Teams established an "experimental farm" in distant Jiangxi Province to which more than 2,800 instructors and administrators were packed off for labor reform. The farm was located in an area infested with schistosomiasis, and more than 1000 of the Tsinghua faculty and staff contracted the disease as a result.[42] Some died; others battled debilitating symptoms for decades. Even thirty years later, Tsinghua University's

[40] Tang Shaojie (唐少杰), "清华大学工宣队始末" (The Workers' Propaganda Teams at Tsinghua University from start to finish) in *炎黄春秋* (April 2015).
[41] Chinese Communist Party Committee at Nanjing Teachers' College, ed., "在党的一元化领导下充分发挥工人宣传队的政治作用 (Fully develop the political functions of the Workers' Propaganda Teams under the unified leadership of the Party), in *武汉科技大学学报* (January 1976): 56.
[42] Zhu Zucheng (朱祖成) "工宣队在清华还干了什么？" (What else did the Workers' Propaganda Teams at Tsinghua do?) *炎黄春秋* (June 2015).

medical facilities were still burdened with providing treatment for hundreds of schistosomiasis patients.[43]

Deng Xiaoping's historic restoration of meritocratic college entrance examinations in 1977 put an abrupt end to Mao's "education revolution." The Cultural Revolution was now roundly denounced for having cost China "ten lost years" in higher education. Political study was reduced, practical labor was phased out, and universities were directed to beef up academic standards in a determined attempt to make up for lost time. As part of this wholesale reform of higher education, the Workers' Propaganda Teams were dismantled, and regular Party and government appointees resumed control of university administration.

Workers' Patrols in 1989

Workers' Propaganda Teams appeared to have disappeared for good with the categorical post-Mao repudiation of "ten lost years" of radical educational experimentation during the Cultural Revolution decade. Surprisingly, however, state-mobilized proletarian counter-protest made a dramatic reappearance on the Chinese political stage in the spring of 1989 after university campuses had erupted in response to the Democracy Movement. Sensing the grave danger of a possible regime collapse, municipalities across China again turned to the proletariat as a politically reliable instrument to quash the student uprising and restore public order. As in the Cultural Revolution, however, Chinese cities varied markedly in their approach.

In Beijing, where student protesters had already forged links with local factories, the municipal government chose to rely on peasants from surrounding suburban counties to meet the state's political need. In Shanghai, however, factory workers were confidently called upon again—as in the summer of 1968—under the legacy revolutionary name of "workers' patrols" (工人纠察队) as part of the party-state's urgent effort to form a massive counterweight strong enough to quell the student demonstrators who had nearly paralyzed China's most valuable economic center for weeks.

[43] Tang Shaojie (唐少杰), "'文化大革命'时期清华工宣队诸问题述评" (Discussion of several issues concerning the Tsinghua Workers' Propaganda Teams during the time of the 'Cultural Revolution') *社会科学论坛* (November 2004): 87.

In the spring of 1989, China's two leading cities also differed in terms of the immediate objectives of their state-mobilized counter-movements. In Beijing, the counter-deployment was intended primarily as a propaganda campaign to legitimize martial law and the impending military crackdown. In Shanghai, by contrast, the state-mobilized workers' patrols served also as a coercive force under the command of the security apparatus; their mandate was to pacify rebellious university campuses, remove road blocks, dissolve gathering youth protests and return the city to the control of the regime.

Unlike the Cultural Revolution, in 1989 in neither Beijing nor Shanghai did the mobilization of proletarian patrols presage an "education revolution" in institutions of higher learning. In stark contrast to Mao's day, proletarian counter-protest was not intended to fundamentally remake the basic fabric of the nation's politico-ideological superstructure, nor was it undertaken as a means to purify and rectify the ranks of the ruling Communist Party. This key difference points to a sea change in the dynamics of state-mobilized contention in the context of Deng Xiaoping's China. Charismatic mobilization had been superseded by bureaucratic and instrumental mobilization. The "revisionism" of revolutionary purpose warned against by Chairman Mao in the waning years of his life had indeed taken hold.

The Beijing Pattern

By late April 1989, the student movement had spiraled out of control in Beijing. A violent confrontation with security forces protecting the Zhongnanhai Compound—where the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council of the PRC government are located—broke out on the night of April 20. On April 26, the *People's Daily* published a strongly worded editorial accusing demonstrators of having stirred up "political turmoil" (动乱), and calling upon Party members and Communist Youth League members all over China to act in concert to put an end to the political unrest. When the protests continued to escalate in both scale and demands, martial law was declared on May 19 and a military operation in the nation's capital seemed increasingly inevitable.

Two days after the declaration of martial law, the Beijing Municipal Party Committee and the City Government held an emergency meeting at which an organization named "The Mass Task Force to Maintain Order in the Capital" (首都群众维护秩序工作队) was established.

Members of the force represented a "composite" range of social groups, but were drawn especially from militias in the countryside surrounding Beijing.[44] Hailing from rural suburbs where few protesters were present, members of the Mass Task Force had had little previous contact with the rebellious students.[45] In an open letter issued on the day of the emergency meeting, the municipal party-state requested that all residents of Beijing "organize themselves to help restore public order, promote production and secure people's daily livelihood." This had been standard rhetoric from Beijing authorities throughout the 1989 democracy movement, but to date no offensive action against the student protesters had been undertaken.[46]

With the escalation of political tensions and the looming prospect of military intervention, Beijing's state-mobilized propaganda campaign grew more insistent. On May 31, thousands of peasants, workers, staff and teachers from Shunyi County (in the suburbs of Beijing) held a mass rally that "firmly opposed the ongoing political turmoil."[47] That afternoon, similar demonstrations took place in Daxing and Huairou (both suburban counties of Beijing), to voice opposition against "the small group of people who stirred up political chaos."[48] The next day, state-mobilized counter-protests reached a peak. According to an official account (written in a hasty style with broken sentences),

> More than 200,000 peasants and township cadres and residents of the five rural counties in the suburbs of Beijing held very large-scale rallies and demonstrations in support of the wise decision made by the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council to halt political turmoil and restore public order. The rallies and demonstrations were also in support of the series of measures adopted by the Communist Party's Municipal Committee and the Municipal Government of Beijing to carry out the decisions made by the central leadership. The numbers of participants in the five suburban counties are as follows: Mengtougou District, 100,000;

[44] On the composite character of counterrevolutionary mobilization, see Mark R. Beissinger, "The Social Sources of Counterrevolution: State-Sponsored Contention during Revolutionary Episodes": 4.
[45] Daxing District Party Committee Military Department (中共大兴区委武装部), "动乱后的反思" (Reflections after the Turmoil), *中国民兵*, 1989 年第 10 期：18.
[46] Office of the Beijing Party Committee(中共北京市委办公厅), *1989 Annals of Beijing's Suppression of Turmoil and Quelling of Counter-revolutionary Rebellion* (1989'北京制止动乱平息反革命暴乱纪事), Beijing: Beijing Daily Press, 1989： 100.
[47] *1989'北京制止动乱平息反革命暴乱纪事*：120
[48] *1989'北京制止动乱平息反革命暴乱纪事*：120

> Tong County, more than 20,000; Fangshan County, more than 10,000; Yanqing County, more than 100,000 and Changping County, 25,000.[49]

Journalistic reports of the events on June 1 revealed further details of their state-mobilized nature. According to a former senior official at the government's Xinhua News Agency, the massive participation was facilitated by a combination of bureaucratic mobilization and material incentives:

> The large-scale rallies and demonstrations in the suburbs of Beijing were carefully planned and organized by the Municipal Communist Party Committee. They comprised an essential part of the ongoing propaganda war (against the democracy movement). These officially organized events had to have a large attendance and create high morale. Every district or county was required to mobilize at least 10,000 participants … Every participating peasant was granted two 'work points' (工分) and the government provided transportation. For cadres and workers, each was rewarded 5–10 RMB in cash for participation; some work units handed out new bath towels or straw hats for free as incentives.[50]

Deng Xiaoping's post-Mao market reforms had brought a welcome rise in household incomes, and cash had replaced charisma as the coin of the realm. Bath towels and straw hats, not Chairman Mao's Little Red Book or magical mangoes, now served as proletarian protest props. But economic liberalization had not translated into political liberalization, and those who spoke at the state-sponsored demonstrations were careful to mouth the prescribed Party line:

> No matter whether cadres or peasants, every speaker at the rallies was required to make three points: first, those who stirred the political unrest were only an extremely tiny portion of society; second, the patriotic zeal of the university students was commendable; third, the demands of the anti-government protesters were in line with the Party's own demands. The slogans that participants chanted, such as "firmly oppose political turmoil" and "firmly support the speeches made by Premier Li Peng and President Yang Shangkun," were also determined by the state.[51]

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[49] *1989'北京制止动乱平息反革命暴乱纪*: 121

[50] Zhang Wanshu(张万舒) *历史的大爆炸:"六四"事件全景实录* (History's Great Explosion: A Complete Account of the June Fourth Incident) (Hong Kong: Tiandi Books, 2009): 323.

[51] Zhang Wanshu, 2009: 323.

Much like Polish mass rallies in March 1968, so also in the Beijing rallies of 1989 "the narrative was shaped, if not directly dictated, by the party."[52] The legitimizing function of the series of counter-protests in Beijing was confirmed by the municipal Party Committee's official mouthpiece, which stressed the law-abiding and pro-government import of the state-sponsored demonstrations. One day after the rallies, *Beijing Daily* contained the following account in an article entitled "Please Hear What the Peasants Have to Say":

> "Maintain stability and solidarity! Firmly uphold the Four Cardinal Principles! Oppose bourgeois liberalism!" Yesterday, more than 200,000 peasants, workers, cadres and teachers from Shunyi, Huairou and Daxing Counties . . . held rallies or demonstrations outside the areas that have been declared subject to martial law with permission from the Public Security Bureau. The participants supported the wise decision and the prompt measures to implement the decision. They also expressed their will to remain at their work posts and commit wholeheartedly to production and to a good harvest in the summer.[53]

These multiple suburban rallies followed similar procedures and protocols. Convened in a central sports arena that could accommodate a large crowd, the gatherings featured remarks by local Party cadres, peasant representatives, worker representatives, and intellectual representatives. A public letter calling for society-wide endorsement and support for government policies was usually read aloud and applauded. In some places, government-sponsored rallies were broadcast live to spill-over venues set up outside of the central arena. The rally would be followed by a street demonstration, in which participants holding pro-government signs marched from the arena to an important political location in town. In some counties, motorcades were organized with participants riding in open vehicles, hoisting banners and shouting slogans. In the spring of 1989 these well publicized initiatives created a dramatic scene that garnered widespread public attention.[54]

Arresting as they were, the 1989 counter-protests organized by the Beijing municipal party-state never went beyond a propaganda offensive. The demonstrations all took place outside of the martial law areas and participants did not engage directly with anti-regime

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[52] Ekiert and Kruszewska, 2015: 11.

[53] *Sichuan Daily* Editorial Department (四川日报编辑部)，*学潮动乱暴乱：惊心动魄的 71 天* (The turmoil and disruption of the student movement: 71 harrowing days) (Chengdu: Sichuan People's Press，1989): 158-159.

[54] *学潮动乱暴乱：惊心动魄的 71 天*: 159.

protesters. Furthermore, Beijing authorities did not rely principally on workers to halt the escalating political upheaval and curb the unruly youth protesters, as they had in 1968 when the Red Guard movement turned bloody and brutal (or on April 5, 1976, when a massive political protest against the Gang of Four and its radical Cultural Revolution policies broke out in Tiananmen Square).[55]

On the contrary, when instructed to mobilize "the people" against anti-regime student challengers, Beijing municipal authorities drew primarily upon the support of the peasantry and rural cadres, carefully avoidingdirect contact between participants in state-organized rallies and anti-government protesters. The clear goals of the state-mobilized campaign were to legitimize the implementation of martial law and ensure that the labor force stuck to its routine work schedule. The overall suppression operation in Beijing relied mostly on the official security apparatus and the People's Liberation Army, and the state-mobilized counter-campaign played only a supporting role in the nation's capital.[56] This was markedly different from the state-mobilized counter-movement in the industrial hub of Shanghai.

The Shanghai Pattern

In Shanghai, the party-state had inherited a rich tradition of deploying the city's working class as a political stabilizer and legitimizer, to the advantage of the regime. In 1989, workers once again took center stage as the primary force strategically commissioned to stop student unrest on behalf of the ruling regime:

> On June 8 . . . after Mayor Zhu Rongji's televised address, more than 5,000 worker patrols at 33 large and medium-sized enterprises throughout the city formed propaganda teams to converge from all directions on three command posts in the city center. By four in the morning on the ninth, more than five thousand propaganda team members together with armed police and public security personnel, riding in trucks and holding high banners, took to the streets to clear away all obstructions. At the same time, more than 100,000 worker patrols organized by each district sprang into action. By dawn, the 48 remaining obstructions had all been removed . . . Zhu Rongji offered praise: "The Shanghai worker patrols took action early this morning, restoring Shanghai's

[55] Perry, *Patrolling the Revolution*, pp.249-253.
[56] Timothy Brook, *Quelling the People: The Military Suppression of the Beijing Democracy Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

> transportation and ending the disorderly situation. You have performed a great service for the people of Shanghai!"[57]

Much as had been true with the suppression of student Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, proletarian counter-protest was viewed as both more ideologically correct and more palatable to the general populace than naked military repression. To be sure, in both cases armed security units provided crucial behind-the-scenes direction and protection for the workers. But the dominant image presented to the public was one of unarmed workers parading in open-air trucks and shouting pro-regime slogans through megaphones, rather than of armored tanks and soldiers. The mayor of China's largest industrial city was determined to use Shanghai's most valuable political resource, its working class, as a substitute for a show of state military strength in order to avoid massive bloodshed:

> Mayor Zhu Rongji . . . emphasized that martial law would not be declared in Shanghai. "Many comrades have asked us to call in the People's Armed Police and some have even suggested bringing in the army. As mayor, I solemnly declare that neither the Party Committee nor the Municipal Government has considered calling in the army. We have never envisaged military control or martial law; we seek only to stabilize Shanghai, to steady the situation, to insist on production, and to ensure normal life." That evening tens of thousands of workers were sent out to clear away the roadblocks.[58]

Further replicating the Cultural Revolution pattern, working-class patrols were dispatched to occupy urban districts to reestablish order in restive Shanghai neighborhoods.[59] Nationally, more than 2.5 million workers were mobilized to participate in such occupations that spring.[60] *Liberation Daily* (解放日报)—the official mouthpiece of the Shanghai Municipal party-state—reported on June 9:

> In the early morning today, about 100,000 members of Workers' Patrols from various Districts of Shanghai went onto the streets with

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[57] Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions, ed., *上海工运志*（Gazetteer of the Shanghai labor movement）(Shanghai, 1996): 514. This draft version contains much information on sensitive political topics that was omitted from the official published version which appeared the following year.

[58] Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers* (New York: Perseus, 2001): 410.

[59] Zhang Yongkang (张永康) *中国工人阶级的地位和作用*（The status and function of China's working class）(Beijing, Chinese Communist Party School Press, 1991): 241.

[60] Yi Yuanqiu and Liu Guofu, eds., *民兵纵横谈* (A comprehensive discussion of the militia) (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 1994): 195.

> Communist cadres and police to remove the roadblocks that had been set up by a small number of people who intended to paralyze the transportation of Shanghai. The removal of the barriers will ensure the normal operation of transportation in Shanghai and restore public order.[61]

Liberation Daily later reported that, thanks to the Worker's Patrols, roadblocks across Shanghai had been cleared by 4:40 a.m. The newspaper noted, in a tone reminiscent of reports on Shanghai universities' appreciative reception of Workers' Propaganda Teams during the Cultural Revolution:

> The operation received support from the leaders, teachers and students at Fudan University, Tongji University, Aquatic University (水产大学) and the Institute of Mechanical Engineering (机械学院). By around 12:45 am, protesting students in front of the gates of Fudan and Tongji had all retreated to their respective campuses. Tongji University provided tea and drinking water and offered shelter for members of the operations. After the roadblocks had been cleared, teachers and students at Aquatic University shouted slogans such as 'Thank the working class' (感谢工人阶级) and 'Thank the police force' (感谢公安干警).[62]

Beijing and Shanghai Compared

Considering the backlash that the deployment of tanks and troops to suppress student demonstrators in the nation's capital generated both at home and abroad, it is tempting to suggest that Shanghai's reliance on counter-protests by unarmed workers was a superior strategy of responding to the national crisis precipitated by the 1989 democracy movement. In fact, however, it is hard to gauge the relative efficacy of the contrasting approaches due to very different situations in the two cities. As in the Cultural Revolution, the differences reflected not only divergent historical legacies and economic circumstances, but also the critical matter of sequencing. In both cases, Beijing led (with demobilization that turned violent) and Shanghai followed (with notably less bloodshed). Premier Li Peng, who had advocated for the use of armed force to restore order to the nation's capital, reacted defensively to suggestions that the

[61] *Liberation Daily* (解放日报), June 9 dispatch，"Shanghai's 100,000 worker patrols sent forth to remove road obstructions" (上海十万工纠队员出动拆除路障)。
[62] "Shanghai's 100,000 worker patrols sent forth to remove road obstructions"。

Tiananmen massacre might have been averted had proletarian counter-protest been substituted for military might. As Li remarked a few days after the June Fourth crackdown:

> Had Beijing not relied on the People's Liberation Army, it would have been difficult to defend this capital of ours. Some democracy activists asked us whether it wouldn't have been better had Beijing been like Shanghai. I told a meeting with democracy activists that Beijing had no choice but to use military force because the capital of the People's Republic was in grave danger. The reason that Shanghai could later restore order with 100,000 workers was because Beijing had already suppressed the rebellion. Had Beijing not already been pacified, even the mobilization of an additional 200,000 workers would not have resolved Shanghai's difficulties.[63]

Self-serving though the Premier's explanation was, it was not an unreasonable argument. Proletarian counter-protest works as an effective local strategy of repression only once the authority and intentions of the central state leadership are no longer in doubt. Shanghai benefited from Beijing's example, brutal as it was. In this respect, sequencing was crucial.

Differences in levels of political trust also shaped the variant patterns of state-mobilized counter-protest seen in the Beijing and Shanghai suppression efforts. In the spring of 1989, the Beijing working class was not regarded as a reliable base of support in the eyes of the local party-state. Beijing's rogue union, the so-called Autonomous Association of Workers, was established very early on in the democracy movement and had already gathered a considerable following, particularly among younger workers, when martial law was announced.[64] Many of the more rebellious and potentially violent groups among the protesters—the so-called "Flying Tigers" (飞虎队)—were themselves active or former factory workers in state-owned enterprises. Rumors of an imminent nationwide general strike had also circulated widely, forcing a refutation from the official All-China Federation of Trade Unions.[65]

On May 14, at the height of the student protests, Premier Li Peng paid a well planned visit to the Capital Iron and Steel Corporation (首钢) to hold a discussion session with state enterprise

[63] June 13, 1989 speech of Li Peng in 析世鉴，乙编第九: 1.
[64] *学潮动乱暴乱：惊心动魄的 71 天*: 174; Andrew G. Walder and Gong Xiaoxia, "Workers in the Tiananmen Protests: The Politics of the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 29 (January 1993).
[65] *学潮动乱暴乱：惊心动魄的 71 天*: 116.

workers about the mounting crisis. However, reading between the lines of the carefully worded coverage by Xinhua News Agency, an informed reader could sense that the conversation did not go quite as Party leaders had expected:

> During the discussion, the workers of the Capital Iron and Steel Corporation offered candid opinions about issues such as regulation of the economy, deepening reform, revitalizing large state-owned enterprises, stabilizing prices, curbing corruption and so on . . . After hearing the workers' views on the student protest, the Premier said that the government welcomed criticism and suggestions provided by the workers, students and masses. Some of the opinions of the students—such as the chaotic situation in the economy, the bureaucratism in our state apparatus, and corruption—are indeed problems the Party seeks to resolve.

The Xinhua report did not suggest even lukewarm working-class sympathy for the state at this critical moment.[66] In fact, just one day after the promulgation of martial law, a "Joint Declaration of Workers and Students in the Capital Region" denounced the martial law and called for the immediate removal of the government leadership.[67] A lack of political trust in its own working class convinced the municipal party-state in Beijing to resort to peasants to de-legitimize the democracy movement, and to call up the People's Liberation Army to quell it, in sharp contrast to the situation that unfolded a few days later in Shanghai. As the cradle of the Chinese industrial proletariat, Shanghai did not shy away from deploying workers for counter-protest objectives of both propaganda and security.

Conclusion

Concrete contexts and historical legacies shape the motives and pathways by which the state at both national and sub-national levels engages in counter-mobilization. State-mobilized contention can be a vehicle for profound and sustained institutional reform (as in the Cultural Revolution) or a temporary emergency measure in response to a perceived crisis (as in the Tiananmen Uprising). It can take the form of a quasi-religious crusade for a charismatic

[66] *People's Daily* (人民日报), "李鹏与首钢工人座谈对话" (Li Peng's dialogue with the workers' at Capital Steel), May 14, 1989.
[67] Zhang Liang (张良), *中国"六四"真相* (The true face of China's "June Fourth") (Hong Kong: Mingjing Press, 2002): 553

supreme leader's utopian vision of revolutionary immortality or a thinly veiled cover for the tactical maneuvers of an ideology-free party-state seeking to cling to power in the wake of destabilizing economic reform. It can be progressive or reactionary. As we have seen in the cases of the Red Guard Movement of 1968 and the Democracy Movement of 1989, China's party-state actively mobilized the nation's proletariat to defuse political tensions and eradicate the challenge presented by a violent and confrontational student movement. The striking similarities between proletarian counter-mobilization in Communist Poland and Communist China, where in both countries mass rallies and state-supportive resolutions espoused patriotic and populist sentiments intended to delegitimize and demobilize threatening student movements, points toward the diffusion of tactics and rhetoric among kindred states. However, distinctions in the precise nature of the threat as well as variations in circumstances and sequencing generated discernable differences in the patterns of proletarian counter-protest both over time and from one country (and city) to another.

In 1968, proletarian mobilization directed by the Chinese state was initially adopted in Beijing as an emergency measure to stop the spreading Red Guard factional strife and save the Cultural Revolution from alienating the masses. Serious as the armed conflict was, the rival combatants' ultimate loyalty to Chairman Mao afforded the regime considerable latitude for counter-measures. Charismatic mobilization contributed to the Workers' Propaganda Teams' speedy success in curtailing campus conflict and handed them an official mandate to serve as the vanguard of a more fundamental restructuring of the nation's institutions of higher learning. "The Working Class must lead in everything . . . and forever," was a directive from Chairman Mao himself. State-mobilized contention was thereby elevated from a makeshift counter-measure against unruly youth to a righteous path toward attaining the charismatic leader's revolutionary utopia.

Twenty years later, when the post-Mao state faced another tumultuous student movement in the form of the Tiananmen Uprising, proletarian counter-protest remained within the political elites' operational toolkit. This time, however, student protesters were not vying for loyalty to the top leader but were actually calling for the overthrow of the political system itself. As Mark Beissinger notes, "in the unusual times of direct revolutionary challenge to

autocratic regimes, the purposes of state-sponsored mobilization narrow considerably."[68] On this occasion a pragmatic and ideology-free Party bureaucracy in Beijing would deploy counter-mobilization as an instrument to legitimize suppression by the state's security apparatus and military forces. Despite this narrowing of purpose, varying levels of trust between municipal authorities and the proletariat combined with the lag in response time between Beijing and Shanghai, gave rise to starkly divergent patterns of counter-protest in China's two most important metropolitan centers.

State-mobilized contention is a revealing prism through which to view the machinery of the modern state and its interaction with social forces. While mobilized contention has long served as a staple instrument of the Chinese state, dating back at least to the Boxer Uprising of 1898-1900, its deployment has varied according to changing conditions and the state's shifting and multi-layered calculus of costs and benefits, security and risk, reality and potentiality. In the eventful history of modern China, where student movements have augured fundamental political change, state-mobilized proletarian counter-protests have also played a major role. A better understanding of this phenomenon – in China as elsewhere – requires a sturdy yet supple theoretical framework that takes into account enduring structural factors as well as fluid and fleeting historical contingencies.

[68] Beissinger, "The Social Sources of Counterrevolution": 1.