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THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF MOBILIZATION IN CHINA: Factions, Work Units, and Activists during the 1976 April Fifth Movement

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In the first days of April 1976, on the occasion of the Qingming festival, hundreds of thousands of Chinese took to the streets. In at least 41 places all over the country, they commemorated the late Premier Zhou Enlai and denounced protagonists and policies of the "Cultural Revolutionary" Left. On 5 April, the demonstrations in Beijing led to riots and were violently suppressed. In China, the events became known as "April Fifth Movement" (*siwu yundong*) - a name which will also be used here.

Drawing on diverse Chinese sources and works, about two dozen interviews conducted in Beijing, Nanjing and Henan Province, and the small body of Western-language studies of the movement, this article attempts to gain a clearer view of the social forces at work in the April Fifth Movement.¹ What was the social context in which people were mobilized before and during the Qingming demonstrations in 1976? Who were the agents of mobilization, the institutions, groups or individuals, that took the initiative in the movement? How did they manage to trigger mass collective action under a highly repressive political system?

After briefly introducing the conspiracy theories put forward by the Chinese security apparatus and the official media immediately after the incidents, a closer look is taken at the movement's infrastructure of mobilization: the impact of factional conflicts, the significance and limits of collective action based on the work unit (*danwei*), the activists' social background and their different associational networks. In the concluding section, the course of events is explained as a result of processes of micromobilization.

The concept of mobilization used here is not confined to a top-down process as in well-organized political campaigns. It also implies processes of mobilization "from below" or, more specifically, micromobilization, as displayed by grass-roots movements. For such processes, the initiative of individual activists and core groups of activists as well as the structure of formal and informal social ties are fundamentally important. Mobilization can be achieved by "activating existing social networks, extending those networks, forming coalitions, and generalizing established oppositions".² This concept of mobilization can serve as an important tool for understanding the dynamics of the April Fifth Movement.

The Search for Backstage Bosses

The unexpected mass demonstrations at the Qingming festival were a shock to the "Cultural

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¹ For details on sources and secondary literature and for an analysis of the antecedents, regional incidents, forms of action, demands, suppression, and impact of the April Fifth Movement, see my book *Die Gegen-Kulturrevolution in der VR China. Die Bewegung vom 5. April und der soziale Protest der siebziger Jahre* (The Counter-Cultural Revolution in the PRC. The April Fifth Movement and the Grass-Roots Protest of the Seventies). Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, forthcoming.

² Charles Tilly, "Models and Realities of Popular Collective Action", *Social Research*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Winter 1985), p. 730. For the concept of micromobilization, see Doug McAdam, "Micromobilization Contexts and Recruitment to Activism", *International Social Movement Research*, Vol. 1 (1988), pp. 125-154; Karl-Dieter Opp and Wolfgang Roehl, "Repression, Micromobilization, and Political Protest", *Social Forces*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (December 1990), pp. 521-547; Karl-Dieter Opp, "DDR '89. Zu den Ursachen einer spontanen Revolution" (GDR 1989. On the Origins of a Spontaneous Revolution), *Kölnener Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (June 1991), pp. 302-321.

Revolution" beneficiaries and radicals who dominated the Chinese leadership in those days.³ For many years, with the exception of a short-lived wall poster movement in the summer of 1974, dictatorial normality had prevailed in Beijing. The Party leadership had kept the capital under firm control and was unable to comprehend what might have triggered this sudden unrest among the population, or what was going on in the heads of the people. They did not doubt that backstage bosses had been at work.

Hence, the Chinese media stated that the demonstrations had been planned and organized beforehand. It was claimed that, beginning in the summer of 1975, "counter-revolutionaries" had put into circulation political rumors to manipulate public opinion in favor of their cause and, on the eve of the Qingming festival, had led others astray to join in their activities. Deng was condemned as their "ring leader", a "Chinese Nagy" who had attempted to prepare a *coup d'état*.⁴

Police reports mentioned "about two hundred organized" participants who had taken the lead during the 5 April riots. Four or five thousand people on the square had "banded together" with them and stormed the command post of the security forces on the east side of Tiananmen Square.⁵ Later reports by the security organs stated that about ten "counter-revolutionary cliques" had been active at the time of the incident.⁶ In Nanjing, which was the site of the second largest Qingming incident, one of the heads of the local Public Security Bureau (PSB) developed a conspiracy theory of his own. He distinguished three kinds of backstage wirepullers of the Nanjing incident: a) individual members of the provincial leadership who supported Deng's political line, b) veteran cadres on all levels who had been purged at the end of the sixties and had partially been reinstated in the meantime but were still "unrepentant", and c) the children of those veterans.⁷

During the political persecution following the movement, the security forces concentrated on traces expected to lead to top cadres in Beijing. Deng Xiaoping was not a good target because he had been under *de facto* house arrest since February.⁸ One of Deng's daughters and his younger sister were suspected to have pushed for demonstrations in their respective work units but these accusations proved to be tenuous: Deng's relatives had been very cautious during the criticism campaign and had not personally participated in the Tiananmen demonstrations.⁹

Because there was no evidence of Deng playing a backstage role¹⁰, the security organs focused on Marshal Ye Jianying. Almost daily, Ye had sent relatives and servants to the square to obtain firsthand information about the activities and transcriptions of the poems. On 3 April, one of his sons even wrote a poem of his own and attached it to the memorial in the center of the square. One day later, Ye Jianying was personally driven by his chauffeur along

³ See Roderick MacFarquhar, "The Succession to Mao and the End of Maoism", in *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 15. The People's Republic, Part 2: Revolutions Within the Chinese Revolution, 1966-1982*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991, pp. 361-365.

⁴ *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), 18 and 27 April 1976.

⁵ Fan Shuo, *Ye Jianying zai 1976* (Ye Jianying in 1976). Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe 1990, pp. 99-100.

⁶ Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida de siwu yundong* (The Great April Fifth Movement). Beijing: Beijing chubanshe 1979, pp. 197-8; Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi, *Zhongguo 'wen ge' shinian shi* (A History of the Ten years of the Chinese Cultural Revolution). Hong Kong: Dagong baoshe 1986, p. 625.

⁷ *Gongnongbing Pinglun* (Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Review, Nanjing), No. 12 (1977), pp. 43-5; *Xinhua Ribao* (New China Daily, Nanjing), 20 December 1976.

⁸ Soviet intelligence information, quoted in *Zhongguo Shibao* (China Times, Taipei), 22 April 1976. See also John Gardner, *Chinese Politics and the Succession to Mao*. London: Macmillan 1982, p. 91.

⁹ Fan Shuo, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

¹⁰ In an article titled "*Lun zouzhi*" (On Capitalist Roaders) published under the pseudonym Zhuang Lan, a mouthpiece of the radicals, the Shanghai journal *Xuexi yu Pipan* (Studies and Criticism), No. 5 (1976), p. 7, conceded that Deng was "probably not acquainted" with the Tiananmen demonstrators.

the square to observe the demonstrations. This time, the police registered the number plate and identified the car as belonging to him. Ye himself was not recognized but, nevertheless, became the main suspect among the veteran cadres in Beijing. In connection with this, the PSB in Zhengzhou (Henan Province) tried to find evidence for direct contacts between local Qingming activists in Henan and one of Ye's sons. In the security apparatus, Ye was internally accused of being a "backstage boss" of the Beijing incident and attacked as the "representative of the bourgeoisie within the army". The evidence the PSB found was apparently not sufficient to expose Ye.¹¹

The assumption that a high-level plot could have been at the heart of the April Fifth Movement was shared by several foreign journalists who had witnessed the events and by some China watchers in Hong Kong and Taiwan. A number of journalists suspected that the massive and unforeseen demonstrations might have been a clever maneuver of Deng Xiaoping and his followers and that an underground network might have stirred up the demonstrations.¹² Laszlo Ladany suggested that the "old guard" had been "capable of building up an organization that was never mentioned in the press" and had coordinated the nationwide Qingming demonstrations.¹³ Only a minority of scholars joined in with these speculations, although some raised doubts whether the demonstrations had really been spontaneous.¹⁴ In general, the conspiracy theories circulated by journalists in connection with the April Fifth Movement have not had a big following in the scholarly literature. The findings in this article confirm the wisdom of this restraint.

The Impact of Factionalism

Stimulated by the "Campaign Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius", political and social conflicts dating from the mass factional strife of the late sixties had regained momentum in the years between 1974 and 1976. In several regions, especially among industrial and railway workers, the remnants of old rival associations were tangled in frequent clashes.¹⁵ Factionalism (*paixing*) was a driving force behind social and political tensions in China in the mid-seventies.

A social analysis of the April Fifth Movement has to take into consideration that factional affiliations cut across almost any sector of Chinese society: factories, offices, schools, Party organizations, and other institutions. Was the April Fifth Movement mainly staged by the "rightist", "conservative" forces already active in the late sixties, or was it a manifestation of newly emerging social and political configurations that transcended the struggles and cleavages provoked by the "Cultural Revolution"?

A closer look at the activities of cadres' children (*ganbu zidi*), a social group deeply involved in the factional strife of the sixties, is helpful in addressing these questions. After the 1976 Qingming incidents, rumors in Beijing had it that grandsons of Ye Jianying and Zhu De had been arrested for taking part in the 5 April riots. The eldest daughter of Marshal He Long (who had lost his life during the "Cultural Revolution") had spontaneously joined one of the earliest funeral marches on Tiananmen Square and later came close to being imprisoned for this. The arrest of one of General Wang Zhen's sons who had been on the square during

¹¹ Fan Shuo, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-89, 92-93, and 114.

¹² *Le Monde*, 6 and 7 April 1976; *L'Aurore*, 8 April 1976; *Newsweek*, 19 April 1976, p. 45.

¹³ See *China News Analysis*, No. 1142 (8 December 1978), p. 4, and Laszlo Ladany, *The Communist Party of China and Marxism, 1921-1985. A Self-Portrait*. London: Hurst 1988, pp. 382-3.

¹⁴ See Tom Bowden and David Goodman, "China: The Politics of Public Security", *Conflict Studies*, No. 78 (December 1976), p. 17; John Gittings, *China Changes Face. The Road from Revolution, 1949-1989*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 1989, p. 103; Philip F. Williams, "Some Provincial Precursors of Popular Dissent Movements in Beijing", *China Information*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (Summer 1991), p. 2.

¹⁵ See Keith Forster, *Rebellion and Factionalism in a Chinese Province. Zhejiang 1966-76*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe 1990. Similar developments as in Zhejiang occurred in provinces like Henan, Jiangxi, and Fujian.

the demonstrations was also said to have been part of the plans.¹⁶

During the "Cultural Revolution", children of veteran cadres had suffered heavily from the political purge of their parents. The campaign against Deng Xiaoping threatened the position of their parents and their own prospects again. Therefore, many of them took an active part in the Qingming demonstrations. A group of Beijing cadres' children later wrote that at Qingming 1976, they "poured out" their deep hatred in verses denouncing Jiang Qing and swore in front of the Heroes' Monument: "Whoever is opposed to [the late] Premier Zhou, we will fight him in bloody battle through to the end!"¹⁷

In Xi'an (Shaanxi Province), former members of a dissolved "conservative" Red Guard organization joined the local demonstrations in April 1976. They had been attracted by the concept of the "Four Modernizations" and used the Qingming festival to express their support for Zhou Enlai and Deng.¹⁸

From such reports, the China watcher Ladany drew the far-reaching conclusion that "sons and daughters of leading cadres, still bitter over what had happened to them during and after the 'Cultural Revolution', had united in a secret pact of vengeance".¹⁹ Other scholars did not go so far as to assume a plot behind the demonstrations but correctly stated that in several work units, the *ganbu zidi* had been a driving force behind the Qingming demonstrations. They were dissatisfied with their own lot and with that of their parents and "remained privy to the scandal, the intrigue, the lapses of integrity within the highest circles of power".²⁰

But was there any organizational connection between the participating cadres' children? Some former Red Guards who had escaped to Hong Kong were quick to note that the style of the most critical poems and slogans as well as the riots on 5 April showed similarities to actions carried out by the "United Action Committee" (*Liandong* or *Shoudu hongweibing lianhe xingdong weiyuanhui*) in 1966/67.²¹ Those speculations were fueled by a report in the *People's Daily* which mentioned youths with "short cropped hair" (*pingtou*).²² At that time, this was a code word for cadres' children. In connection with the attack on the command post of the security forces, the media hereby alluded to the "United Action Committee": in 1966, this organization had attacked Jiang Qing, the "Cultural Revolution Group", and the Ministry of Public Security, and had become notorious for its political arrogance and its brutality.²³

Indeed, at the Qingming festival in 1976, former members of the "United Action Committee" joined the demonstrations as individuals or together with close friends.²⁴ However, judging by information gathered in Beijing, there was no revival of the "United Action Committee" in the capital in 1976 - neither before nor after the Tiananmen incident. Even if

¹⁶ Yang Kuangman and Guo Baochen, "Mingyun" (Destiny), in Zhou Ming (Ed.), *Lishi zai zheli chensi* (History is Reflected Here), Vol. 2. Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe 1986, pp. 265, 278, and 291; Interviews in Beijing.

¹⁷ *Renmin Ribao*, 3 November 1978.

¹⁸ *Shaanxi Ribao* (Xi'an), 21 January 1979.

¹⁹ *China News Analysis*, No. 1142 (8 December 1978), p. 3.

²⁰ Anne F. Thurston, *Enemies of the People*. Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press 1988, p. 16.

²¹ For such speculations, see *Zhanwang* (Prospect, Hong Kong), No. 342 (1 May 1976), p. 6, and No. 343 (16 May 1976), p. 9; *Mingbao Yuekan* (Mingbao Monthly, Hong Kong), No. 5 (1976), pp. 17-21.

²² *Renmin Ribao*, 8 April 1976.

²³ See Red Guard Shanghai Headquarters (*Hong Shang Si*) (Ed.), "*Zalan 'Liandong'*" (Crush 'Liandong'), May 1967, pp. 6-21; Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-122.

²⁴ The best known example is Wei Jingsheng (as a member of *Liandong* he had been imprisoned for some months in 1967) who witnessed the Tiananmen incident in 1976. A poem written by former *Liandong* members is included in Tong Huaizhou group (Ed.), *Tiananmen geming shiwenxuan* (Anthology of Revolutionary Poems and Scripts from Tiananmen), *samizdat* reprinted by Fujian renmin chubanshe 1978, Vol. 1, pp. 296-9. According to Taiwanese reports, isolated wall posters signed with "*Liandong*" appeared in Beijing and Guangzhou after the Tiananmen incident, demanding revenge on Jiang Qing for the "insults suffered over the past ten years". See "Campaign to Repulse the Right Deviationist Wind to Reverse Previous Verdicts: Posters For and Against", *Issues and Studies*, No. 8 (1976), pp. 98-9, and under the same heading, No. 11 (1976), p. 109.

former members of this organization participated as individuals or in small groups, they certainly were unable to manipulate or direct such massive demonstrations. Moreover, it is hardly justifiable to categorize all the children of cadres who were on the square as former members of *Liandong* and to construct a conspiracy theory on this basis. No doubt, most of the *ganbu zidi* had strong sympathies for the direction the demonstrations took, but they were not bound together in an extensive and well-planned plot.

With respect to the role of factional groupings, similar deliberations apply to the large majority of the regional incidents at the Qingming festival in 1976. Groups that had their origins in the factional struggles of the late sixties or in more recent conflicts operated in several places. In Zhengzhou, Hangzhou, and Wuhan, they gained quite a strong influence in the initial stage of the local demonstrations.

In Henan Province, factional strife had made a very strong comeback in the years between 1974 and 1976. The Zhengzhou Railway Bureau was at the center of these struggles²⁵, and the memorial activities held for Zhou Enlai at the 1976 Qingming festival became inseparably entangled in those conflicts. A group of staff members with a "conservative" factional background used the occasion to defy the dominance of the rebel faction in the bureau. Eight cadres and workers from Zhengzhou and subordinate railway bureaus in Anyang, Luoyang, and Xinxiang took the initiative. Since late 1975, they had repeatedly met in order to coordinate their resistance against the radicals. When they heard of the Nanjing demonstrations, they decided to make a public move. On the early morning of 3 April, they formed a march column with about two hundred like-minded colleagues, went to the main office of the railway bureau and wrote slogans in support of Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and the "Four Modernizations". This small-scale demonstration triggered major memorial activities in the following days which were joined by a total of 81 work units and thousands of people in Zhengzhou. The local radicals staged several violent "counter-attacks" against those activities, but could not prevent people in Anyang, Kaifeng, and Luoyang from holding similar demonstrations.²⁶

In Wuhan (Hubei Province), a group named "*Han Cheng Niu*" (cattle of the winter city) was formed in January 1976 by cadres, workers, and other members from different work units. They met as a "study group".²⁷ Many of the participants had belonged to "conservative" factions and had been severely persecuted during the "Cultural Revolution". At the end of February, the two hundred members and other supporters (workers and cadres from seven factories, a people's commune, and an office) met in a factory to discuss the anti-Deng campaign. Beginning on 2 March, several dozens of them put up wall posters attacking the radicals and prepared commemorative ceremonies for the Qingming festival.

In Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), several groups which became active had been closely involved with the local factional struggles in the previous years. One of the best known groups was formed around Zhang Jifa²⁸, a factory cadre who had been brutally tortured by his local opponents in 1974. From 1975 on, he continued to organize informal meetings of like-minded people from several factories, schools, and offices. The group had about 30 members and a

²⁵ Already in 1967, clashes between rival factions and blockades of the railways had affected several provinces along the Eastern China railway network. One of the Zhengzhou railway rebels' leaders, Tang Qishan, had been elevated to the Party's Central Committee in 1969 and, backed by the Politburo members Ji Dengkui and Zhang Chunqiao, had established a powerful political position in the province by 1974. For details, see my forthcoming book (mentioned in note 1).

²⁶ For accounts of the demonstrations in Henan Province, see *Gongren Ribao* (Worker's Daily), 17 November 1978; *Henan Ribao* (Zhengzhou), 4 May 1976, 12 August 1978, 8 and 20 January 1979, 22 February 1979; *Bingchen Qingming jishi* (A Documentation of Qingming 1976). Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 1980, pp. 516-26. At least two of the organizers from Zhengzhou, Lü Dong and Zhu Dianling, were tortured to death in prison.

²⁷ The group was named after the slightly distorted family names of three co-founders: Han (Ximing), Chen (Shiqing), and Liu (Zhongyu). See *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 541-44; *Hubei Ribao* (Wuhan), 7 May 1976 and 18 November 1978.

²⁸ *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 473-87; Forster, *op. cit.*, pp. 136, 157-8, 186, and 245.

mimeograph in its possession. In March 1976 they started to act publicly and became involved in the local Qingming movement. A second significant group from Hangzhou operated under the pseudonym "Fenghuo" and concentrated its attacks on leading protagonists of the radicals in nearby Shanghai. Four cadres from provincial-level bureaus who feared falling victim to the new political campaign were involved in those activities.²⁹ As in the case of the Wuhan *Han Cheng Niu* group, these were associations of people who had already known each other from preceding campaigns and had mostly shared the same factional affiliation in the late sixties.

Remnant "conservative" factions of the "Cultural Revolution" period were not the only ones active during the Qingming demonstration. The radicals were not passive either. Qinghua University, a center of radical activity in the capital, had actually sent 40 to 50 reliable representatives to observe the activities on Tiananmen Square and to check whether members of the school took part in the demonstrations. Some of those informants became entangled in bloody beatings after making critical remarks aimed at Zhou Enlai.³⁰ "Counter-attacks" launched by "Cultural Revolutionary" radicals and violent clashes among rival factions were reported in almost every regional incident.

It is evident that all the different groupings within the Party leadership took an active interest in the 1976 demonstrations and hoped to gain some advantage out of the events. In Beijing, numerous top cadres, many ministries, institutions, and of course the different branches of the security apparatus had their agents and informants on the square. This involvement of very diverse interests and actors makes an overall assessment of the demonstrations difficult. On the one hand, people joined in to express their loyalty towards Zhou Enlai and protest against protagonists of the radical Left, but on the other hand, the multi-faceted conflicts among different political factions inherited from the previous period persisted and influenced the demonstrations in various ways.

Beyond Factionalism

Despite the involvement of factional groupings in several local Qingming demonstrations, the April Fifth Movement was more than an eruption of the old factionalism. It was, certainly in Beijing and Nanjing, a genuine mass movement characterized by the participation of all politically important groups of Chinese society and by the formation of cross-cutting social alliances. The thousands of wreaths laid at the Qingming festival came from factories, schools, offices, publishing houses, trading firms, people's communes, departments of the Academy of Sciences, ministries³¹, individual participants or informal groups formed by activists of the movement.

The number of those present on Tiananmen Square increased dramatically from the first major activities on 30 March to the apex on the weekend of 3 and 4 April. While not more than ten thousand people had participated on 1 April, up to five hundred thousands attended the memorial activities during the said weekend.³² On 5 April, after the wreaths had been removed and suppression had become imminent, some tens of thousands, mostly onlookers,

²⁹ Zhejiang People's Broadcasting Station, 14 October 1978 (Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 20 October 1978); Keith Forster, "The 1976 Ch'ingming Incident in Hangchow", *Issues and Studies*, No. 4 (1986), pp. 19-21.

³⁰ See Li Wen, "Tiananmen shijian zhong de Qinghua daxue" (Qinghua University during the Tiananmen Incident), *Renmin Jiaoyu* (People's Education), No. 12 (1978), pp. 12-18; *Zhengming* (Contention, Hong Kong), No. 3 (1978), p. 21; Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63; Yan Jiaqi *et al.*, *Siwu yundong jishi* (A Factual Record of the April Fifth Movement). Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 1979, pp. 73-75.

³¹ Gerd Ruge, *Begegnung mit China* (A Meeting with China). Düsseldorf: Econ Verlag 1978, p. 378, claims that all ministries, except for the Ministry of Public Security, had sent wreaths to Tiananmen Square.

³² Estimates based on Ruge, *op. cit.*, pp. 372 and 379; Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, p. 56. In his report to the Politburo in the evening of 4 April, Wu De said that a total of 2,073 wreaths had been laid by more than 1,400 work units. On 3 April, 200,000 people and 507 work units had presented more than 800 wreaths. On 4 April, between seventy and eighty thousand participants and 420 units had brought 450 wreaths. See Fan Shuo, *op. cit.*, p. 94. The numbers given by Wu De appear to be understated.

were still scattered across the square.³³ Probably much more than a million people had come to the square between 30 March and 5 April.

As for the regional incidents, the number of participants can in most cases only be roughly estimated. The Nanjing demonstrations held from 29 March through 4 April, represent the biggest regional incident with several hundreds of thousands participants, followed by Hangzhou, Xi'an, Zhengzhou, Luoyang, Taiyuan, and others with numbers in the tens of thousands.

A further significant indicator for the mass character of the April Fifth Movement is the number of work units involved. In Beijing, up to two thousand *danwei* laid wreaths on Tiananmen Square. In Nanjing, more than a thousand work units are said to have been involved. By contrast, only 138 *danwei* became active in Hangzhou, 81 in Zhengzhou, and a meager 21 in Kaifeng.³⁴

The demonstrations in Beijing and Nanjing by far outnumbered their counterparts in other regions, and here it is certainly appropriate to speak of mass movements. In these two places, the memorial activities for Zhou Enlai facilitated a temporary suspension of the social atomization caused by the "Cultural Revolution". In many factories, offices, and institutions which had previously been severely affected by factional infighting, the old front lines seemed to relax somewhat during the Qingming demonstrations. Followers of rival factions sometimes joined memorial marches together even though they could not find common ground in their assessment of Deng Xiaoping and the current political campaign.³⁵ For the sake of Premier Zhou's memory, they postponed their factional rivalry for the duration of the Qingming festival.

These forms of cross-factional unity cannot be detected in several other regional incidents. The example of the Qingming incidents in Henan Province (Zhengzhou, Luoyang etc.), which were characterized by factional clashes, makes clear that the Beijing and Nanjing mass movements in many ways covered new ground. But even in these latter two places, the broad alliance demonstrated by the Qingming movement did not last for long. During the ensuing "Campaign to Suppress Counter-Revolutionaries", many old factional accounts were settled by way of denunciations and personal attacks.³⁶

The Qingming demonstrations in spring 1976 could not heal the wounds of the "Cultural Revolution", but indicated the potential for a social life beyond the manipulated struggles of this period.

Prominent Work Units

In his 4 April report to the Politburo, Beijing Party Chief Wu De claimed that many among the most conspicuous work units in the Tiananmen demonstrations were notorious for their long-standing political "problems".³⁷ An examination of those centers of the movement which were remarkable for their spectacular and large-scale activities contributes to our understand-

³³ In the afternoon, the number of those present on the square decreased rapidly. For pertinent estimates, see *Zhongguo Shibao*, 6 and 7 April 1976; *Le Monde*, 7 April 1976; *Qishi Niandai* (The Seventies, Hong Kong), No. 4 (1977), pp. 5-7; Ruge, *op. cit.*, pp. 411, 425, 435-6; and David Zweig's book review in *The China Quarterly*, No. 120 (December 1989), p. 869.

³⁴ Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50; Interviews in Nanjing; *Zhejiang Ribao*, 24 November 1978; *Henan Ribao*, 8 January 1979; *Kaifeng dashiji* (A Chronicle of Kaifeng). Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe 1990, p. 233.

³⁵ While preparing their memorial activities, rival factions in some work units heatedly debated the necessity of including slogans critical of Deng in their columns. In the end, they compromised not to make any explicit political statements. See *Nanjing Bao*, 30 November 1978.

³⁶ In the wake of the incidents in Beijing and Nanjing, prizes were awarded to many work units and individuals for having contributed to the struggle against "counter-revolution". See *Beijing Ribao*, 24 April 1976, and *Xinhua Ribao*, 14 May 1976.

³⁷ Jin Chunming, "Siwu yundong shuping" (A Review of the April Fifth Movement), *Dangshi yanjiu* (Studies in Party History, Beijing), No. 5 (1984), p. 69.

ding of the context of mobilization.

Many of the *danwei* which during the political persecution in the wake of the April Fifth Movement were condemned as strongholds and headquarters of "counter-revolution" (such as the Seventh Ministry of Machine Building, the Academy of Sciences, the Railway Ministry, or the Second Artillery) had already come under strong political pressure since the beginning of the "Campaign to Repulse the Rightist Revisionist Trend" (*fanji youqing fan an feng*).³⁸ Their prominent role in the memorial demonstrations can be interpreted as a counter-demonstration against the threat of a new campaign. The members of those institutions had a strong interest in defending Zhou's legacy and in publicly pushing for his and Deng's program of economic consolidation and modernization. These people demonstrated to safeguard their future prospects on Tiananmen Square and can safely be classified as belonging to Zhou's and Deng's political *clientèle*.

Departments and subordinate units of the Seventh Ministry of Machine Building played a leading role during the Tiananmen demonstrations.³⁹ The ministry was responsible for advanced military technology like air force equipment, nuclear weapons and missile technology. The proportion of technical specialists (a favorite target for political attacks in the "Cultural Revolution") among the personnel was high. Hence, the ministry had been subjected to a wave of purges, and the political pressure had hardly eased off in the seventies. In March 1976, the heads of the ministry were heavily criticized by Jiang Qing and Wang Hongwen at several conferences. New purges seemed to be imminent. This was the situation when the Tiananmen incident occurred. Many technicians and engineers who had repeatedly been attacked since 1966 and felt threatened by the new campaign took an active part in the movement. Almost daily, members of the ministry were on the square. On 3 April, they organized a funeral march with more than 500 participants.

Also in other institutions, the fear of new purges among veteran cadres and members of the intelligentsia had been fanned by the anti-Deng campaign. Their memorial and protest activities, in a way, were a manifestation of opposition aired by potential victims of the new campaign.

This line of argument is confirmed by the activities of several institutes of the Academy of Sciences. As refuges of the "Stinking No. 9" (*choulaojiu*, i.e., "reactionary" intellectuals), they had suffered many waves of persecution since the beginning of the "Cultural Revolution". Over one thousand members of the Transistor Research Institute marched to Tiananmen Square on 3 April to lay twelve wreaths.⁴⁰ Similarly, the personnel of Factory No. 109 which belonged to the Academy⁴¹ had been under political pressure for many years and was entangled in a wall-poster "battle" with the theory group of Beijing and Qinghua Universities (*Liang Xiao*) since January 1976. Beginning in the middle of March, some staff members, backed by parts of the factory's leadership, began with their preparations for the Qingming festival. More than 400 out of a staff of 550 participated in the funeral march. Moreover, members of this institution, individually or in small groups, were on the square almost daily, and some of them were even involved in the riots on 5 April.⁴²

On 4 April, the biggest marches of the Beijing movement were held by the Aurora

³⁸ See Wang Hongzhi, *Tiananmen guangchang geming jianshi* (A Short History of Revolutionary Events in Tiananmen Square). Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe 1979, pp. 104-5.

³⁹ *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-218; Yang Kuangman and Guo Baochen, *op. cit.*, pp. 238-9; Central Document No. 37 (1977), translated in *Issues and Studies*, No. 11 (1978), pp. 100-2.

⁴⁰ Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi, *op. cit.*, p. 575; Yan Jiaqi *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 36 and 117-8. One of Deng Xiaoping's daughters worked there in 1976 but did not participate in the demonstration.

⁴¹ See Wang Hongzhi, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-5; Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-6 and 202-3; *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-21.

⁴² See Yang Kuangman and Guo Baochen, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

(*Shuguang*) Generator Factory (more than 3,000 people laid 34 wreaths)⁴³ and by the Qingyun Instrument Factory (1,100 participants).⁴⁴ In the preceding months, the Qingyun factory had already gained a certain reputation as a *samizdat* center for editing material in the memory of Chen Yi, He Long, Zhou Enlai, and other veteran revolutionaries.

Even if Deng's *clientèle* took the initiative in preparing memorial activities in many work units, it is important to note that the participation in the marches was not confined to dedicated supporters of the veteran cadres. During the Nanjing incident, the Military Factory No. 511 held one of the largest demonstrations in which about 2,000 staff members participated, among them about 40 cadres and 200 Party members. The march had been planned by the factory's branches of the Trade Union and the Communist Youth Corps in defiance of bans imposed by the Municipal Party Committee. Interestingly, members of different factions had agreed to hold the memorial demonstration for the late Premier Zhou and were unanimous in their opposition to the Party instructions.⁴⁵ Similar phenomena are documented for large factories not only in Beijing and Nanjing but also in Luoyang, Taiyuan, and Wuhan.

There is only scattered information on the actual levels of participation within work units. In the Beijing and Nanjing units examined for this study, it seems to have been no exception that more than 50 percent of the total number of personnel participated. For the most active departments of Nanjing University, the share was even higher than 70 percent for the initial actions (although it rapidly decreased following the first hints of repression). Considering the risk taken by the participants, such levels of participation are very surprising, but they probably apply only to the pioneering *danwei* of the April Fifth Movement. In the less prominently involved units, the proportion was apparently much smaller.

Work units generally served as centers of self-organization.⁴⁶ In all regional incidents during the April Fifth Movement, people characteristically marched in *danwei* groups. In big factories, the actions were planned primarily on the workshop or department level (*chejian/ke*) and then made known to the entire factory. In some enterprises, the preparations for Qingming had begun already in February. But most work units only came into action when the demonstrations on Tiananmen Square had already gained momentum.

The leaderships of factories remained generally passive during the demonstrations and awaited the outcome of the affair. Therefore, workers and basic-level cadres, despite the many directives forbidding participation, had a relatively free hand in carrying out their activities. In contrast to the mourning ceremonies held immediately after Zhou Enlai's death in January, they did not display their wreaths in the name of this or that Revolutionary or Party Committee, but wrote only the name of their respective work unit on the ribbons. They acted independently and without official approval.

As the system of social control in the PRC is based on the *danwei*, political opposition in China almost always becomes manifest only as "cellular protest".⁴⁷ The population is divided into collective units that maintain only limited contact across unit borders. This social cellularization or compartmentalization can only be overcome by establishing cross-*danwei* or even cross-regional contacts, a practice called "*chuanlian*" in the "Cultural Revolution". In the "Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius", cross-*danwei* contacts had been revived in many regions. Members of different factories who knew each other through private

⁴³ See *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-42; Yang Kuangman and Guo Baochen, *op. cit.*, p. 271; Yan Jiaqi *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 49 and 115.

⁴⁴ *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-6.

⁴⁵ Interview with a worker of Factory No. 511; *Nanjing Dangshi ziliao* (Material on Nanjing Party History), No. 1 (1986), pp. 16-24; *Nanjing Bao*, 17, 18, 28, and 30 November 1978.

⁴⁶ This section is inspired by Andrew G. Walder's assessment of the work units' role in the 1989 movement. See his article "Workers, Managers, and the State: The Reform Era and the Political Crisis of 1989", *The China Quarterly*, No. 127 (September 1991), pp. 477-492, esp. pp. 483-491.

⁴⁷ David Strand, "Protest in Beijing: Civil Society and Public Sphere in China", *Problems of Communism*, (May-June 1990), pp. 1-19, extensively describes instances of what is called "cellular protest" here.

connections or through associations from the "Cultural Revolution" set up contacts and coordinated the direction and means of their actions. This is how the two Beijing factories Aurora (*Shuguang*) and Qingyun agreed to unite in centripetal marches on Tiananmen Square coming from different directions.⁴⁸ In Nanjing, there was not only cooperation among students of different schools but even between students and workers. The student actions at the Nanjing railway station (they made speeches to the travelers and used tar to write slogans on the carriages), spreading the news of the local demonstrations to many places along the Eastern China railways, would have been impossible without the support of the railway workers.⁴⁹

Besides those remarkable cases, coordinated actions across unit borders played only a marginal role during the Qingming demonstrations of 1976. The April Fifth Movement revealed the opportunities and limits of cellular protest posed by the *danwei*-based system of social control in the PRC. On the one hand, mobilization can be accelerated because of the close contacts and easy communication within the *danwei*. But on the other hand, the building of broader forms of organization is impeded by the segregation of each *danwei* from other social groups and organizations. In comparison with the events in 1976, it is even more significant that cross-*danwei* autonomous organizations were founded during the Democracy Movement of 1989, thus calling into question the system of social control and breaking the organizational monopoly of the Communist Party.

Social Profile of Activists

The focus of our analysis can now be shifted from the collective level of the *danwei* to that of individual participants whose courage and determination are crucial to the dynamics and direction of mass collective action.

As in other countries, Chinese city dwellers have a strong desire to witness exciting events. In the case of a major political incident like the Qingming demonstrations in 1976, individual conscious support was not necessarily the most important criterion for attending: the wish to satisfy one's curiosity or to "take part in history" motivated many people to go to the sites of demonstrations.⁵⁰ We thus have to differentiate between the periphery and the center of the April Fifth Movement.

In the 1976 Tiananmen demonstrations, apart from the activists operating in the center of the movement, three main types of participants can be distinguished: we will call them onlookers, fellow travelers, and multipliers, respectively. Onlookers spent several hours on the square to witness the activities of others but, except for copying poems, did not take any initiative on their own and remained passive. For the security apparatus, it was extremely difficult to anticipate the moves of this huge group: such a crowd can produce a large number of multipliers, be radicalized by police operations or impede suppression and protect activists by its sheer number.⁵¹

Fellow travelers were different from mere onlookers since they actively participated in the memorial demonstrations, particularly by writing and displaying poems, after individual risk had been reduced in the context of mass actions. In Beijing, such a process of rapidly expanding participation could be observed during the weekend of 3 and 4 April. The two groups of onlookers and fellow travelers represented a cross section of the urban population.

⁴⁸ *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-42; Yang and Guo, *op. cit.*, p. 271; Yan Jiaqi *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 49 and 115.

⁴⁹ Although *chuanlian* across *danwei* borders was officially prohibited in the political campaigns of 1976 so as to limit the detrimental impact on production, there were news from many places that it was practised, nevertheless. See *Zhanwang*, No. 344 (1 June 1976), p. 11.

⁵⁰ Interviews with participants in the 1976 demonstrations in Beijing, Nanjing, and Kaifeng.

⁵¹ The distinction between activists and onlookers is strikingly shown by several photos reprinted in *Tiananmen shijian jinian tuji* (A Collection of Pictures in Memory of the Tiananmen Incident). Hong Kong: Qishi niandai 1978.

Multipliers were the link between center and periphery of the movement and played a key role in expanding the scope of the demonstrations. They spread the contents and demands of poems, banners, slogans or speeches by conveying them to people who had not gone to the square. The boundaries with the other groups can be described as fluid.⁵²

The activists and leaders operated in the center of the movement. It is difficult to assess the number of those who organized marches and articulated explicit criticism or protest in their poems, slogans, or speeches. According to the impressions of eyewitnesses, this group consisted of not more than several hundreds of people who dared to take the risk of standing in the front line of political demonstrations.

After combing all pertinent sources, 182 persons could be identified as the activists of the April Fifth Movement: they had organized funeral marches in their *danwei*, written critical poems, made speeches and taken the lead during the demonstrations or in the 5 April riots. The data presented below unavoidably mirror the coverage of the movement in China after rehabilitation. Although it offers neither a complete nor a representative picture, it nevertheless helps to refine our social analysis.

SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF 182 IDENTIFIABLE ACTIVISTS IN BEIJING⁵³

Workers	91	Soldiers/Officers	11
Students	34	Teachers/Intellectuals	5
(Basic-level) Cadres	20	Occupation unknown	8
Middle School Students	13	Younger than 35	min. 92
		Female	min. 30

In addition, the social profile of those people who were imprisoned for their participation in the movement can also contribute to our analysis. They belonged to the most courageous demonstrators and were condemned as "counter-revolutionary bellwethers" (*fan'geming daitou-yang*) in the wake of the incidents. In a way, they represented those social forces which had actively supported the movement. Because of a lack of detailed sources on the background of those imprisoned in Beijing⁵⁴, we have to turn to the victims of persecution in Nanjing.

⁵² *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-105, contains an interesting story of such a multiplier who was arrested for "instigating counter-revolution".

⁵³ Data compiled from the following sources: *Beijing Ribao* (Beijing Daily), *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), *Gongren Ribao* (Workers Daily), October 1978 to April 1979; *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Yan Jiaqi *et al.*, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Yang and Guo, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁵⁴ Officially, 388 are said to have been jailed for their role in the Tiananmen incident. See *Renmin Ribao*, 19 November 1978.

SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE 22 ACTIVISTS IMPRISONED IN NANJING⁵⁵

Age Cohorts		Occupation	
20-35	11	Workers	8
35-45	2	Students	5
45-	3	(Basic-level) Cadres	4
unknown	6	Teachers/Intellectuals	2
		Doctors	2
Children of Cadres		Soldiers	1
min.	6	Cultural Revolution Experience	
Party Members		(overlap possible)	
min.	8	Rustication	min. 10
		Red Guards	min. 11
		Soldiers	2

A report compiled by the Ministry of Public Security in June 1976 stated that, according to statistics from different localities, among the "recently discovered counter-revolutionaries", the proportion of Party and League members had been high.⁵⁶ Because of obvious manipulations by the Chinese media after the rehabilitation of the April Fifth Movement in November 1978, the actual proportion of Party members among the Beijing activists is not easy to assess: as "Heroes of April Fifth", numerous rehabilitated activists were taken into the Party and *a posteriori* praised as upright comrades. However, the share of Party and Youth League members seems to have been considerable. Party members and Party activists who had never before aroused suspicion for airing deviant opinions were among the most active demonstrators. The security organs explained this phenomenon by assuming a change in class relations: the "bourgeoisie" had penetrated the proletarian party.⁵⁷

Albeit incomplete, the data on the Beijing movement confirm the impression that numerous basic-level cadres had joined or even actively supported the Qingming activities in their respective units. Demands to hold marches were addressed to them and because many of them had only been reinstated in the years between 1973 and 1975, thanks to Zhou Enlai, they lent their support to the actions. The active involvement of basic-level cadres is also documented for other Qingming movements such as those in Nanjing and Hangzhou.

An important difference between the Beijing and Nanjing movements, which was confirmed by interviews conducted for this study and by Chinese works published immediately after the official rehabilitation, is that students in Nanjing took the initiative and the leading role, whereas their Beijing counterparts remained mostly passive or were prevented from joining the demonstrations.⁵⁸

Young workers played a crucial role in the Tiananmen incident. They were also the backbone of the local incidents in places such as Zhengzhou, Xi'an, Luoyang, and Wuxi. By

⁵⁵ Data compiled from the following sources: Interviews with three activists conducted in Nanjing in 1987 and 1988; *Nanjing Bao* (Nanjing News) and *Nanjing Ribao* (Nanjing Daily), September 1978 to April 1979; *Nanjing Dangshi ziliao* (Material on Nanjing Party history), Vol. 12 (1986), *passim*; Yang and Guo, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁵⁶ See Central Document No. 37 (1977), translated in *Issues and Studies*, No. 7 (1978), p. 100.

⁵⁷ Wang Hongzhi, *op. cit.*, pp. 106 and 109.

⁵⁸ For the Beijing students' situation, see David S. Zweig, "The Peita Debate on Education and the Fall of Teng Hsiao-p'ing", *The China Quarterly*, No. 73 (March 1978), pp. 140-158; Li Wen, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

contrast, student actions gained particular significance not only in Nanjing but also in the Qingming demonstrations in Hangzhou and Hefei.

Both in Beijing and Nanjing, the proportion of people younger than 35 years of age is remarkable. This includes the age cohort of the Red Guard generation and also part of the age cohort of the Revolutionary Rebels of the late sixties.⁵⁹ Among the Beijing activists, a group of eight young men who tried to direct the 5 April mass actions with the help of a megaphone deserves a closer look.⁶⁰ They had only met that morning and formed a spontaneous "fighting group". Four of them (two workers, one middle school student, and a student from an industrial high school) even tried to enter into negotiations with the command post of the security forces.

The personal history of one of them, Chen Ziming, who became a prominent dissident in 1989, is instructive. Chen was a student at the Beijing High School of the Chemical Industry (*Huagong xueyuan*). In a private letter written in 1975, he had criticized Zhang Chunqiao for his "Theory of Comprehensive Dictatorship". The letter was discovered and Chen was condemned as a "counter-revolutionary". On 2 April 1976, exactly at the time of the Tiananmen incident, he was expelled from high school and the Communist Youth League and was waiting to be sent to the countryside for re-education. On 4 and 5 April, although he had no prior personal or organizational contacts with other activists, he used the opportunity offered by the Tiananmen incident to publicly express his opposition to the radicals. Since he was already politically stigmatized, he had little to lose anyway.⁶¹ The history of Liu Di, another important leader in the 5 April events, is not as well documented as that of Chen Ziming. But he obviously also had serious political problems and was to be sent to the countryside for unknown political deviations committed previously.⁶²

The 5 April riots were almost completely dominated by young, even very young people. Take the important role played by twelve to fifteen-year old middle school students. They had not participated in the struggles of the sixties but were notorious for their appearance in youth gangs in Beijing.⁶³ In addition, small groups of young workers were also prominent among the rioters for chasing and beating up foreigners on certain parts of the square.⁶⁴ Neither the juvenile rowdies nor the violent young men seem to have been politically motivated.

Information on other conflict-prone groups, such as rusticated youths who had illegally returned to the cities, or demobilized soldiers, is scarce. Whereas rusticated youths apparently played no conspicuous role in the Nanjing incident, a considerable number of them are said to have been involved in the Tiananmen incident.⁶⁵

The data presented reveal that the age cohort which had served as the basis for mobilization at the beginning of the "Cultural Revolution", turned against the radical Left on the occasion of the Qingming incidents in 1976. The social basis of the April Fifth Movement

⁵⁹ See *Xinhua Ribao*, 12 May 1976; *Zhanwang*, No. 341 (16 April 1976), p. 4, and No. 343 (16 May 1976), p. 3.

⁶⁰ Chen Ziming, Hou Yuliang, Liu Di, Sun Qingzhu, Wang Weiyan and Zhao Shijian. The names of the two other young men were not disclosed even after the reversal of the verdict on the movement. See Yan Jiaqi, *Wode sixiang zizhuan* (*My Intellectual Autobiography*). Hong Kong: Sanlian shuju 1988, pp.19-20; Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-7, 138-9, and 140-6.

⁶¹ See Chen's own account "Yongyuan zhunbei jiेशou shidai de kaoyan" (For Ever be Prepared to Stand the Tests of the Era), *Beijing zhi Chun* (Beijing Spring), No. 1 (9 January 1979), pp. 25-30 (Hoover Institution, Stanford); Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

⁶² Even after his official rehabilitation, Liu Di had to suffer reprisals. See his article in *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-9.

⁶³ See Tong Huaizhou group (Ed.), *Bingchen Qingming jianwen lu* (*Eye-witness Accounts of Qingming 1976*). Beijing: Gongren chubanshe 1979, pp. 119-20 (hereafter abbreviated as *BQJL*); *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-65.

⁶⁴ Tong Huaizhou group, *BQJL*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁶⁵ See Yan Jiaqi *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 37; *Xinhua Ribao*, 23 November 1978; Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

was not confined to the political *clientèle* of the veteran cadres, but encompassed broad sections of what the radicals used to call the "revolutionary successors". In spite of their historical rivalry, members of "Cultural Revolution" organizations that previously were deadly enemies, participated side by side in the Tiananmen demonstrations.⁶⁶ They had every reason to be dissatisfied with their lot because the "Cultural Revolution conservatives" as well as "leftists" had equally suffered from persecutions and reprisals, and had, after their demobilization, spent some of their best years in the poor countryside, in "study groups" for re-education, or even in prison.

The dissident Wei Jingsheng explained the political "maturation" of the Red Guard generation revealed by the Tiananmen demonstrations in the following words: "Many of those who in 1966 had stood in Tiananmen like idiots, with tears in their eyes, before that man who stripped them of their freedom, returned courageously in 1976 to oppose him in that same place".⁶⁷ Thus, in 1976, a formerly manipulated and abused generation turned away from the goals and protagonists they had fought for in the late sixties with fatal personal and social consequences.

Private Circles

Having analyzed the social profile of the activists and participants, we now turn to examining the networks that facilitated political mobilization in spring 1976. In addition to the factional affiliations and work unit coordination described above, the initiatives and activities of private circles, latent effects of official campaigns, as well as forms of *ad hoc* organization proved to be significant conditions for mobilization in the April Fifth Movement.

During their time in the countryside and after returning to the cities, many former Red Guards met on a regular basis to exchange opinions on a wide range of topics.⁶⁸ Various networks with very different interests were formed, often meeting as "study groups" (*dushuhui*, *yanjiu xiaozu* etc.). In an exceptional situation such as the 1976 Qingming festival, these informal groupings could become active and even assume an important role in mass actions.

A circle of former Red Guards had been responsible for a spectacular action in Guiyang (Guizhou Province) on 10 March, when they publicly displayed their eighty-page wall poster on problems of the Party's economic and educational policies and sent it to several other cities. This group had its roots in a private association formed by rusticated youths in the early seventies⁶⁹. Another typical example for such small group activities were the protests initiated by four former Red Guards in Wuhu (Anhui Province) on 29 March. The four had waited for an opportunity to express their discontent with the radical Left for many years. After hearing about the demonstrations in nearby Nanjing, they were convinced that the time had come, and wrote several slogans on walls in Wuhu supporting Deng and Zhou.⁷⁰

A different kind of discussion circle played an important role during the Nanjing incident. Beginning in 1975, the Second Party Secretary of Nanjing University, Zhang De, an army veteran, had regularly invited the children of other cadres to his home to debate the latest political

⁶⁶ There is scattered evidence that "ultra-leftists" condemned as belonging to the "May 16 Clique" (*wu yaoliu jituan*) were present as well as the "rightists" of the "United Action Committee". Interview with a former *Beida* student in Beijing; *Zhanwang*, No. 344 (1 June 1976), p. 25.

⁶⁷ Cited after Roger Garside, *Coming Alive. China after Mao*. New York: McGraw-Hill 1981, p. 256.

⁶⁸ Anita Chan, *Children of Mao*. London: Macmillan 1985, pp. 187-8; Michel Bonnin and Yves Chevrier, "The Intellectual and the State", *China Quarterly*, No. 127 (September 1991), pp. 570 and 573. These circles can be regarded as incipient forms of the urban "*shalong*" of the 1980s.

⁶⁹ See Yu Xiguang (Ed.), *'Wenhua da geming' shangshu ji* (A Collection of Written Statements Submitted to the Authorities During the Cultural Revolution). Changsha: Hunan Renmin chubanshe 1989, pp. 441-500.

⁷⁰ After having put up their slogans, they went to Nanjing and joined the demonstrations there. See Editorial Office of the "Internal Newsletter on Popular Complaints and Requests" (*Shangfang tongxun*) (Ed.), *Chunfeng Huayu* (Lessons to be Learned), Vol. 2. Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe 1981 (*neibu faxing*), pp. 448-56.

developments. Some members of this circle used to take a very critical view of the "Cultural Revolutionary" Left and belonged to the most daring activists of the Nanjing incident, one of whom was Zhang De's son.⁷¹

In Beijing Tiananmen Square, numerous small literary circles, poetry clubs, and groups of amateur photographers were active during the first days in April.⁷² The literary circles used the occasion to publicize works which they had concealed for many years. Thus, in an exceptional situation such as Qingming 1976, leisure time associations that normally appeared to be completely apolitical turned into political forces.

Latent Effects of Official Campaigns

Besides private circles and factional associations, groups established in the context of Party-led campaigns constituted another driving force. In the middle of the seventies, "theory groups" (*lilun zu*) served as an umbrella for very different activities. As a rule, these groups were officially set up, for example the Theory Group of the Beijing Labor Union which assumed a leading role in the initial phase of the events in Beijing. The workers of this group had been drawn together at the end of February to compile and write propaganda material against the "rightist revisionist trend" allegedly fanned up by Deng Xiaoping. In March, the members of this group were so enraged by what they understood to be attacks on Zhou Enlai in the Shanghai *Wenhui Daily*, that they became politically active on their own and wrote a manifesto attacking the radicals. One of the group's leaders, Cao Zhijie, was a son-in-law of the former deputy minister of public security, Yang Qiqing, and loosely acquainted with Hu Yaobang.⁷³

There were also other unintended effects of "mass line" practices. For some of the activists, "fighting groups" (*zhandoudui*) which they had joined at the beginning of "Campaign Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius" served as a model for independent action in 1976. During the Nanjing incident, about twenty such groups were formed by students of different schools to make their activities known to the general population.⁷⁴ In Huaiyin County (Jiangsu Province) in the vicinity of Zhou Enlai's birthplace Huaian, six thirteen to eighteen-year old middle school students formed a "fighting group" at Qingming festival and, motivated by the big demonstrations in Huaian, distributed a manifesto entitled "*Fenghuo*" (Beacon) denouncing the *Wenhui Daily* as belonging to "reactionary forces".⁷⁵

The production of wall posters and banners was a routine activity in the work units, where special teams had to produce suitable posters for every campaign. Usually, this led to a mechanical formulation of conformist statements. But under exceptional circumstances, the members of these teams could use the same techniques to air dissident views. Independent wall posters had already appeared during the "Campaign Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius" in 1974. In spring 1976, these "mass line" practices again led to the expression of deviant opinions in many places.

In contrast to the Democracy Wall movement of 1978/79, the April Fifth Movement did not develop beyond this poster and banner stage. At Democracy Wall, although posters were the most important instruments for independent expression in the initial stage, the activists soon started to distribute mimeographed publications, and the editorial committees were transformed into mini-organizations. In the April Fifth Movement, due to its early suppression, these steps towards organizational consolidation never materialized. Nevertheless, there were

⁷¹ Interviews in Nanjing. During the crackdown on the local "class enemies", Zhang De himself was suspected to be a backstage boss.

⁷² Yan Jiaqi *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 56 and 65.

⁷³ Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-2 and 202-3.

⁷⁴ Sebastian Heilmann, *Nanking 1976. Spontane Massenbewegungen im Gefolge der Kulturrevolution* (Nanjing 1976. Spontaneous Mass Movements in the Wake of the Cultural Revolution). Bochum: Brockmeyer 1990, p. 55.

⁷⁵ *Chunfeng Huayu*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, pp. 522-30.

several initial forms of *ad hoc* organization.

Ad hoc Organization

During the Qingming demonstrations, some incipient forms of more "solid" organizations gained a certain importance. Extensive activities of mourning and protest took place in Zhou Enlai's birthplace, Huaian (Jiangsu Province), in the first days of April 1976. Poems, political news, and slogans were conveyed by "speakers' teams" (*yanjiang tuan*) which moved from one intersection to another through the town. At Qingming 1976, this means of mobilization that apparently imitated Communist street propaganda teams could be found only in Huaian.⁷⁶

In Beijing, small groups had formed in many places on Tiananmen Square on 4 April, holding lively debates and shouting slogans. The crowd moved in groups from one poem or poster to the next.⁷⁷ On 5 April, more marked forms of *ad hoc* organization were developed. Several young workers and middle school students temporarily joined together and acted as bodyguards for authors of poems, speakers, and other prominent activists, trying to protect them from the secret police.⁷⁸ The most conspicuous of such spontaneous associations was the aforementioned group formed by eight young men in the morning of 5 April. They tried to direct the mass actions in front of the People's Hall and in front of the command post of the security forces.⁷⁹ They belonged to the four representatives sent by the crowd who tried to negotiate with the police command for the return of the wreaths and for the release of demonstrators arrested the days before. After the negotiations had failed, these young men withdrew from the command post and tried to organize a demonstration march across the square. Only a few people joined in.⁸⁰

Official reports on the events stated that there had been agitation for the establishment of "counter-revolutionary groups" on the square. Actually, around noon of 5 April, some people in the crowd proposed to set up a "Capital's People's Committee for the Commemoration of the Premier" (*shoudu renmin daonian zongli weiyuanhui*). They demanded that a Zhou Enlai memorial site be built, financed by voluntary donations from the population. Six participants took up the idea to found a special committee for that purpose and agreed to meet again on the square on 12 April.⁸¹

On 6 April, even after the violent suppression the night before, the tendency to set up autonomous organizations resurfaced. After having heard about the violent crackdown, several speakers suggested the organization of sit-ins and petition delegations or demonstrations, and the formation of a "National Committee for the Protection of Premier Zhou" (*quanguo baowei Zhou zongli weiyuanhui*).⁸² None of these proposals could be put into action. The early suppression prevented the emergence of autonomous organizations or publications and other forms of consolidation that became possible in 1989.

Cross-Regional Connections

Because demonstrations of a similar character took place in dozens of Chinese provincial cities around the time of Qingming 1976, some scholars suspected that, at the end of March, the local activists in Nanjing, Hangzhou and Beijing might already have been "hooked into a

⁷⁶ *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, p. 459.

⁷⁷ *Le Monde*, 6 April 1976.

⁷⁸ *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 and 158.

⁷⁹ Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-40.

⁸⁰ Wang Hongzhi, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-8; Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, p. 142; Chen Ziming, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁸¹ This became impossible because of the crackdown. *Bingchen Qingming jishi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-150; *Renmin Ribao*, 8 April 1976; Tong Huaizhou group, *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

⁸² See the two works of the Tong Huaizhou group, *BQJL*, *op. cit.*, p. 146; and *Weida...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-191.

common information network". Deng's followers had supposedly planned that Nanjing should lead the nation into the Qingming demonstration.⁸³

Indeed, the events in Nanjing⁸⁴ gained a particular significance because they preceded the demonstrations in Beijing and in other provincial cities. In February and March 1976, a delegation of 160 students, teachers, and cadres from 31 universities of Jiangsu Province traveled to Beijing. They were supposed to learn from the "methods" applied at Qinghua and Beijing universities in the anti-Deng campaign.⁸⁵ Such political information and mobilization tours were very common in China at that time. Did the Nanjing students use the opportunity to get in touch with their Beijing counterparts? Several interviews conducted in Nanjing with participants of the 1976 journey did not confirm this hypothesis. While the students took the lead in Nanjing, their counterparts in Beijing remained passive and, under heavy pressure from their schools' authorities, did not dare to prepare commemorative or protest activities. During the Nanjing demonstrations some local students even accused Qinghua University of viciously slandering political leaders of great merit, and there seem to have been certain animosities between students in Nanjing and Beijing.⁸⁶

An analysis of the initial stages of several regional incidents in East China shows that the news of the Nanjing demonstrations was a strong stimulus for the movement in other regions. But no evidence could be found for personal cross-regional connections among the leading local activists.⁸⁷

In statements and interviews after their political rehabilitation, many activists of the April Fifth Movement vehemently rejected assumptions that they had been mere pawns or even marionettes of a powerful backstage network. In their opinion, the meaning and significance of the movement lay in the very fact that it came from the grass roots, at a time when this seemed almost unthinkable. But how could it happen, as the *People's Liberation Army Daily* put it, that the demonstrators were "so attracted to one another that they consciously coordinated their actions"?⁸⁸

The commemorative ceremonies, the production of wreaths and banners, the formation of funeral marches, doubtlessly needed "a good deal of planned and organized preparations".⁸⁹ However, all these activities had already been an integral part of work unit life in the preceding years. Enterprises, offices, schools and other institutions were used to making wreaths and organizing marches for the Qingming festival to honor the "martyrs of the revolution". Hence, the 1976 memorial activities did not need much additional effort and planning; they were a result of "imitative spontaneity", as John Gardner called it in his thoughtful assessment of the demonstrations.⁹⁰ The April Fifth movement was characterized by the application of traditional symbolism together with the imagery of the "Cultural Revolution", and by the development of a secular cult for the late Premier Zhou Enlai. By laying wreaths, swearing oaths of loyalty, and paying homage to this popular revolutionary, the ritualized forms of official memorial ceremonies regularly organized by the Communist Party and the Com-

⁸³ Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 2; Garside, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁸⁴ See Genny and Kam Louie, "The Role of Nanjing University in the Nanjing Incident", *The China Quarterly*, No. 86 (June 1981), pp. 332-48; Barrett L. McCormick, *Political Reform in Post-Mao China: Democracy and Bureaucracy in a Leninist State*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1990, pp. 44-59; Heilmann, *op. cit.* (1990), *passim*.

⁸⁵ Jiangsu People's Broadcasting Station, 11 March 1976, according to *China News Analysis*, No. 1035 (2 April 1976), p. 7.

⁸⁶ See the manifesto reprinted in *Geming shichao* (Transcriptions of Revolutionary Poems). *Samizdat* circulated at Nanjing University 1977, Vol. 2, p. 250.

⁸⁷ The channels of interregional communication are examined in Heilmann, *op. cit.* (1990), pp. 69-75.

⁸⁸ *Jiefangjun Bao* (People's Liberation Army Daily), 20 November 1978.

⁸⁹ Forster, *op. cit.* (1986), p. 29.

⁹⁰ Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

unist Youth Corps were filled with new political contents by the demonstrators.⁸¹

In all regional incidents, the destination of the marches and the location of the demonstrations were central intersections, squares or well-known memorials at the outskirts of town. These places became the natural meeting places for the participants. The people knew when and where to meet. They did not need anybody to tell them how to hold memorial activities and where to go. They demonstrated on their own, not on command.

Conclusion

Having examined the contexts of mobilization and the social profile of the activists of the April Fifth Movement, we have found no reason for attributing the 1976 Qingming demonstrations to secret schemes of powerful backstage bosses or a national underground network. However, all individual members and groupings within the Party leadership obviously took an active interest in the events, and the multi-faceted conflicts among different political factions gave the demonstrations a strong momentum.

It was the work units that served as centers of co-ordination and self-organization during the April Fifth Movement, which simultaneously revealed the dilemma of *danwei*-based "cellular protest": mobilization was facilitated by easy communication within the *danwei*, but the establishment of more comprehensive organizational forms was impeded by its segregation from society at large. In addition to *danwei*-based activities, the initiatives of private circles, latent effects of mass line practices, as well as forms of "imitative spontaneity" contributed to political mobilization in spring 1976.

How can we conceptualize the web of political activity displayed during the April Fifth Movement? The sociological model of micromobilization⁸² comes very close to aptly describing the course of events. Place and time of the Qingming actions were first chosen, partially in agreement with each other, by small numbers of autonomously operating activists or groups of activists. The information was conveyed decentrally, through informal channels. With some exaggeration, one could characterize this as a process consisting of innumerable "mini-conspiracies" within and between friendship circles, private meetings, work units, factional networks etc. The marches and demonstrations were not planned in central "headquarters" (as the Chinese security organs put it) but in many, often tiny, "switch points" and organizational cells within the population. Associational networks served as the basic building blocks of the April Fifth Movement, constituting the cellular structure of collective action during the demonstrations. The official ban on activities to commemorate Zhou Enlai triggered and invigorated processes of micromobilization in the population because the ban was widely regarded as entirely illegitimate. This is why at a critical political junction a large number of people dared to use the first possible occasion to air their discontent and political preferences.

The analysis of the activists' social profile shows that the generation which had been used as the basis of mobilization at the beginning of the "Cultural Revolution" openly turned against the radical Left in 1976. Moreover, many of those persons, groups and work units that took the lead during the Qingming demonstrations had been stigmatized in the years since 1966 for political deviations or their "bourgeois" character. In 1976, these forces stood up to protest against the injustice and arbitrariness of this political persecution, and the demonstrations crystallized around them.

Already prior to 1976, the widespread aversion among the population against the goals and methods of the "Cultural Revolution" had occasionally surfaced in numerous uncoordinated local protests and dissident activities.⁸³ This social development found an aggregated and

⁸¹ For a theoretical explanation of such phenomena see Joseph W. Esherick and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, "Acting Out Democracy: Political Theater in Modern China", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (November 1990), pp. 835-65.

⁸² See McAdam, *op. cit.*; Opp and Roehl, *op. cit.*; Opp, *op. cit.*

⁸³ See the first chapter of my forthcoming book (mentioned in note 1).

intense expression during the Qingming demonstrations of March and April 1976 in many places throughout China, and was made particularly obvious by the mass movements in Beijing and Nanjing. The Qingming demonstrations in these two places produced incipient forms of cross-factional unity that contributed to the suspension of cleavages pervading Chinese society since the late sixties. These newly emerging social alliances could be observed, *en miniature*, in several of the prominently involved work units. While people who can be counted among the political *clientèle* of the veteran cadres (with personal interests in ending class struggle campaigns and in Zhou's modernization program) very often took the initiative in organizing memorial activities, participation was not confined to dedicated supporters of the old guard.

Against this background, the April Fifth Movement can be regarded as a manifestation of an emerging social and political realignment that transcended the cleavages provoked by the "Cultural Revolution" and indicated the potential for a social life beyond the manipulated struggles of the past.