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Source: *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Winter, 1995), pp. 131-156

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the Midwest Sociological Society

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# Mobilization Processes and the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement

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Using a multimethod strategy, we identify and analyze mobilization processes associated with the rapid emergence of the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement. We propose that the confluence of macro-, meso-, and micromobilization processes and linkages among them provide a more robust model for understanding social movement dynamics. While the Chinese Democracy Movement was facilitated by economic reforms, regime crises, delayed repression, and the presence of foreign journalists, institutional forces were not sufficient in explaining the rapid and extensive mobilization. Students were able to overcome deficits in organizational and media resources by co-opting extant networks and by developing resonant collective action frames. Their frame alignment strategies and nonviolent direct action tactics tended to resonate with ordinary people's observations and experiences as well as with traditional Chinese narratives of Confucianism, nationalism, and communism. State reactions and counterframings, on the other hand, failed to sway the masses. Instead, participation spread from a few hundred college students to millions of citizens and ended, tragically and ironically, with the "People's Army" slaughtering its own people around Tiananmen Square.

While grassroots social movements constitute significant and pervasive forces for social change in the contemporary Western world, they are new phenomena in communist China. The succession of political movements launched during the Mao era (1949-1976) lacked the extra-institutional character of Western mass movements inasmuch as they were essentially state-orchestrated (cf. Aguirre 1984). Mao Zedong used these totalitarian movements, along with his charisma and coercive power, to remove political rivals and ideological dissidents (Ladany 1988; Liu 1989). In contrast, the Democracy Movement (April 17-June 4, 1989) represented a genuinely grassroots attempt to reform the Chinese state. It was the largest, most enduring, and best organized antiestablishment campaign since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Shi 1990). Initiated by a few hundred college students in Beijing during the economic reforms, the movement rapidly swept throughout the country and, in the course of a few weeks, mobilized millions of ordinary citizens. Considering the power of China's authoritarian party-state, it was an extraordinary series of events.

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**The Sociological Quarterly**, Volume 36, Number 1, pages 131-156.  
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ISSN: 0038-0253.

Under communist rule, any type of unauthorized social movement, particularly one critical of the presiding government, has not been tolerated in China (Chow 1993). The party-state controls all major social, economic, administrative, and cultural resources. This totalitarian structure had effectively thwarted the emergence of grassroots movements (Walder 1986). Prior to 1989, university students initiated several attempts to organize protests against the dictatorship. In each instance authorities repressed organized dissent before it flourished (Mu and Thompson 1989). Under such a limited political opportunity structure, inspiring even an episodic outburst of collective action would be an extremely difficult task; sustaining a movement for just a few days seemed impossible.

Some may suggest that given its brief duration ending with the June 4th massacre near Tiananmen Square, the Democracy Movement was an abysmal failure (e.g., Smith 1992). But given the political opportunity structure, particularly the omnipotence of Chinese central authority, what is most remarkable is that collective action occurred at all. *How could such a movement emerge under brutally, oppressive conditions? What factors contributed to the movement's rapid and extensive mobilization?* We focus on these and related questions by examining the nexus of macropolitical opportunities, meso- and microlevel organizational structures, and micromobilization processes. In so doing, we analyze cultural as well as institutional forces associated with collective action in China.

## DATA AND METHODS

We employed a triangulated research strategy involving multiple data sources, methods, perspectives, and theories (Denzin 1989). The data include observations of action and interaction (before, during, and after the June 4th massacre), talk of participants and bystanders, the direct experience of Jiping Zuo, and a variety of primary and secondary electronic and print sources. These data were gathered by way of participant observation, semi-structured, formal interviews (face-to-face and telephone), guided conversations, unobtrusive conversational listening, and "interviewing by comment," as well as from analyses of private letters, print and electronic news media accounts, computer bulletin boards, and published secondary sources.<sup>1</sup>

The bulk of the data were gathered by Zuo, a native Chinese who came to the United States to pursue graduate studies in the 1980s. In the spring of 1989, (coincidentally just prior to the dramatic confrontation at Tiananmen Square), Zuo returned to Beijing to visit family and friends.<sup>2</sup> From shortly after her May arrival until her late June departure, she observed various activities associated with the movement, the most noteworthy of which were the events in and around Tiananmen Square preceding the June 4th massacre. She conversed directly with approximately twenty-five participants, bystanders, and sympathizers in Beijing during May and June.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, she visited and interviewed students and faculty at four universities: Beijing University, Beijing Language Institute, Beijing Teachers' College, and Beijing Normal University. Throughout this period she kept a journal of her observations, interviews, and personal reflections. She decided to leave this document in China due to the well-founded fear of being searched and permanently detained by Chinese officials. Upon returning to the United States, Zuo reconstructed her notes from memory.

During the ensuing four years, Zuo interviewed twelve Chinese who immigrated to the United States after the crackdown. Most were active participants in the Democracy Movement, and a few were core activists.<sup>4</sup> Secondary source material included books and articles written by movement activists and eyewitnesses, Chinese and United States newspaper, radio, and television accounts, as well as computer bulletin board postings.

In addition to employing several data sources and methods, our analysis was informed by multiple theories and perspectives. While we will elaborate on our theoretical orientations below, one caveat is worth mentioning here. Although we draw on several social movement theories to illuminate the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement, all are *Western* theories. We thereby run the risk of perpetuating Orientalism, that is, Western colonialist representations (Chow 1993).<sup>5</sup> We do not claim to have avoided this problem altogether. We did, however, seek to mitigate it in two ways. First, by virtue of the authors' distinctive biographies, we sought to strike a balance between nativism and Orientalism, between an insider's and outsider's views. Second, the types and varieties of data sources and methods we employed enabled us to develop a comprehensive understanding of indigenous perspectives, especially how Chinese people from a variety of backgrounds and contexts viewed history, the political and economic climate of China in 1989, the student movement, and their roles in these events.

Taken together these multiple sources, methods, and perspectives contribute to a more holistic understanding of the Chinese Democracy Movement than would have been obtained from employing a single source, method, or viewpoint.

### TOWARD A MORE ROBUST MODEL OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

The advent of resource mobilization theory sensitized a generation of social movement scholars to the importance of interests, opportunity, constraints, organization, resources, and power in collective action (Tilly 1978). These contributions notwithstanding, resource mobilization theory also deflected attention away from the mobilizing role of grievances and identities (Benford 1993b; Buechler 1993; Hunt 1991; Hunt and Benford 1994; Snow and Oliver forthcoming; Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986; Taylor and Whittier 1992). After more than a decade of debate among resource mobilization, new social movement, and social constructionist scholars (Cohen 1985; Ferree 1992; Ferree and Miller 1985; Jenkins 1983; Killian 1980; Turner 1981; Turner and Killian 1987; Zald 1992; Zurcher and Snow 1981), a pragmatic theoretical synthesis appears to be emerging, one that draws on the conceptual and empirical contributions of each of these paradigms (Gamson and Meyer 1992; Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994; Klandermans 1992; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988; Melucci 1988, 1989; Snow and Benford 1992; Tarrow 1989, 1992). This hybrid perspective views collective action as emerging from a confluence of macro-, meso-, and microstructures and forces, all of which must be considered in order to explain mobilization, demobilization, or inaction.

In the case of China, a focus on the structural and historical conditions alone is not adequate to the task of accounting for the rise and fall of the student Democracy Movement. Yet the bulk of the post-Tiananmen literature has concentrated on macrolevel changes and institutional conditions that facilitated mass collective action (Ashley and Ji 1991; Chen 1990; Davis and Vogel 1990; Smith and Pagnucco 1992; Zhou 1993). While these studies shed considerable light on the institutional forces precipitating the rise of grievances and mass mobilization, they fail to illuminate the processes by which students were inspired to take action in the face of extraordinary costs and risks and how the movement expanded to include the active contributions of millions of other citizens. A more robust understanding of the dynamics of this mobilization requires attending to interpretive as well as institutional factors. This means focusing not only on changes in the political opportunity structure but also on how these changes were interpreted and articulated such that activists' claims resonated with the experiences and cultural narratives of Chinese citizens (Snow and Benford 1988). It further sug-

gests the need to identify the role of networks, organizations, and media in facilitating the construction and diffusion of injustice frames (McAdam 1982; Molotch 1979; Morris 1984; Snow Zurcher, and Eklund-Olson 1980). With these considerations in mind, we seek to illuminate the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement by attending to the macro-, meso-, and micromobilization processes as well as the linkages among them.<sup>6</sup>

### GRIEVANCES AND OPPORTUNITIES: MACROMOBILIZATION

Economic reforms that began in the early 1980s yielded tremendous progress in the Chinese economy and standard of living. These reforms, which began a transition from a planned to a market economy, gave rise to the emergence of new grievances as well as indirectly affecting opportunities for the expression of grievances.

#### The Rise of Grievances in the People's Republic

The relaxation of economic restraints and improvements in the economy not only created rising expectations but also dissatisfactions when those expectations were not met (Mu and Thompson 1989). Moreover, economic reforms were not matched by similar political reforms. While the market economy implied privatization of ownership, limited competition under the guidance of law, and a certain level of democracy in leadership, state elites sought to sustain autocratic *political* power over market forces. By 1989, the majority of the economic sectors remained under the control of the state, which ran the economy on its own terms, invoking policies that lacked stability and consistency. Even the private sector continued to be dominated by the capricious authority of state officials rather than by legal-rational mechanisms, as illustrated by the popular aphorism: "The Party's policies are like the moon which looks different every day." Moreover, decision-making powers were never extended beyond Party leaders.

Apparent contradictions between the political and economic structures resulted in the abuse of power by elites in the form of what ordinary people called "official profiteering" (*guan dao*). *Guan dao* gave rise to the ascension of a new elite class comprised of officials at various levels, particularly those at the top (Shi 1990). Institutional contradictions also led to a dual price system, a high free market price and a low state-fixed price, that only yielded a few successful entrepreneurs (*wan yuan hu*) and left the majority of Chinese citizens, who lived on fixed salaries or retirement allotments, to suffer from inflated prices (Liu 1989; Shi 1990; Yu 1990). Meanwhile, other forms of corruption, such as bribery, extortion, and "entering by the back door," were widely distributed among all levels of officials. As the corruption at the top spread, discontent at the bottom grew. Ordinary people complained about the unequal access to opportunities and skyrocketing prices.

The growth of discontent was facilitated by an increase in press reports of corruption. Even positive media reports on the economic reforms tended to stimulate a sense of relative deprivation among those who had not been able to profit from the changes. Rumors (*xiao dao xiao xi*) about high-ranking leaders and their families reaping enormous profits further contributed to the discontent.<sup>7</sup> Many workers and professionals looked forward to corresponding political reforms that might complement a "free market" economy (Han 1990).

These perceived structural contradictions were accompanied by the rise of grievances among Chinese intellectuals concerning the repression of democracy and freedom of speech. During the previous forty years, the Party had launched numerous sustained political campaigns to persecute intellectuals and political dissidents (Ladany 1988; Liu 1989). Nineteen-

eighty-nine marked three major anniversaries that aroused emotions: the two hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution, the seventieth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, and the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. Many intellectuals wondered why China had not achieved the humanistic ideals advocated and symbolized in those three historic events. For the first time in their lives, several well-known intellectuals wrote open letters to the Central Committee and the State Council requesting the release of political prisoners. These requests fell on deaf ears (Dittmer 1990; Liu 1989).

College students began to raise similar objections concerning a system that deprived them of the right to vote or speak freely. Inequities precipitated by the economic reforms also exacerbated students' concerns regarding the state's failure to invest in education, the inadequate university facilities, and a rigid job placement system controlled by the central government (Liu 1989; Mu and Thompson 1989).

But it was the death of Hu Yaobang, former General Secretary of the Party, that ignited the explosion of grievances. In the eyes of most Chinese, especially college students, Hu symbolized reforms, justice, and political tolerance (Chow 1993; Mu and Thompson 1989). The 1986 purge of Hu by the Gang of Old marked a setback in the course of reforms and aroused concerns. The death of Hu further generated feelings of grief and a loss of hope.

In short, by the late 1980s grievances were on the rise among a number of sectors of the population. Many of these grievances were amplified by rising expectations stimulated by reforms (Davies 1969). However, a mere widespread discontent in China was not a sufficient reason for the emergence of this unprecedented Democracy Movement. Popular discontent and grievances had existed during a number of periods in the Mao era but had failed to yield mass movements. To understand the outburst of collective action in China more fully, we must also examine changes in political opportunities.

### **Changes in the Structure of Political Opportunities**

Considerable literature suggests that favorable changes in the structure of political opportunities can facilitate movement activity (Barnes and Kaasse 1979; Eisinger 1973; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McAdam 1982; Piven and Cloward 1977; Tarrow 1983; Tilly 1978). Structural changes conducive to collective action may arise due to political and/or economic processes initiated by the polity, changes in the stability of political alignments, or regime crises that improve the relative position of challengers by undermining the unity and hegemony of previously dominant groups (McAdam et al. 1988; Tarrow 1989). Closely related to regime crises is the absence of repression during such times due to the inability or hesitancy of elites to take repressive action (Koopmans 1993; Skocpol 1979). By the 1980s, these forces had yielded major shifts in the structure of political opportunities for those disaffected with the Chinese state. In this section, we explore political developments that contributed to the emergence of the Democracy Movement.

China has been governed by state socialism characterized by the dictatorship of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Under state socialism in China, the party-state seeks to control all aspects of individual lives, particularly ideological domains. The party-state has "effectively monopolized resources for social mobilization and denied the legitimacy of any organized interests outside its control" (Zhou 1993, p. 55).

Although no major changes took place in the structure of the political system during the 1980s, the Chinese government relaxed its control in the ideological field (Whyte 1990). Compared with the Mao era, political study sessions were less intense and less frequent. Het-

erodox views were less subject to sanctions such as denouncement and imprisonment. The loosening of ideological shackles provided increased opportunities for critical views to be shared beyond the boundaries of primary groups. College students, for example, felt free to participate in unauthorized political activities on campus. A few unofficial organizations were established in early 1989 and intellectuals began to mobilize and prepare for change (Shi 1990). The exposure to Western ideas due to the "open-door" policy in the 1980s created a new awareness of political and cultural alternatives.<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, central government's unity began to erode. The leadership was divided between the "reformers" and the "hard-liners," which in turn created opportunities for the gathering momentum of the Democracy Movement. The failure to suppress the student movement at the earlier stages reflected the fractured leadership split between "reformers-sympathizers" and "hard-liners" (Dittmer 1990; Liu 1990; Smith and Pagnucco 1992; Tsao 1991).

While factions within the central leadership contributed to an opportunity structure more favorable to mass mobilization, it was not the primary precipitating event. The death of ousted Hu Yaobang indicated that greater difficulties in sustaining reform momentum lay ahead. As hard-liners continued to seek to repress ideological diversity and to preserve the status quo, concern grew among reformers and activists that the window of opportunity was about to be slammed shut. It was under this desperate set of circumstances following Hu Yaobang's death, that students, inspired by a sense that something should be done, decided to protest against the government.

Of course, unauthorized collective actions under totalitarian regimes are likely to be suppressed, as had historically been the case in communist China. Students were not ignorant of the risks associated with initiating the Democracy Movement. But, more importantly, they were well aware of their historical positions in taking the lead in promoting social change (Han 1990; Li 1990). Chinese students and intellectuals have had a long history of serving as "the conscience of the nation" in advocating and disseminating new ideas (Chow 1993; Mu and Thompson 1989; Niming 1990), as illustrated by May Fourth Movement, a patriotic student movement in 1919, which partly contributed to the founding of the CCP. In official propaganda, students were portrayed as young, innocent, brave, and promising—the future of China. As a result, students were presumably less subject to state social control. Mao, for example, used students to help him purge his opponents during the Cultural Revolution. Ironically, the success of state propaganda also instilled in students a strong sense of historical responsibility for the prosperity of China, which inspired and provided a justification for them to oppose the dark side of the communist regime.

One final factor contributing to the political opportunity structure was the presence of an unusually large foreign media contingency in the spring of 1989. Two major events—the historic visit of Mikhail Gorbachev and the Asian Development Bank's first meeting in the PRC—attracted throngs of international journalists to China. Cognizant of the fact that the whole world would be watching and that state authorities would feel somewhat constrained in exercising repressive force, student activists seized upon this unique opportunity for a global stage. In the final analysis, foreign media played a crucial role in the mobilization, not only by reporting events to their audiences back home, but more importantly by also keeping Chinese citizens informed regarding movement developments (Calhoun 1989a; 1989b; 1989c; Smith and Pagnucco 1992).

## NETWORKS AND ORGANIZATIONS: MESOMOBILIZATION

The notion that pre-existing social networks and indigenous organizations are required to generate and sustain collective action has been widely supported by students of Western movements (McAdam 1982; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Morris 1984; Snow et al. 1980; cf. Piven and Cloward 1977). We know far less about the role of networks and organizations outside the West. In the case of the Chinese Democracy Movement, there were no pre-existing movement organizations, indigenous or professional (Niming 1990; Wang 1992; Xiong 1992). Although a few interim movement organizations were founded at the outset of the movement (Li 1990; Shi 1990; Zhou 1993), these were relatively powerless, poor associations compared to the formidable state structures that student activists confronted.

Nevertheless, mobilization occurred in spite of deficiencies in capital and mass media access, resources primarily under state control. Citizens and overseas Chinese donated money, food, tents, and transportation. Students disseminated information via their own broadcast station established in Tiananmen Square, street posters, mimeographed leaflets printed in the dorms, sympathetic Chinese and foreign journalists,<sup>9</sup> as well as by word of mouth (Han 1990; Liu 1989; Mark 1991; Yu 1990). The grassroots character of this mobilization effort was thus much more arduous and resource-poor than is typically the case in Western countries. But as with Western movements, the rapid expansion of the Chinese Democracy Movement depended on the strategic use of social networks, informal groups, and a few incipient organizations.

### Social Networks and Organizational Features

Prior to the 1989 movement, the dominant student organization on campuses was the student union which, as with other organizations, was a formal affiliate of the CCP. The only existing voluntary associations comprised of students were academic study groups, each of which contained five or fewer members. In some instances these study groups served as "movement halfway houses" (Morris 1984) by providing students with a place to discuss grievances and to develop resonant collective action frames grounded in traditional Chinese values (see below). Although some student activists emerged from these contexts, the small campus study groups were not structurally linked to one another or to other organizations. In sum, the Chinese Democracy Movement lacked organizations comparable to the United States civil rights movement's Highlander Folk School, African American churches and colleges, and the NAACP to serve as communication and coordination networks (cf. Killian 1984; Morris 1984).

Geographical proximity represented one of the movement's few pre-existing organizational advantages. All ten major universities are concentrated in one Beijing district. Furthermore, 90 percent of all college students live on campus. As Smith and Pagnucco (1992, p. 176) note, students, who were packed six to eight to a dormitory room, "were necessarily connected to dense webs of informal interpersonal networks. Such structural arrangements helped to make the rapid mobilization of protesters possible."

At the outset of the 1989 movement, student activists from each university abandoned the official student union, established interim student body organizations, and elected representatives who assumed movement leadership roles. Representatives of forty-one universities in Beijing formed the Federation of Beijing Autonomous College Student Unions-Interim (FBASUI), which became the student movement's policy-making body (Ming Pao News 1989). FBASUI also coordinated the autonomous student unions at Beijing universities, the



basic units that carried out movement tasks. Subsequently, student activists from other provinces formed a Federation of Foreign-Province Autonomous College Student Unions (FFASU) to work with FBASUI.

Movement coordination was initially difficult due to a deficit in communication resources. The "illegitimate" status of the student protests precluded student activists from accessing major media outlets such as newspapers, television, and radio. During the "crisis," the state even cut off student telephone and telegram services for several days in some Beijing universities (Ming Pao News 1989). To cope with communication problems, student leaders devised a number of means of communication including protest notices posted on campus building walls and bulletin boards, posters reporting the latest movement decisions and suggestions, bicycles as a means of communicating between campuses, and on-campus speeches and press conferences seeking additional support. Throughout the entire period, student leaders remained at the forefront of the movement, mobilizing and deploying resources, devising and directing strategies and tactics, maintaining adherence to nonviolent principles, and organizing and coordinating protest activities.

The ultimate success in organization, however, hinged not simply upon a few leaders and interim movement groups but on the conscientious commitment of tens of thousands of students and their persuasive articulation of shared grievances to the masses.<sup>10</sup> In the absence of the students' well-developed sense of duty to society and their role in the general diffusion of resonant collective action frames, it is doubtful that the narrow opening in the window of political opportunity and the movement's paltry organizational resources could have induced so many to take to the streets in the face of such extraordinary risks and costs.

#### FRAME ALIGNMENT AND FRAME RESONANCE: MICROMOBILIZATION

Thus far we have outlined the macro- and mesolevel structural conditions and forces that facilitated the rapid mobilization of the Chinese Democracy Movement. We conceive of these "objective" conditions as necessary but insufficient catalysts of collective action. In order for potentially favorable macro- and mesostructures and processes to be translated into mass mobilization, individuals must be inspired to act collectively toward correcting an "injustice" and achieving perceived shared interests.

Recent theoretical and empirical work suggests that a variety of interacting actors ranging from movement protagonists to their antagonists to audiences socially construct a sense of injustice (Hunt et al. 1994; cf. Benford and Hunt 1992; Capek 1993; Piven and Cloward 1977). The resultant "injustice frame" includes an elaboration of the problem, attributions of blame, solutions, strategies, and rationales for action (Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina 1982; Snow and Benford 1988). Whether or not the injustice frame stimulates collective action hinges in part on the apparent alignment of individual interests, values, and beliefs with a social movement organization's goals and claims (Snow et al. 1986). Although the achievement of frame alignment is fraught with a variety of difficulties and hazards (Benford 1993a; Benford and Hunt 1994; Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Snow and Benford 1988), successful mobilization depends on the persuasive articulation and amplification of shared grievances (Snow and Benford 1992) as well as the development of compelling vocabularies of motive or rationales for taking action (Benford 1993b).

While this line of inquiry has recently stimulated considerable research, there has been a growing recognition that framing processes do not occur in a social or cultural vacuum (Gamson 1992; Klandermans 1992; Snow and Benford 1988; 1992; Taylor and Whittier 1992). For

one, movement actors must respond effectively to antagonists' "counterframings"—that is, to opponents' attempts to rebut, undermine, or neutralize the movement's collective action frames—by developing compelling "reframings" (Benford and Hunt 1994). Whether or not movement actors' initial framings and subsequent reframings *or* their opponents' counterframings resonate depends on the extent to which the claims (or counterclaims) are consistent with what targets of mobilization know and believe about the world based on their observations, experiences, and cultural wisdom (Snow and Benford 1988). It is these micromobilization processes that have been neglected in previous analyses of the Chinese Democracy Movement to which we now turn our attention.

### Student Frame Alignment Strategies

From the earliest days of the movement, student activists walked a dangerous tightrope. On the one hand, if they framed their grievances in [counter]revolutionary terms, they were certain to elicit a violent response from state officials, and the movement would have been crushed before anyone beyond their immediate networks learned of their existence. Indeed, if the state was successful in labeling student protests as "counterrevolutionary," repression could easily be legitimated. On the other hand, if the students failed to frame their grievances so as to strike a familiar chord among the masses, in all likelihood their claims would have been dismissed as the immature whining of impetuous youth. Thus the major framing task was to win sympathy and active support from bystander audiences while earning understanding and tolerance from state authorities, or at least to neutralize the legitimacy of any official pretense to using repressive force.

The students achieved and sustained this delicate balance by developing an ingenious, complex set of frame alignment strategies. First, they constructed cogent critiques of the injustices and improprieties resulting from the economic reforms. These framings tended to resonate because they were consistent with citizens' observations and experiences. Second, students grounded their claims in three Chinese cultural traditions or narrations: Confucianism, communism, and nationalism. Although these three traditions reflect distinctive, even opposing, belief systems, they were intertwined and finally unified by an imposed centralized culture (Chow 1993). Confucianism is a traditional moral philosophy that requires, among other things, obedience and loyalty to superiors. Under communism, Confucianism translates into devotion to communist practices in China (i.e., nationalism). Since communist authorities are portrayed as leaders in the Chinese communist movement, devotion to communism and nationalism also requires loyalty to the communist leaders.<sup>11</sup> By grounding the student movement's collective action frames in all three of these traditions, activists were able to deflect any state attempts to impugn their collective character, particularly attributions regarding their "patriotism" (cf. Benford and Hunt 1994), while simultaneously providing other students and ordinary citizens compelling reasons for supporting their campaign. Third, students initiated a set of direct action tactics including a hunger strike and mass demonstrations at Tiananmen Square, which citizens tended to interpret as validating activists' claims of sincerity regarding their commitment to traditional Chinese values of community devotion and self-sacrifice. At each critical juncture, until the final massacre, this strategic web was reinforced by the ineffective reactions and counterframings of state authorities.

*Empirical and Experiential Resonance of Student Injustice Frames*

According to Snow and Benford (1988), “empirical credibility” and “experiential commensurability” constitute two crucial factors related to the resonance of movement frames. Assessment of empirical credibility entails assessments by the targets of mobilization of the material/factual basis of movement claims. Experiential commensurability refers to the extent to which movement claims seem consistent with one’s biography. The two dimensions of frame resonance tend to work hand-in-hand.

In the case of the Chinese Democracy Movement, student framings regarding corruption, profiteering, and the creation of new inequalities tended to fit with what most citizens had observed and experienced. Official counterframings, on the other hand, tended to be seen as lacking empirical or experiential resonance. Economic reforms had created an environment in which official profiteering and corruption were common place among elites (Mu and Thompson 1989). Although these reforms provided a few opportunities for upward mobility, high-ranking officials and their families benefited disproportionately from the reforms. This was due, of course, to their unequal access to power and scarce resources, especially the means of production of profitable enterprises. Taking advantage of their fathers’ high positions, many elite offspring were soon promoted to the ministerial level. Many more engaged in the most lucrative businesses and enjoyed exorbitant profits from their business activities (Liu 1989; Mu and Thompson 1989). Informal interviews conducted by Zuo with Beijing residents indicated that ordinary citizens were aware of such patronage and the potential for the corruption to spread:

You don’t know how bad corruptions and social morality were before the outburst of student protests. High-ranking officials placed their children in important positions. Some of them sent their children abroad. They also opened accounts in Swiss banks in their children’s names. Now they have nothing to worry about. What can ordinary people do? We just followed their examples: to make money by abusing our positions. Just a few months ago, our society was full of cheating, bribery, distrust, and hostility. Now things seem to be changing in a positive direction. Students have brought about hope for change.

The perception that the official reformers had failed to address the essence of their problems and the hope that students would be able to lead the forces of “real reform” were widely shared among those we interviewed before and after the June 4th massacre. Frequently, citizens posted their grievances on poles and walls throughout Beijing. These postings not only constituted a protest tactic, they also served as surrogate newspapers, often taking the form of journalistic accounts and interviews, as reflected in the following poster observed on a Beijing building wall:

GRADUATE STUDENT: Do you think the students are right?

PEASANT: Absolutely right. It’s about time to make some noise. The officials are just too much. Right now, township [officials] are not doing anything for production, but every township government has one or two cars. . . and this is all at the expense of us peasants. . . I think China must go through some big changes. How can a government like this not collapse? (quoted in Han 1990, p. 184)<sup>12</sup>

As implied in this excerpt, most citizens recognized that they were not structurally situated to take advantage of the reforms. Since the central government decided which sectors of the economy would be decentralized, those who did not happen to work in the decentralized sectors remained relatively deprived. School teachers were among those suffering the most from unequal economic opportunities. Whereas people in private business made as much as 1,000 yuan (US \$270) or more a month, teachers lived on fixed salaries averaging 150 yuan (US \$40) at the college level and only 80 yuan (US \$21) at the elementary and secondary levels. Moreover, teachers' salaries failed to keep pace with a skyrocketing inflation rate of 18.5 percent in 1988 (Liu 1989; Mu and Thompson 1989). Comments displayed on a Beijing wall poster protesting such conditions conveyed the level of despair felt by most teachers as well as support for the student movement:

Teachers in China have always been known for their "other worldness," their "genteel poverty," their "slender" physique and "long-suffering" temperament. . . . They leave their lives to benevolent or heartless hands, and have little but tears to swallow. They dare neither to be angry nor to speak out. . . . Coming home from work with a rumbling stomach, they sink into deeper depression as they count the coins in their pockets, take a glance at the food on the table and then at their crowded, shabby dwelling. Other things make their hearts sink, too: living apart from their wives or husbands [because their schools have no jobs and no space for their spouses], they prepare late into the night, staring at a solitary lamp to see their own shadow. . . . He [teacher] is hoping that the students will go a little further this time and put more pressure on the government. (quoted in Han 1990, p. 176)

Even the chief beneficiaries of economic reforms, such as farmers and private entrepreneurs, were plagued by problems associated with corruption. For example, given that the state controlled the supply of fertilizer, which was low in price but high in demand, many farmers either had to bribe the officials in charge of fertilizer supplies or turn to the black market where they sometimes found that the "fertilizer" for which they paid an exorbitant price was fake and had ruined their harvests. Entrepreneurs also found that in order to maintain their business licenses, they had to bribe officials regularly. Moreover, the variability of governmental policies generated uncertainty and insecurity among most private business persons. For instance, whereas taxi drivers were permitted to retain a portion of their profits, bus drivers were not afforded the same privilege.

In the ideological field, Chinese citizens had long endured a party-state that was oppressive beyond what Westerners could conceivably imagine (Chow 1993). The CCP exercises strict control over the social and personal lives of Chinese (Zuo 1991). People are compelled to conform to the official belief system and to abandon other ideologies. The state-controlled press serves primarily as a propaganda tool of the Party (Mark 1991). Ideological freedom is, therefore, strictly prohibited and dissidents are subject to persecution. There have been numerous state-orchestrated movements against heresy since the PRC's founding (Ladany 1988; Liu 1989). The main victims of these political movements have been intellectuals whose only "crime" was the expression of their opinions. Tens of thousands of innocent intellectuals have been denounced, tortured, exiled, imprisoned, murdered, or "suicided" over the past fifty years. The purge of Hu Yaobang and the neglect of intellectuals' requests to release political prisoners signaled that the state would not stop persecuting intellectuals in the future, a realization that amplified discontent and anxiety among intellectuals. Moreover, many academics

sensed a general decline in the cultural value attributed to intellectual work, sentiments echoed by an intellectual with whom Zuo spoke:

Today you can hardly carry out research of your own interest without censorship. Even a request to translate a book can take years to approve. Although the government has promised to improve intellectuals' lives, I don't see much change taking place. On the contrary, I have seen that the notion of 'worthlessness to get an education' [*du shu wu yong lun*] is regaining in popularity. This notion was popular during the cultural revolution when schools were shut down.

Given the experiences of most Chinese citizens, it is little wonder that the student framings resonated. Initially, however, students did not frame their shared grievances in alignment with ordinary citizens. The 1989 movement began with student protests against the party-state. But the purpose of the protest was not to deny the leadership of the CCP. Instead, students sought to aid the Party in leading China in the course of "four modernizations." Toward that end, students advocated more democracy, an end to the persecution of political dissidents, and other political reforms they believed would better suit the emerging social and economic structures. They plastered walls and telephone poles on Beijing campuses with pro-democracy slogans: "DOWN WITH BUREAUCRACY!," "LONG LIVE DEMOCRACY!," "FREEDOM OF PRESS!"

Students were also aware of several other major concerns of people: official profiteering, rampant corruption, and inflation. In fact, they found that these issues were more appealing to the masses because they spoke directly to people's daily lives. To gain momentum for the movement, students decided to subordinate their own specific concerns about democratic and educational reforms while focusing on issues they perceived to be more salient to the masses. Subsequently, activists extended their framings beyond pro-democracy claims to include other reformist demands. By displaying posters with slogans such as "STOP POLITICIANS FROM ENGAGING IN ILLEGAL TRADE!" and "ELIMINATE CORRUPTION!" in more conspicuous places (e.g., along main vehicular and pedestrian arteries) and by aligning their frames with the vocabulary of the masses, student activists hoped to expand the movement's populist appeal.

They even targeted their framing tactics at soldiers (whom students considered citizens rather than agents of the state). One Beijing University handbill, for example, was titled "Soldiers, Look How Profiteering by Government Officials Is Eating You Up":

What does it mean when people talk about "profiteering by government officials"? To describe it simply, it refers to officials using their power to acquire things such as goods at low state-fixed prices, import and export licenses (or documents), loans, and foreign currency at special low exchange rates so that they can reap huge profits. . . .

Why is China's economy such a mess? Why does the daily stipend of a soldier remain at 1.65 yuan [US 43 cents] after all these years, despite rocketing prices? Nowhere else can one find the answer to these questions except in the word "official." One official takes the lead, another follows, and very soon each official acts as a protective shield for another's crimes. (quoted in Han 1990, pp. 28, 31)

From the outset the student protest garnered positive reactions from a wide audience. A professor of medicine from another province whom we interviewed reflected:

At the beginning of the student protest, student claims resonated with what I wanted to say to the government. I hoped this was going to work and the government would take further steps toward reform. Unfortunately, what I learned from the [CCP] news editorials was the deliberate avoidance of the government to deal with the student requests—a lack of sincerity to solve its own problems—which disappointed me.

Despite such disillusionment, people saw in students the hope for the dismissal of corrupt officials, for reforms, and for China (Liu 1989). Student framings regarding democracy and anticorruption resonated with the observations and experiences of the masses. Hence, it was not surprising that even in the early days of the movement student protests garnered popular support, although Beijing citizens were primarily bystanders at this stage. Civilians lined miles and miles of roads leading from the universities to Tiananmen Square, shouting, “Long live the students!” A bond between students and civilians was thus established from the outset and solidified throughout the mobilization period (Liu 1989; Tsao 1991). Later, thousands of civilians donated food and money and held pro-student demonstrations as expressions of their support. During this period Zuo observed private entrepreneurs transporting food and drinks to Tiananmen Square via tricycle carts and others bringing drinking water, clothes, blankets, bicycles, and money. Some informed us that they deposited their entire monthly pay checks in students’ donation boxes. In the meantime, pro-student demonstrations were held almost every other day. On demonstration days, tens of thousands of civilians gathered at Tiananmen Square, while vehicles carrying demonstrators moved toward the Square. With few exceptions, the schedule of the demonstrations was disseminated via word of mouth through personal networks. One notable exception was the *Science and Technology Daily News* which broke with official censorship policies by reporting student movement events. This remarkable development contributed significantly to information dissemination and facilitated mobilization processes.

In sum, the evidence we gathered indicates that the student framings struck a responsive chord among many people from various walks of life. The circles of participation and support rapidly expanded from the original small core of student activists to thousands of other students, workers, peasants, entrepreneurs, and professionals, and even to some Party members and government officials (Han 1990). The students thus forged a link between the masses and the movement, bringing together previously unmobilized sentiment pools and providing the basis for successful micromobilization.

### *Student Framings and Chinese Cultural Narrations*

Authorities did not take these developments lying down. They launched a massive counterframing effort aimed at discrediting the student movement and its claims. The Party’s official newspaper, *People’s Daily*, immediately labeled student demonstrations as “turmoil,” “upheaval,” “a violation of the constitution,” “a plotted conspiracy” “instigated by a handful of people” (April 26, 1989). Similar counterthemes were espoused around the clock on state radio and television networks. Students realized that the movement would not achieve its goals without a careful reframing effort directed toward the government. The key to avoiding

suppression was to frame the movement's ideology so as to appear congruous with state political propaganda while continuing to amplify traditional Chinese values.

That's precisely what the activists did. Every student movement framing and action was informed by and grounded in one or more of three traditional Chinese narrations: Confucianism, communism, and nationalism. Together, these cultural narratives tended to be concerned with patriotism and the way in which it was defined and dramatized.

Owing to their central positions in traditional Chinese society and to Confucianism's strong influence (Weber 1964), intellectuals long ago developed a collective sense of social responsibility. They consider it their calling to oppose political and social injustice. According to Confucian tradition, the main ideology to which most Chinese intellectuals adhere, three principles are normally followed in regard to patriotism: (1) "Every individual is responsible for the rise and the fall of the country" (*Tian xia xing wang, pi fu you ze*), (2) "Die to achieve virtue/justice" (*Sha shen cheng ren*), and (3) "Remonstrate with one's superior or friend" (*Jian*). Sense of responsibility, self-sacrifice, and remonstrance with the emperor for the prosperity of the country have been emphasized and passed on over several generations in the form of novels, poems, folktales and legends. These themes figured prominently in the 1989 movement's collective action frames.<sup>13</sup>

While the frames constructed by the students were often inspired by Confucianism, they were aligned with and constrained by contemporary political ideologies as well. From the outset, students avoided radical or "unpatriotic" framings such as calling for fundamental restructuring of the polity or expanding the number of political parties, demands that would have been considered violations of the "Four Basic Principles of the Party" (adherence to Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought, to the Party's leadership, to proletariat dictatorship, and to socialism). Instead, students pointed out that the government had promised both economic *and* political reforms. Accordingly, the main message that students delivered to the government was to urge them to act in a socially responsible manner by eliminating official profiteering and corruptions.

Students' subsequent actions and framings, which were consistent with both traditional and communist culture, represented attempts to demonstrate further their patriotism. For instance, on the national mourning day for Hu Yaobang, students sent representatives to kneel on the steps to the Great Hall of People, where the Party was conducting the official funeral service for Hu Yaobang. As they knelt, student representatives held petitions above their heads, waiting for Premier Li Peng to accept them. Students carefully staged this scene as a dramatic recreation of traditional encounters in which subjects sought to persuade an emperor to adopt just policies. While some may have interpreted this as parody intended to portray current leaders in the personae of aging and decadent emperors, we doubt that this was what the demonstrators intended. Rather, the students were quite cognizant of the dangerous tightrope they walked and thus would not have jeopardized the entire movement for the sake of having fun at the leaders' expense. A poster crafted by a Qinghua University student supports the contention that this event was staged to demonstrate the activists' sincerity and patriotism (Ming Pao News 1989, p. 14). Beneath a large photo of three students kneeling on the steps of the Great Hall, the poster's caption read:

CRYING FOR FREEDOM;  
KNEELING FOR DEMOCRACY;  
THE REPUBLIC WILL NEVER FORGET!

Students also attempted to counter allegations that they were unpatriotic by amplifying patriotic themes. In their all-night sit-ins at Tiananmen Square, for instance, they sang an officially recognized song, the “Internationale” (Li 1990). Following the state’s April 26 *People’s Daily* editorial labeling the movement as “turmoil” and “a planned conspiracy,” students waved a pro-Party banner: “SUPPORT THE CORRECT LEADERSHIP OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY” (Mu and Thompson 1989, p. 30). Students employed similar reframing and altercasting tactics when they confronted police and army personnel during marches. Students shouted: “Long live policemen,” and “People’s police love the people” (Ming Pao News 1989, pp. 28, 47).

Not all framings were so restrained, however. The handbill directed at soldiers cited above, for example, was much more strident, albeit still grounded in Confucian philosophy:

In whose hands shall China crumble? “No corrupt officials, no revolt,” as the saying goes. We want to build our country and we want to bring prosperity to the people, but allowing these corrupt officials to have their way will reduce all this to empty rhetoric. Trees must be chopped down if they are rotten, and parasites exterminated. My dear soldiers, let me ask you: if the people say no, if history says no, will you still allow this situation to go on? (quoted in Han 1990, p. 31)

It was not coincidental that the students’ rally on May 4 at Tiananmen Square corresponded with the seventieth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, the first large-scale patriotic student movement, one highly valued by the CCP. By selecting May 4, students claimed justification for the 1989 Democracy Movement and attempted to demonstrate their sense of national responsibility (Yang 1991). One of the day’s most impassioned speeches (“New May Fourth Manifesto”), made by a core activist, typified attempts to align their collective action frames with traditional cultural narratives:

Fellow students, fellow countrymen [sic]: Seventy years ago today, a large group of illustrious students assembled in front of Tiananmen, and a new chapter in the history of China was opened. Today, we are once again assembled here, not only to commemorate that monumental day but more importantly, to carry forward the May Fourth spirit of science and democracy. Today, in front of the symbol of the Chinese nation, Tiananmen, we can proudly proclaim to all the people in our nation that we are worthy pioneers of seventy years ago. . . .

At present, our country is plagued with problems such as bloated government bureaucracy, serious corruption, the devaluation of intellectual work, and inflation, all of which severely impede us from intensifying the reforms and carrying out our modernization. . . .

Fellow students, fellow countrymen [sic], the future and fate of the Chinese nation are intimately linked to each of our hearts. This student movement has but one goal, that is, to facilitate the process of modernization by raising high the banners of democracy and science, by liberating people from the constraints of feudal ideology, and by promoting freedom, human rights, and rule by law. To this end, we urge the government to accelerate the pace of political reform, to guarantee the rights of people vested in the law, to implement a press law, to permit privately run newspapers, to hasten the establishment of an honest and democratic government, to value education, to respect intellectual work, and to save the nation through science. Our views are not in conflict with those of our government. . . . Prosperity for our nation is the ultimate objective of our patriotic student movement (quoted in Han 1990, pp. 135-137)



*Action/Inaction as Framing*

To this point our analysis of the micromobilization processes associated with the Chinese Democracy Movement has focused on student framings as manifested in written or spoken words. We suggested that the activists' claims effectively mobilized unprecedented numbers because they resonated with the observations, experiences, and cultural narrations of the masses. But the social construction of oppositional frames does not necessarily rely only on words. It can also depend on the action and/or inaction of the parties engaged in the struggle, a consideration overlooked in the framing literature. Of course, how such acts of commission or omission are individually and collectively understood depends on the same biographical and cultural contexts that mediate the interpretation of collective action frames.

In the case of the Chinese Democracy Movement, students developed a set of direct action tactics and restraints (e.g., nonviolence) that complemented and dramatized the movement's injustice frames, thereby enhancing the movement's apparent legitimacy. Representatives of the state, on the other hand, failed to respond in ways that resonated with people's expectations regarding how the state ought to respond. Taken together, the actions and inactions of the activists and their state opponents contributed to the rapid spread of the student movement to other segments of Chinese society.

Throughout the movement, protesters had remained calm, restrained, and nonviolent despite violence from the police and army (Li 1990; Liu 1989; Mu and Thompson 1989). From the public's perspective, students' actions appeared to have been initiated in good faith as indicated by citizens' remarks such as the one Zuo overheard: "What can students get out of this? They could join the elite in the future since they are educated people. They only want to speak out for us, for the whole country." The government's response—labeling, ignoring students' requests, and counterinsurgency tactics (Ming Pao News 1989; cf. Marx 1979)—by contrast, seemed to be based on outdated and unreasonable attitudes. The state's inaction and their failure to develop compelling counterframes contributed to the emergence of a strong sense of injustice among the masses, a sense that the state had violated both Confucian and communist codes of ethics pertaining to leaders.

The students' patriotic spirit was further dramatized by their hunger strike (May 13-19, 1989). In light of the state's attempt to discredit the movement in *People's Daily* editorials and the government's refusal to engage in substantive dialogues, students decided to resort to a hunger strike. They hoped this drastic act would demonstrate that their movement was patriotic and nonviolent. They also hoped to sustain the movement's momentum by exhibiting an even deeper commitment to Confucian principles (Chai 1990). They chose May 13, two days before Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to China, because they correctly perceived that officials would not take extreme measures during this period and that they could seize this opportunity to embarrass authorities into engaging in a dialogue (Li 1990). In their "Statement of the May 13th Hunger Strikes," students wrote:

We commence our hunger strike in the lovely May sunshine. In the full bloom of youth, however, we leave beautiful things behind, but with great reluctance.

Yet the condition of our country is one of rampant inflation, economic speculation by officials, extreme authoritarian rule, serious bureaucratic corruption, a drain of products and people to other countries, social confusion, and an increase in the number of criminal acts. It is a crucial moment for the country and its people. All compatriots with a conscience, please heed our call:

The country is our country.  
 The people are our people.  
 The government is our government.  
 If we do not cry out, who will?  
 If we do not take action, who will? . . .  
 We do not want to die . . . . No, we are not seeking death; but if death could lead to improved conditions and prosperity for our country, then we ought not shun it. . . .  
 Death awaits. Farewell. To our colleagues who share our loyalties. To our loved ones, whom we would rather not leave, but whom we must. To our mothers and fathers, for whom we cannot be both patriotic and filial at the same time. To the people of our country, from whom we ask permission to pursue this final act of loyalty. (Yu and Harrison 1990, pp. 96-97)

To frame their tactic more succinctly, several hunger strikers wore white vests with slogans such as "I STARVE FOR CHINA; I CRY FOR CHINA" and "MAMA, I AM HUNGRY, BUT I CANNOT EAT." Their willingness to sacrifice their young lives to promote political reforms resembled the principle "remonstration with death" (*si jian*) applied in traditional Chinese society and deeply struck a responsive chord among Beijing residents.

The government, on the other hand, refused to talk to the students until the sixth day of the hunger strike when many fasting students were in critical physical condition. The dialogue ended without any concrete results. The unyielding attitudes of the government incurred the wrath of Beijing citizens who perceived the government as neither benevolent (*ren*) nor righteous (*yi*) (Confucian moral codes for the ruler). We interviewed a Chinese professor from a distant province who recalled her reaction to the hunger strike and the state's response:

The hunger strike sponsored by the students touched me deeply, while the martial law imposed by the government irritated me. What a contrast! And then one day some of my students came back from Beijing telling me what they saw when they had just arrived at the Beijing Railway Station where hundreds of Beijing citizens gathered. They asked them: "Now the government has declared martial law, and the army may occupy Tiananmen Square anytime. It is dangerous to go there at this point in time. Are you sure you still want to go?" My students answered firmly, "Yes, we do!" The Beijing citizens applauded and welcomed the students as if they were heroes. I was deeply touched and got very excited! Students were using their young lives to touch the government! Had I not had a four-month-old son, I would have been there to show my support!

Citizens subsequently entered the drama on the students' side, converting from bystanders to movement supporters. A civil service officer told Zuo that he disapproved of students' actions at the beginning of the movement, believing that student protests would only invite trouble. Later he was so deeply moved by the hunger strikers that he wanted to join them. Another woman, whom we interviewed during her recent business trip to the United States, reflected:

I considered myself a bystander at the beginning of the movement. I thought that students' claims to fight corruption were right, but that maybe they did not have to protest. But later on when I saw that the government failed to respond to students in a timely manner and in an appropriate way, I was disappointed with the government. I thought it was definitely

wrong for the government to repress the movement with the army and bullets when students had good intentions of helping the government.

Approximately one million civilians visited the students in the Square, donating food, clothing, and money. Some even joined the encampment (Li 1990).

At this stage, an identification with students and a collective consciousness were developing among the citizens, frames which undermined government efforts to tarnish the image of the student movement. For example, when the Beijing municipal government withdrew traffic and security police in an attempt to create a chaotic situation that could have provided a handy pretext for clearing Tiananmen Square and thus crushing the movement, Beijing citizens saw through the ploy.<sup>14</sup> They allowed students to assume traffic officers' responsibilities in maintaining social order (Yang 1991). The attempt to organize a counterstudent movement in the outskirts of Beijing also failed. Farmers in the counterstudent movement informed reporters that officials had paid them to do so, thereby severely undermining state attempts to restore its own definition of the situation (Liu 1989).

Frustrated with the loss of legitimacy of their framing efforts, the government finally declared martial law (beginning on May 20, 1989) in hopes that armed forces would restore "order." They sent troops to the Chinese Central Broadcasting and Television Station, *People's Daily*, and other Beijing publications, ordering editors to publish articles espousing the hard-liners' position (Mark 1991). Meanwhile, they ordered troops to occupy Tiananmen Square. To civilians, the imposition of martial law meant that the government chose to take a stand in opposition to its own people. The official response not only outraged hundreds of thousands of citizens, it drove more civilians to the students' side, marking a new stage in the movement. From that point on, Tiananmen Square became the symbol of democracy and justice, a source of strength and spirit among the masses. Zuo heard one citizen urge a student at the Square: "Don't withdraw! We will lose hope if you do."

Zuo observed people of all walks of life join the student rally. They included workers, teachers, business people, journalists, retirees, and even government officers and Party members. In order to prevent the government from finding any evidence of "rioting" as a justification for cracking down on the movement, most Beijing residents stood at their posts during the day, maintaining a normal social order. But in the evening, millions of them surged toward all the major access routes to the Square in order to prevent the troops from entering the city proper. They not only blocked the roads with obstacles, they also engaged the soldiers in dialogues, persuading them to withdraw. Students and citizens pointed out the contradiction of using the "people's liberation army" to suppress its own people. Many citizens sent food and water to the soldiers as a gesture of friendliness, demonstrating the nonrioting, noncounterrevolutionary nature of the movement. Civilians stayed on the streets until dawn. Then they removed the obstacles and went to work. When asked: "Do you get any sleep," they replied: "We take turns resting at the work unit."

In one of history's most remarkable achievements in nonviolent direct action, unarmed people won the first confrontation with the military. The troops finally retreated due to the successful framing effort of students and citizens. The victory marked the success of "people power." To further deflect the "riot" label, students returned to police all weapons abandoned by the soldiers who had attempted to occupy Tiananmen Square.

Realizing that they were losing the framing contest and concerned that their legitimacy was rapidly eroding, Chinese leaders decided to force their way into Tiananmen Square with tanks,

bullets, and troops transferred from other provinces, soldiers who had had no contact with the students and Beijing citizens. During the final stage of the movement, Beijing citizens had become the major forces in the movement. They not only outnumbered the students, but also fought in the battle's front lines, protecting the students in Tiananmen Square. On the night of June 3, 1989, Zuo observed private entrepreneurs who owned motorcycles organize the "Flying Tiger Motor Brigade" to provide students at the Square with information about troop movements. Meanwhile, Voice of America continued to broadcast news to residents beyond the reach of the motor brigades. Young workers formed a "Dare-to-Die Squad" to meet the troops; doctors rescued the wounded; thousands of people blocked the roads to the Square with obstacles and their bodies; and a million more protesting civilians stood along the access routes. The human barricades were simply no match for the steel tanks, armored personnel carriers, and automatic weapons. In the early morning hours of June 4, the movement's most sacred symbol, "The Goddess of Democracy" statue, was smashed to smithereens and with it the hopes of the movement. Hundreds of civilians lay dead among the rubble and thousands of others were injured.

In order to justify the crackdown, Chinese officials denied the killing and fabricated "facts" for television news reports. Zuo observed televised accounts in which the June 3-4 sequence of events was reversed. State television reported that "the government repressed a counterrevolutionary turmoil and brought back the social order necessary for the four modernizations," supported by a video sequence showing: (1) soldiers being killed by demonstrators, (2) students setting military vehicles ablaze, and (3) soldiers opening fire in apparent self-defense. Foreign media personnel and eyewitnesses to the slaughter interviewed by Zuo reported a reverse temporal order: "They [the government] can lie to the people outside Beijing and the world, but they are unable to lie to us Beijing citizens, or to those eyewitnesses along Chang'an Boulevard."<sup>15</sup> But mostly, citizens expressed their disbelief, pain, and anger:

- \* I can't believe this has actually happened! They are fascists!
- \* I thought those were rubber bullets, but then found out that they were real explosive bullets.
- \* How cruel of the army to shoot unarmed people!
- \* I am totally disillusioned of the Chinese government and the People's Liberation Army.
- \* There won't be peaceful petitions as such any more. What awaits the government next time will be revolution!<sup>16</sup>

The irony of the "People's Army" unleashing such ruthless force on its own citizens in the name of the People's Republic and then seeking to deceive the world further amplified the emerging injustice frame. The words of one Chinese woman now living in exile poignantly summarize sentiments shared by most Chinese today: "It is the government who produced 'turmoil,' who 'plotted conspiracy,' who 'violated the constitution.' Therefore, 'the Chinese People's government' is no longer 'people's government!' Likewise, 'the Chinese People's army' is no longer a 'people's army.'"

## CONCLUSION

Although the 1989 Democracy Movement was brutally repressed by the state, it represented an unprecedented success in Chinese participant mobilization. For the first time in modern, authoritarian China, a grassroots movement galvanized and activated a large proportion of the

populace. Prior to the "Beijing Spring," the pervasiveness and omnipotence of state control made the prospects of the rapid diffusion of such a movement seem unimaginable. The primary impetus for the massive participant mobilization was a regime crisis and the rise of democratic ideals precipitated in part by changes in the political opportunity structure. But even the shared recognition of an opening in the window of opportunity, no matter how wide or narrow it is, is not sufficient to trigger mass mobilization.

In contrast to most analyses of Chinese social movements, which have typically been limited to macrocontexts, we call attention to the confluence of and linkages across macro-, meso-, and micromobilization factors and processes. In particular, though students lacked substantial resources, indigenous organizations, or institutional protection, they were able to overcome mesostructural impediments by co-opting extant networks and organizations, including campus study groups, student unions, and dormitory networks. These networks in turn facilitated the social construction and dissemination of grievances throughout the community and beyond. But even these developments were not sufficient. Significant numbers of people had to be inspired to act collectively, to take extraordinary risks for abstract notions like "justice," "democracy," and "modernization." Students fashioned a set of frame alignment strategies, grounded in traditional Chinese values and narratives, which resonated well with the experiences and observations of most non-elites and effectively foiled state attempts to discredit the movement. Meanwhile, students relied on nonviolent direct action tactics that complemented and reaffirmed their framings. State responses and counterframings, by contrast, failed to fit with what people believed and "knew." The series of punitive countermeasures by authorities only served to reinforce the values and beliefs espoused by movement participants. In short, student-citizen-state interactions profoundly transformed people's perceptions of Chinese authorities from "our government" to "our enemy." Ultimately, these factors combined to undermine the legitimacy of CCP rule.

One question that arises from our research is the extent to which distinctive state systems may have differential effects on mobilization processes. In a country like China, where the state dominates private and public domains, grievances must be widely shared before mobilization is likely to occur. While political opportunities and organizational factors are important, both tend to be severely limited. Consequently, translating even widely shared grievances into collective action requires more arduous micromobilization efforts than is necessarily the case in other political contexts. It therefore seems reasonable to propose that under repressive and hegemonic conditions, micromobilization processes acquire an even greater significance than under less restrictive contexts. Not only is it essential that the framings resonate with the perceived social realities, daily experiences, and cultural wisdom of the targets of mobilization, they must also effectively neutralize—at least long enough to mobilize a critical mass—the counterframings of the targets of change, thereby undermining the legitimacy of their rationales for using repressive force against movement participants.

Paradoxically, once framings have been constructed and diffused, it may be easier in centralized, totalitarian systems to galvanize large numbers of participants on behalf of a cause. We speculate that this is due in part to what Zhou (1993) refers to as the "large numbers" phenomenon. A totalitarian institutional structure such as Chinese state socialism tends to "reproduce large numbers of individual behaviors with similar claims, patterns, and targets" (p. 54). Zhou observes that "the bureaucratic apparatus in the workplace facilitates the large numbers phenomenon by (1) directly linking local grievances to national policies, and (2) creating similar bureaucratic problems and generating similar dissatisfactions across organiza-

tions" (p. 59). Totalitarian state socialism tends to divide the entire population into the rulers and the ruled. Consequently, the ruled, regardless of occupations or social statuses, tend in many respects to share common everyday life experiences and grievances. Moreover, since the state directs private and public domains, large numbers of aggrieved people typically look to the state for solutions. Thus, collective action frames targeting the state are more likely to resonate with most people's experiences in centralized systems than they would in systems characterized by cross-cutting interest groups and multiple institutional layers.

Specifying the relationship between state structures, bureaucracies, "large numbers" of similarly affected individuals, and collective action frames is beyond the scope of this article. We have, however, sought to stimulate further research along these lines by attempting to illuminate a few of the macro/meso/micro linkages associated with mobilization processes and the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge Norman Denzin and several anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions, Ming Zhang for his valuable assistance and firm support, and the many Chinese citizens with whom we spoke whose contributions to this project were essential. We are deeply indebted to all who were tortured, exiled, or killed in the 1989 Democracy Movement. Although our names are listed in inverse alphabetical order, our contributions to this research are equal. An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Pittsburgh, 1992.

### NOTES

1. For an elaboration of the various techniques employed, see Denzin (1989); Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg (1991); Lofland and Lofland (1984); Snow, Zurcher, and Sjoberg (1982); Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest (1966).

2. For ethical reasons, we are unable to provide additional biographical information.

3. Due to the fear of state persecution, citizens would not consent to formal interviews, especially when conducted by a stranger. In consideration of these legitimate concerns, Zuo learned about citizens' political attitudes and what, if anything, they had done to support the movement by listening to and engaging in informal conversations.

4. We have disguised the identities of movement participants (some of whom emigrated illegally) in order to protect them and their families who still remain in China.

5. We found Chinese social movement theories too limiting. Given the lack of academic freedom in the People's Republic, only social movement theories that serve the interests of the party-state have been formulated (citation omitted on the request of a Chinese scholar who has studied "social movements" at a university in Beijing.)

6. We use the terms macromobilization, mesomobilization, and micromobilization to refer to the sets of social movement related processes that tend to operate at the institutional (macro), organizational (meso), and interactional (micro) levels. Macromobilization processes refer to institutional level changes in power relationships and opportunity structures, which can stimulate, facilitate, and/or inhibit collective action (Snow et al. 1986; Tilly 1978). Mesomobilization processes refer to the coordination, integration, and/or activation of social groups, networks, and organizations for the purposes of collectively seeking or resisting social change (Gerhards and Rucht 1992). Micromobilization refers to "the range of interactive processes devised and employed by SMOs and their representative actors to mobilize or influence various target groups with respect to the pursuit of collective or common interests" (Snow et al. 1986, pp. 464-465). While these are analytically distinct sets of processes, we demonstrate below the extent to

which they are empirically linked and overlap (see also Klandermans 1992; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988; Tarrow 1992).

7. Rumors in contemporary China often have a greater impact on perceptions of an event than official channels of communication, which tend to be viewed skeptically or ignored.

8. The advent of rock and roll music in China is illustrative of Western cultural influences. Rock and roll, which became quite popular on college campuses in the 1980s, functioned as a substitute expression of dissatisfaction with Chinese leaders and a longing for freedom (Chow 1993). Chow notes that Vaclav Havel attributed a similar insurgent function to rock music in Czechoslovakia before the 1989 fall of the communists.

9. Although various official Chinese media sources occasionally seemed to support the student protesters, only the *Science and Technology News* offered firm support throughout the "crisis" (Ming Pao News 1989). In the early days of the student movement, *People's Daily*, CCP's main official paper, distorted news associated with the protests and published hostile editorials in opposition to the students. For a few days during the student's hunger strike, sympathetic journalists expressed their support for the demonstrators in *People's Daily*. Our sources suggest that the factions within the party-state leadership and the temporary disappearance of Deng Xiaoping led to a brief relaxation in state censorship. Voice of America, various Hong Kong media outlets, and CNN also contributed to the instant diffusion of information among movement participants and bystanders.

10. Calhoun (1989b, p. 31) observes that "while leaders played an important role in this protest movement, leadership was widely diffused. When one large character poster struck a positive chord, others echoed it, people drew attention to them, and a collective action was born." We tend to agree that there were spontaneous and emergent properties (Killian 1984; Zhou 1993) to the events analyzed herein (some of which we point out below). Our primary objective, however, is to direct attention to the linkages between structural and interpretive factors associated with mass mobilization.

11. Throughout Chinese history, the legitimacy of the polity has been built upon the charismatic authority of the leaders by way of a strictly imposed hierarchical system (Weber 1964). This leadership style did not change under the communists. The rule of the party-state is in essence the rule of a few individuals, a political dependence on strong leaders ideally conceived as *mingzhu* (enlightened rulers) and *qingguan* (uncorrupted officials) (Chow 1993, p. 81). According to Chow, the reliance on strong leaders has predetermined the despotic political structure in contemporary China.

12. This excerpt was from a two-hour interview conducted May 6, 1989. The graduate student who conducted and posted the interview, wrote at the bottom of the poster: "Everything written here is true. The writer is willing to take full responsibility."

13. That sense of obligation to oppose injustice has not historically yielded challenges to the rulers. Rather, strict adherence to Confucian principles requires that the intellectuals seek to assist the rulers in restoring justice. It is this tendency that has led some critics to denounce Chinese intellectuals as the "subalterns" of the ruling class in Chinese history (Chow 1993).

14. Beijing, a congested city of over ten million, relies on traffic and security police to help maintain order over the relentless flow of motorized vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians. The absence of traffic police could have resulted in accidents and chaos, which in turn could have been used as a justification for cracking down on the movement.

15. Chang'an Boulevard is a main avenue to Tiananmen Square.

16. The preceding quotes are from Zuo's reconstructed field notes.

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