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Sirens of the Strongman: Neo-Authoritarianism in Recent Chinese Political Theory

Barry Sautman

China's year of upheaval, 1989, was full of incongruities. For example, students invoked the historic struggle of intellectuals to "revive China," while at the same time erecting statues modelled after the symbol of a foreign power with a long history of objectionable conduct toward their country. One of the most interesting incongruities, however, emerged not in the streets, but in the pages of Chinese journals. Highly-placed intellectuals debated the theory of neo-authoritarianism, a doctrine new to the People's Republic, but one which reflects the policy prescriptions of pre-revolutionary Chinese leaders and contemporary Third World strongmen. Advocates of the doctrine were ideologically and, in some cases, organizationally, close to Zhao Ziyang, then the general secretary of the world's largest Communist Party,¹ but their theory was classically conservative. The debate, moreover, was waged without reference to Marxism by either proponents or opponents.

Neo-authoritarianism was the "hot topic" in intellectual circles until the repression of June 1989 rendered further exchanges impossible. The debate that the theory engendered, however, remains relevant to contemporary Chinese politics. Neo-authoritarianism appealed to a broad section of Chinese political thinkers, economists and, it is said, to Deng Xiaoping himself. Well after the putative restabilization in the wake of the Tiananmen incident, fear of civil war and revived warlordism in post-Deng China has been voiced not only by Deng, but by "hardline leaders" and "democratic dissidents" alike.² Neo-authoritarianism continues to be discussed by exiled intellectuals and students as an alternative to demands for the immediate implementation of liberal democracy in China,³ even as similar thinking inspired the attempts to create a strengthened presidency for the Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990.

1. See Nicholas D. Kristof, "'New Authoritarianism' seen in Chinese actions," *New York Times (NYT)*, 28 February 1989, p. A13, in which reference is made to "Some foreign diplomats and many Chinese [who] believe that Mr Zhao shares the idea of new authoritarianism, but it almost certainly is not his alone," implying that the concept was also endorsed by Deng Xiaoping. A Hong Kong newspaper also associated neo-authoritarianism with "Zhao Ziyang's old brain trust." Ai Kesi, "Controversial 'new authoritarianism'," *Zhengming (Contending)* (Hong Kong) No. 137, 1 March 1989, pp. 55–56, in Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS)–CAR–89–047, 17 May 1989, p. 12. In 1991, two and a half years after his fall from power, Zhao was accused by a senior adviser to the CCP's Organization Department of having attempted to set up a personal dictatorship under the banner of neo-authoritarianism. Chen Yeping, "Consciously uphold the Party's authority," *Qiushi (Seeking Truth)*, 16 October 1991, pp. 11–16.

2. Nicholas D. Kristof, "Aging of China leaders reviving fear of chaos," *NYT*, 16 July 1990, p. A6.

3. See Ding Xueliang, "Dongya moshi yu 'xinquanweizhuyi'" ("The East Asian model and neo-authoritarianism"), *Minzhu Zhongguo (Democratic China)* (Paris) (April 1990), pp. 29–36.

The debate is of interest to students of Chinese politics in two respects. First, it shows the degree to which political discourse among “connected” higher intellectuals had been removed from Marxism after a decade of reform under Deng Xiaoping and evolved toward categories familiar to non-Marxist westerners. In some respects, Chinese neo-authoritarianism resembles the emphasis placed on state authority by contemporary western conservatives,⁴ while the replies of its “democratic” opponents mirrored the concerns for civil liberties expressed by western liberals. Secondly, the debate shows that the doctrine could well be implemented in post-Deng China in an effort to avert the chaos now so widely feared by leading figures across the political spectrum.

In order to gauge the implications of the neo-authoritarian proposal for the future of Chinese politics, this article will analyse the debate during the first five months of 1989. The prospects for the implementation of a neo-authoritarian regime in China will be looked at in light of the characteristics of East Asian authoritarian regimes that served as its model and the recent attempts at strengthening authority in order to transform the former Soviet Union. It will be argued that neo-authoritarianism is a possible bridge between conflicting political and intellectual elites and thus may be more indicative of the shape of things to come in China than either the limited reformism of the current CCP leaders or the radical reformism of many Chinese intellectuals.

The Owl Takes Flight

In the winter of 1986, after a season of proposals for the “political structural reform” of the Chinese political system,⁵ the leading radical reform theoretician Su Shaozhi⁶ told an American political scientist that “What China needs today is a *strong* liberal leader.”⁷ Su thus

4. See, e.g., Robert Nisbet, *Twilight of Authority* (Oxford: New York, 1975), ch. 5 on the need to restore political authority.

5. On the push for “political structural reform” in 1986, see Harry Harding, *China's Second Revolution* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1987), pp. 191–99.

6. An economist, Su became director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute for Research on Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought in 1983, where he promoted theories derived from western social science and European Marxist circles. He was criticized during the regime's campaign against “spiritual pollution” in 1983–84, criticized again during the campaign against “bourgeois liberalization” in 1987, and removed from his position as Institute director. Su successfully appealed against an attempt to revoke his Party membership and left China shortly after June 1989 to spend a year teaching in the United States. Carol Lee Hamrin, *China and the Challenge of the Future: Changing Political Patterns* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 235, 240. In an interview with the Hong Kong periodical *Bai xing* (*The People*), 1 September 1989, pp. 20–23, in JPRS–CAR–89–121, 22 December 1989, pp. 10–15, Su outlined his views in the wake of the suppression of the student movement, stating, *inter alia*, that “proletarian dictatorship is only slightly different from fascist dictatorship,” “revisionism is not a bad thing,” and “the Swedish model is I don't know how many times closer to socialism than the Chinese model.”

7. Lawrence R. Sullivan, “Leadership and authority in the Chinese Communist Party,” in David Goodman and Gerald Segal (eds.), *China at Forty: Midlife Crisis?*

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summed up in a sentence the new-born theory of neo-authoritarianism.

The principal proponent of the doctrine, the well-connected policy adviser Wu Jiaxiang,⁸ has recounted that the theory began in 1986 when young intellectuals in Shanghai began to discuss the relationship between competent leaders, the role of centralized power in the process of modernization, and the situation in other East Asian countries, notably the “Four Small Dragons,” as the Chinese call their prosperous neighbours Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong.⁹ These “young scholars” referred to the writings of Samuel

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 62 (emphasis supplied by Sullivan). Sullivan argues that “Rather than concentrating on restricting the central leader’s authority and prohibiting leadership cults, perhaps Deng Xiaoping should encourage a ‘liberal authoritarianism’ to sweep away entrenched opponents of reform.” *Ibid.* pp. 62–63. This argument expresses the essence of the neo-authoritarian idea.

8. Wu was born in 1955 and admitted to Beijing University (Beida) in 1977, and in 1989 was a member of the Beida Department of Economics, on secondment as deputy director of the Investigative and Research Department of the General Office of the CCP Central Committee (CCPCC), where he specialized in research on the modernization of property rights. A self-described “marginalist,” Wu’s position doubtless allowed him to draft policy statements for top Party leaders. The *New York Times* identified Wu as “a Communist Party official and protégé of the party’s General Secretary, Zhao Ziyang” and a Hong Kong journal described him as “a man in a key position in the CPC” and “Deng Xiaoping’s policy interpreter.” Wu Jiaxiang, “Between the happy ant and the despairing suicide—my experience,” *Zhongguo qingnian (China Youth)*, No. 6, 9 June 1989, pp. 10–11, in JPRS–89–101, 5 October 1989, pp. 8–9; Wen Po, “The People’s University Congress outside the Great Hall—big debate between ‘neo-authoritarians’ and ‘democrats,’” *Xin wan bao (New Evening News)* (Hong Kong), 5 April 1989, p. 4, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)—CHI—89—065*, 6 April 1989, p. 29; Kristof, *NYT*, 28 February 1989, p. A13; Luo Yu, “Star of the CPC’s think tank, Wu Jiaxiang—Deng Xiaoping’s policy interpreter,” *Guang jiao jing (Wide Angle)*, No. 196, 16 January 1989, pp. 22–24, in JPRS–CAR–89–028, 31 March 1989, pp. 9–11. Prior to his participation in the neo-authoritarianism debate, Wu published a book *Deng Xiaoping: His Thoughts and Practices*. This devoted a chapter to an approving discussion of Deng’s famed 1962 theory that it does not matter whether a cat is black or white; if it can catch mice it is a good cat (“*mao lun*”), which Wu interpreted as “no matter what kind of system or thought, as long as it can solve China’s problems, it should be adopted.” Wu has written articles whose titles include “Conversion to the shareholding system: one way to further the reform process,” “Choices in the reform of product rights,” “Creditor’s rights, stock ownership rights and property rights,” “A tradition of incomplete social and individual property rights,” and “Germination and transplant: the historic course of maturity of personal property rights.” See Luo Yu, “Star of the CCP’s think tank.” Wu also co-wrote two articles advocating the adoption of shareholding in Chinese industry, the first with Jin Lizuo, “The needs for a new strategic concept to reform the state’s economic functions,” which appeared in March 1985 in *Shijie jingji daobao (World Economic Herald)*. In a later article, Wu and his co-author characterized shareholding as a Marxist form of public ownership because it is “property right distribution based on the principle of each according to his ability to each according to his need.” Wu Jiaxiang and Zhong Pengrong, “The shareholding system is a practical form of public ownership,” *Jingji ribao (Economics Daily)*, 17 February 1989, p. 3, in FBIS–CHI–89–043, 7 March 1989, pp. 36–39.

9. Wu Jiaxiang, “Commenting on neo-authoritarianism,” *Shijie jingji daobao (Shanghai)*, 16 January 1989, p. 12, in FBIS–CHI–89–020, 1 February 1989, pp. 33–35. The following discussion of the early development of neo-authoritarian theories in 1986–88 relies upon the account in Wu’s article and Ai Kesi, JPRS–CAR–89–047, pp. 12–14. According to a report of Gao Yu, “Neo-authoritarianism: does it represent a ‘spirit’ or a ‘rat’?” *Jingjixue zhoubao (Economics Weekly)*, 12 March 1989, p. 1, in FBIS–CHI–89–058, p. 30, the first proponent of neo-authoritarianism was Qing Ping in 1986.

Huntington, the Harvard University political scientist whose works have emphasized the need to institutionalize politics in developing societies by creating authoritative sources of leadership.¹⁰

Some time after learning of the discussions of the young intellectuals, Wu read a report by Wang Huning, a leading political scientist at Shanghai's Fudan University and a strong advocate of centralized power in the reform process.¹¹ In 1986, Wang presented to "the central decision-making organ" a position paper on "the need to pay attention to the operation of political power in the process of modernization." In this paper, which Wu deemed the earliest formal expression of neo-authoritarianism, Wang argued that because China's resources are scarce, its market mechanism imperfect and the cultural level low, there was a need to establish a highly efficient power structure system. Wang's views, however, were misunderstood by intellectuals as hindering democratization. At about the same time, Beijing University and the CCP Central Party School sponsored a "Salon Forum" at which Beida doctoral candidate Zhang Bingjiu argued that China needed a semi-centralized system commensurate with the development of its commodity economy, and his views too were dismissed.¹²

10. See Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). On the influence of Huntington and other western social scientists on Chinese neo-authoritarian thought, see also Mark Petrasen and Mung Xiang, "The concept of Chinese neo-authoritarianism: an exploration and a democratic critique," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33, No. 11 (November 1990), pp. 1101, 1105; Ma Shu Yun, "The rise and fall of neo-authoritarianism in China," *China Information*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Winter 1990-91), pp. 3-7; Pei Minxin, "A discussion on authoritarianism with Samuel Huntington, the pioneer of the theory of authoritarianism," *Shijie jingji daobao*, 27 March 1984, p. 13, in *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology (CSA)*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Summer 1991), pp. 67-85.

11. Wang, born in 1955 and a 1981 graduate of Fudan, was in 1989 the director of the Institute of Politics and Administration of the International Politics Department of Fudan. In 1988, Wang argued that the decentralization of the Chinese economy and politics had led to local interests overwhelming national interests, noting that some observers regard China's provinces and counties as "split into about 30 dukedoms, with some 2,000 rival principalities." As procedural democracy develops, local constituents could be expected to vote from local interests, an outcome that may result in separatist rule. "Non-economic reflection on problems of reform in China," *Shijie jingji daobao*, 29 August 1988, p. 11, in FBIS-CHI-88-201, 18 October 1988, pp. 20-22 (an abbreviated version of this article and an interview with Wang on the development of political science in China appears in the CCP's theoretical organ, *Qiushi*, No. 7, 1 October 1988, pp. 35-36, in JPRS-CAR-88-074, 21 November 1988, pp. 30-31).

12. Yan Tzu, "What kind of power system does China need? - the connotations of Wang Huning's ideas on a 'new power structure'," *Guang jiao jing*, No. 200, (16 May 1989), pp. 38-40, in FBIS-CHI-89-103, 31 May 1989, pp. 81-83. Wang maintained that a "new power structure" was needed because the separation of economic and political functions had gradually weakened the political power which had been based on the old economic structure, while a new structure had not yet been established. A new power structure could make "super-economic and advanced transformations" by "extending the representative nature of the structure, greatly raising the positions of the democratic [satellite] parties and other social groups in the political system, and allowing non-Party personages to participate in government affairs at various levels." Democracy would be able to thrive only after this new power structure became fully developed. Wang abstained from participation in the 1989 debate on neo-authoritari-

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It was only in early 1988, after the CCP's 13th Party Congress,¹³ that interest in these "new views" on the relationship between authority and society was renewed. In February, Wu Jiayang published an article entitled "Seeds and transplantation: the historical road along which individual power grows" in which he concluded that the British monarchy itself had initiated the modernization process by "pulling down 100 castles overnight." Based upon this reading of history, Wu concluded metaphorically that a flirtation and pre-marital relations between autocracy and freedom must precede the marriage of democracy and freedom in China and all developing countries.

In June, the previously-scorned graduate student Zhang Bingjiu appeared at a forum sponsored by the Research Office of the CCPCC Propaganda Department and reiterated the ideas that he had expressed in 1986. Zhang argued that it was more feasible and realistic for some powerful leaders to push ahead forcibly with modernization than to implement democracy all at once. He proposed that the route to modernization is through the "dualization" of social life, i.e. the simultaneous construction of a free enterprise system and centralized state power. Three months later, at a forum commemorating the 90th anniversary of the failed Chinese reform movement of 1898,¹⁴ Dai Qing,¹⁵ a reporter for the leading intellectual newspaper, *Guangming ribao* (*Illumination Daily*), argued that reform and modernization in the PRC required a leader as capable as the strongmen who had emerged elsewhere in East Asia.¹⁶ At the same

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anism, but expressed appreciation of the "deep understanding of China's current social conditions on the part of advocates of 'neo-authoritarianism'" and affirmed the correctness of the views that he had expressed three years earlier. Zhang Bingjiu's 1986 seminar paper, "The progress and co-ordination between economic and political system reform," in Liu Jin and Li Lin (eds.), *Xin quanweizhuyi* (*The New Authoritarianism*) (Beijing: Beijing College of Economics Press, 1989), pp. 1–26, translated in *CSA*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 1990–91), pp. 8–35. See also interviews with Wu Jiayang and Zhang Bingjiu, "Radical democracy or stable democracy," *CSA*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring 1991), pp. 7–15.

13. On the 13th Congress, which marked a significant victory for the reform forces led by Zhao Ziyang and endorsed by Deng Xiaoping, see Michel Oksenberg, "China's Thirteenth Party Congress," *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 37, No. 6 (November–December 1987), pp. 1–17; Zhao Ziyang, "Advance along the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics—report delivered at the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on 25 October 1987," *Beijing Review*, 9–15 November 1987, pp. 23–49.

14. See Ai Kesi, JPRS–CAR–89–047, p. 13.

15. Dai Qing, "a prominent writer in her mid-40s," was arrested shortly after the crackdown of June 1989. She had "apparently offended the leadership with a speech in Tiananmen Square in which she praised the student demonstrators but also called on them to leave the square." She was released after 10 months detention on 10 May 1990. Sheryl WuDunn, "China announces release from jail of 211 dissidents," *NYT*, 11 May 1990, p. A1.

16. Dai Qing, "From Lin Zexu to Jiang Jingguo," in Liu Jin and Li Lin, *The New Authoritarianism*, pp. 86–90, translated in *CSA*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring 1991), pp. 61–66; Wu Jiayang, FBIS–CHI–89–020, p. 34; Ai Kesi, JPRS–CAR–89–047, p. 12.

forum, Wu Jiayang maintained that the centralization of state power at the top of society and the development of individual freedom at the bottom are two aspects of one process.

Subsequently, at a symposium on the relation between political and economic reform, Rong Jian, a Chinese People's University (Renda) Ph.D. candidate, reiterated the point that he had made on earlier occasions that as China transformed its "natural economy" into a commodity economy, it needed first to create a relative centralization of power and then make a rapid transition from centralized to democratic politics. At another symposium on theories of modernization, held in November 1988, the question of centralized politics once again became the focus of discussion.¹⁷ The following month, Wu Jiayang published a book, *Deng Xiaoping: Theory and Practice*, in which he found theoretical bases for neo-authoritarianism in Deng's *mao lun* and in Zhao Ziyang's metaphor that the reform process is like crossing a river by groping for stepping stones.

Other highly-placed intellectuals also endorsed the concept of neo-authoritarianism. In an interview given to the *World Economic Herald*, the leading organ of China's radical reformers, Chen Yizi, director of the State Council's Institute for Restructuring the Economic System,¹⁸ and two vice-directors, Wang Xiaoqiang and Li Jun, argued that there are four models of political economy in the world: tough governments and tough economies (the Stalinist model); soft governments and tough economies (e.g. India); tough governments and soft economies (the Four Small Dragons, Brazil, Turkey); and soft governments and soft economies (many contemporary western systems). Chen and his associates argued that the third system – tough governments and soft economies – had produced more successes than the first and second, while no developing country had succeeded with the fourth since the end of the Second World War. Their obvious implication was that China needed an authoritarian political regime that was capable of creating an expanding free market economy.¹⁹

17. Citing a *Guangming ribao* article published that day, a Xinhua broadcast of 24 March 1989, 1040 GMT, in FBIS-CHI-89-056, 24 March 1989, p. 40, stated that the symposium on modernization theories began the discussion of neo-authoritarianism, which it defined as a theory holding that in the absence of a developed middle class and market economy in China, a western democratic system would only produce representatives who would avoid the market or place it under the control of "like interests."

18. The State Council Commission, established in 1982 and first headed by Zhao Ziyang, planned the programme for comprehensive reform and Chen Yizi and other economists are said to have "served as its brain and its legs." Chen and other Institute officials "had direct access to Zhao through his secretary Bao Tong as well as through normal channels." Chen was also head of the Society of Young Economists, a leading radical reform organization. In June 1989, Chen fled to Paris and became the deputy head of the Democratic Alliance, an exile organization. Hamrin, *China and the Challenge of the Future*, pp. 229–230, 238.

19. Chen Yizi *et al.*, "The deep questions and strategic choice China's reform faces," *Zhongguo: fazhan yu gaige* (*China: Development and Reform*), No. 4 (1989), pp. 3–9, translated in *CSA*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring 1991), pp. 39–60. See also Ai Kesi, *JPRS-CAR-89-047*, p. 13.

The academic conferences, articles and interviews of 1988 set the stage for a debate on neo-authoritarianism that began with the simultaneous publication in January 1989 of articles by Wu Jiaxiang and Rong Jian. Wu recognized that some intellectuals questioned any strengthening of centralized authority on the ground that China had been ill-served by past autocrats. He countered that contemporary advocates of centralization had replaced “traditional centralism” with neo-authoritarianism, which was not an autocratic authority based on the deprivation of individual freedom, but was aimed at removing obstacles to the development of individual freedom. This last concept Wu defined as economic freedom, i.e. the freedom to accumulate capital, trade in commodities and labour, and establish marketable property rights.

Wu viewed social development as passing through three stages: first, traditional autocratic authority (“old authority”) in which a “product economy prevailed”; secondly, individual freedom under the protection of neo-authoritarianism (“new authority”), in which an enlightened autocracy creates a semi-market to replace the natural economy; and thirdly, the integration of freedom, i.e. a full market economy and liberal democracy.²⁰ Wu argued that no society had yet leaped directly from stage one to stage three because the decline of traditional authority brings a decentralization whose beneficiaries are not ordinary citizens, but the “intermediate social structure created by the old authority,” i.e. the officialdom, which grabs power and plunges society into a state without authority, economic freedom or democracy. Wu maintained that the development of democracy at this transitional stage would only accelerate decentralization and negate economic freedom. Instead, a new authority must be called into being to destroy the social structure that had been created by the “old authority” and enable power at the intermediate level to develop economic freedom. Centralized authority would ensure the social stability needed to eliminate obstacles to that freedom.

Wu saw the “social crisis,” i.e. intellectual disaffection, as guaranteeing that “new authority” would not resemble traditional autocracy. The restoration of traditional authority would only aggravate the crisis, which in turn would diminish the efficacy of any effort to restore the old order. Because only firm authority could attenuate the social crisis, Wu asserted that neo-authoritarians do not stress political structure, but the political leader. Unlike democratic and autocratic systems, which may be incapable of producing an authoritative leader, a neo-authoritarian system would centre on a leader who could perform the role advocated by Rong Jian and Zhang Bingjiu – the “dualization” of politics and the economy. Officialdom would be separated from the economy and “free competition on an

20. See also Deng Ziqiang, “Concerning controversial views on neo-authoritarianism,” *Shenzhen tequ bao* (*Shenzhen Special Economic Zone News*), s.d., reprinted in *Da gong bao*, 17 April 1989, p. 2, in FBIS-CHI-89-074, 19 April 1989, pp. 26–27 for a summary of Wu’s views.

equal footing” would be implemented. The authoritative leader and his “brilliant and far-sighted” advisers would by “resolute and decisive actions” provide the objective conditions which the economy itself is incapable of providing for its own free development. The ruling elite would realize policies designed to enhance capital accumulation, dispose of resources effectively and provide the law and order necessary for commodity trade. Wu concluded that “In this sense, neo-authoritarianism is similar to conservative economic liberalism.” Although he anticipated substantial disagreement with his thesis, he borrowed a line from Hegel in asserting that “this owl has taken off, though at the early dawn.”

The Debate Commences

Although Rong Jian’s advocacy of a duality between economic freedom and centralized authority inspired aspects of Wu’s thinking, Rong himself immediately took issue with the neo-authoritarian doctrine.²¹ He argued that neo-authoritarianism could not subsist in China precisely because of the lack of three conditions for dualism: private ownership, a “regularized” market, and independent enterprises and entrepreneurs. Rong contended that in the Four Small Dragons, not only did autocratic rule not extend to the economy, but dualism had created the social conditions on which democratic politics could rely, so that autocratic politics had been turned into democracy. Unless China solved the problem of ownership and removed the stumbling block of traditional centralized power, the implementation of neo-authoritarianism would negate the reforms of the past decade and China would be out of step with the democratic trend emerging in other socialist countries.

Within a few weeks of the appearance of Wu and Rong’s articles, other scholars joined the debate. Among supporters of neo-authoritarianism were the Beijing Young Economists’ Association and Chen Yizi’s Institute for Restructuring the Economic System. In a summary of the symposium on the national economic situation, these two organizations jointly stated that “China needs an authoritative top leading group which can rally the social elite and the nation in this complicated environment to advance this historic reform firmly and rhythmically.”²²

Among opponents, Yu Haocheng contended that the proponents of neo-authoritarianism were supporting just that traditional authority that Wu Jiexiang deplored—rule by “a holy emperor and an able chancellor” or “a wise, sagacious and ironhanded leader wielding totalitarian power.” He maintained that it was inappropriate to cite

21. Rong Jian, “Is ‘neo-authoritarianism’ possible in China?” *Shijie jingji daobao*, 16 January 1989, p. 12, in FBIS—CHI—89—020, 1 February 1989, p. 32. An extended version of this article appears in *CSA*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 1990—91), pp. 46—68.

22. “Deng Xiaoping on neo-authoritarianism,” *Zhongguo tongxun she (China News Agency)*, 7 April 1989, 0841 GMT, in FBIS—CHI—89—066, 7 April 1989, p. 15.

the Four Small Dragons as “totalitarian” countries whose economies had, for that reason, grown very fast. He argued that China’s East Asian neighbours have export-orientated economies that are conditioned by the international market, barely regulated by local governments, whereas China has a “product economy” that is under strict political control.

Yu also said that it is inappropriate to speak of a “honeymoon” between authoritarianism and liberalism. This “marriage” occurred in Europe only because the rising bourgeoisie had a need for kings and emperors who would break down small states, achieve national unity and develop a commodity economy. However, China had been a “centralized, totalitarian, and feudalistic country” since national unification under Qinshihuangdi in the third century B.C. All subsequent rulers, up to the last Empress Cixi and the first Republican president Yuan Shikai, were “totalitarians” who neither developed the commodity economy nor permitted a link between authoritarianism and liberalism.²³ Yu asserted that the development of a commodity economy required a democratic government, for economic structural reform is dependent on parallel or even antecedent political reform. He quoted the famous passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in which Karl Marx argued that because the scattered French peasant majority could not enforce its class interests through a parliament, it looked to a strongman who would enforce authority over the peasantry, while protecting it from other classes. Similarly, neo-authoritarianism expressed “the needs and thinking of small-holding peasants living in a state of natural economy.” The regime sought by advocates of neo-authoritarians was thus tantamount to feudalism and a reflection of persisting “feudal” influences in China.²⁴

Another opponent, Zhou Wenzhang, writing in the *Workers’ Daily*, said neo-authoritarians were wrong to place their hopes for the free

23. For an argument along similar lines, see Li Wei, “‘New authority’ going astray,” *Jingjixue zhoubao*, 26 March 1989, p. 7, in FBIS–CHI–89–066, 7 April 1989. Li contended that China had never experienced authoritarianism, in the sense of control of political power by a leader who eschews the monopolization of the economy and culture. Rather, China has historically been ruled by “totalitarians,” who put all aspects of social life under strict control using coercive means, opposed the constitutional separation of powers, required absolute obedience of individuals to the state and propagated absolute collectivism. Therefore, any view that claims to be “authoritarian” is really “totalitarian.” Li also contended that neo-authoritarians confused power and authority. The Chinese government has great power, but insufficient authority; it lacks authority because of its inadequate effectiveness, not because of inadequate power. By neglecting the reform of the existing power structure, while favouring an increase in the power of the government and of individuals, the neo-authoritarians would only produce more power struggles, while political stability will be lost.

24. Yu Haocheng, “Does China need neo-authoritarianism?” *Shijie jingji daobao*, 6 February 1989, p. 14, in FBIS–CHI–89–036, 24 February 1989, pp. 18–19. Yu’s article also appears in *CSA*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Summer 1991), pp. 44–55. See also Wen Jianming “Debates over ‘neo-authoritarianism,’” *Nanfang ribao (Southern Daily)*, 5 April 1989, p. 3, in FBIS–CHI–89–069, 12 April 1989, p. 16, in which Yu’s argument is listed as one of four “diversified concepts among the theoretical circles on neo-authoritarianism.”

development of the economy on a “political elite” and “political strongmen.”²⁵ He viewed the doctrine as a “panacea” more than an academic theory, challenging its implication that China’s economic development had suffered from chaos and loss of control because of the lack of a leader who could play a balancing role. Rather, the reforms had proceeded under the central leaders, who were quite capable of reclaiming any authority that they had delegated. Zhou conceded that the legitimacy of central control in China had declined, but denied that it could be restored by intensifying the government’s authority. Attempts to recreate legitimacy through this method had always failed and China now had no choice but to introduce overall reform. Centralized control had always existed in China so the neo-authoritarians’ blind worship of it risked a reversion to the pre-reform situation. China needed a “political elite” and “political strongmen,” but only of the type dedicated to science and democracy.

Zhou further maintained that neo-authoritarians made the mistake of neglecting the special characteristics of the centralism practised in the Four Small Dragons by assuming that their combination of centralism and a free economy could be applied to China. Neo-authoritarians “indiscriminately copied foreign experience,” a fault from which China had repeatedly suffered in the past. Zhou proposed that the problems of the reform process, such as corruption, low efficiency and bureaucracy, could best be ameliorated by reducing excessive interference in the economy and creating the right conditions for modern economic management, i.e. “science, democracy, high efficiency, honesty, and so on.” To accomplish this, one must “continue to storm the existing highly-centralized political structure” in order to create one that does not bring on economic turbulence through the faults of a few officials.

Chen Xinquan, also in the *Workers’ Daily*, argued that democracy and authority could be combined, for the former did not necessarily lead to disorder and confusion.²⁶ Events like the Cultural Revolution were not the creations of democracy but were caused by centralized state power and arbitrary decisions by individual leaders. He felt that democracy provides rational authority by establishing order through legislation, producing policy through elected organs of power, and suppressing undesirable behaviour; it neither lowers the efficiency of government nor interferes with decision-making. Policy-makers enjoy the full authority prescribed by law, with some policies put to a vote, but others taken by responsible administrators. In allowing for the timely expression of popular will, people need to devote less attention to politics and can concentrate on the economic aspects of life.

25. Zhou Wenzhang, “Neo-authoritarianism: an impractical ‘panacea’,” *Gongren ribao* (*Workers’ Daily*), 3 February 1989, p. 3, in FBIS–CHI–89–038, 28 February 1989, pp. 25–26.

26. Chen Xinquan, “Politics in the course of modernization: democracy and authority,” *Gongren ribao*, 10 February 1989, p. 3, in FBIS–CHI–89–038, 28 February 1989, pp. 26–28.

Chen viewed neo-authoritarianism as arising from a reaction to the parliamentary system on the part of modernizing military and political strongmen in the Third World. The theory could take on a positive significance for China only if its strongmen were genuinely orientated toward modernization, adopted an open attitude toward advanced science and culture, and were “able to prop up the middle bourgeoisie, so that the latter will have economic, political, and cultural strength.” Chen doubted that neo-authoritarianism would be able to play such a role because economics, politics and culture remain highly integrated in China. Because “the pattern of democratic politics adopted in western capitalist countries at present has objectively played a powerful exemplary role,” the international trend was toward democratization in the socialist and developing countries. It was thus probably undesirable for China to adopt authoritarianism while opening to the outside world. Moreover, authoritarian politics risked the inappropriate extension to economic and social life of political principles, such as the subordination of the minority to the majority.

The Debate in Full Bloom

In early March 1989, the neo-authoritarianism debate reached *Renmin ribao*, the organ of the CCP Central Committee.²⁷ Fan Zhongxin of the Taiwan Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences argued that a return to “enlightened autocracy” would be a retrogression from the progress made by the popularization of law which, he felt, had made it difficult for corrupt officials to operate. Neo-authoritarians view democracy as a failed means and method of modernization, as evidenced by the widening gap between the west and China. They seek a “short-term investment” and quick results, in contrast to a “long-term investment” in democracy. Fan maintained that this approach wrongly presupposes that democracy is a method, while in fact it is a purpose.

By this time Chinese dailies had also begun to cover the debate on neo-authoritarianism as a news event. One journal²⁸ noted two schools of neo-authoritarians. One school viewed the doctrine as derived from military and civilian strongman regimes peculiar to Third World states in the early stages of modernization, where it had arisen in reaction to the failures of parliamentary democracy. The other school saw it as a stage that all countries pass through in making the transition from old authoritarian rule to modern democracy. Both agreed, however, that democracy cannot be established immediately after a transition from imperial, colonial or other authoritarian rule,

27. Fang Zhongxin, “An analysis of ‘neo-authoritarianism,’” *Renmin ribao* (*People’s Daily*), (Beijing), 6 March 1989, p. 5, in FBIS–CHI–89–047, 13 March 1989, pp. 34–35.

28. Wu Huijing, “Neo-authoritarianism a hot topic of discussion in academic circles,” *Jingji cankao* (*Economic Reference*), 7 March 1989, p. 4, in FBIS–CHI–89–055, 23 March 1989, pp. 45–47.

because democratic politics arise only from a “free economy.” Neo-authoritarians viewed the premature establishment of democracy as a brake on economic development and the construction of a free economy, which would also produce domestic disturbances and sustained crisis. Instead, they called for “iron-fisted means [and] great administrative strength to smash the forces hampering the development of a free economy.” Once this economy had been created, the nation could move from authoritarianism to democracy under “new authority,” which uses modernization as a guide, has the market as a goal, and employs semi-centralization, not despotism, as a method.

Opponents of neo-authoritarianism reportedly concentrated on seven counterpoints: the three-stage pattern of old authority, neo-authoritarianism and democracy is ahistorical; democracy can develop alongside a commodity economy; democracy should not be associated with anarchic social disturbances; the economic take-off of the Four Small Dragons resulted from *laissez-faire* and not from government intervention; only democracy can abate official corruption, while authoritarianism cannot pave the way to democracy; neo-authoritarians confuse policy-making and policy implementation—the enforcement of policy is a matter of administrative responsibility, while the making of it should not be reduced to the word of the “chief”; and neo-authoritarians neglect the reform of the system and concentrate exclusively on the role of individuals. Although they noted these disagreements, a number of scholars nevertheless favoured studying the doctrine seriously in order to “draw on its rational aspects.”²⁹

Another journal reported in March 1989 that a “first symposium on the theory of democracy in China” and a “symposium on neo-authoritarianism in the current wave of political thinking” had been staged, the latter sponsored by the Beijing Institute of Research on Social, Scientific and Technical Development and *Lilun xinxi bao* (*Theory Information Journal*).³⁰ It noted that neo-authoritarians tended to be economists, while their opponents were generally students of philosophy and political science. Neo-authoritarianism was seen as relying on the proposition that while the basis for democratic freedom is a perfect market economy, the market must be introduced by an authoritarian regime. Opponents argued that this reasoning failed to draw a clear line between old and new authority. Its emphasis on strongman politics rather than the political system ignored the role that democracy could play in stimulating economic development and failed to recognize that major historical events, such

29. For additional comments by opponents of neo-authoritarianism, see Deng Ziqiang, “Concerning controversial views on neo-authoritarianism, Part II,” *Shenzhen tequ bao*, reprinted in *Da gong bao*, 18 April 1989, p. 2, in FBIS—CHI—89—074, pp. 27–28, and Xie Yun, “On the ‘flirtation’ between autocracy and freedom,” *Xin Guancha* (*New Observer*), No. 7, 10 April 1989, pp. 18–19, in JPRS—CAR—89—070, 6 July 1989, pp. 11–12. Xie argued that China had never experienced capitalist or socialist democracy and that democracy does not reject legitimate authority.

30. Gao Yu, FBIS—CHI—89—058, p. 30.

as the May Fourth Movement,³¹ the seizure of power by the Communist Party and the 1976 “Tiananmen Incident,”³² had demonstrated that democracy could only be born out of democracy.

Opponents of neo-authoritarianism did not hesitate to compare it with earlier authoritarian regimes in China. They also saw it as a result of the current inability of intellectuals to influence the course of China’s political development. For example, Qin Xiaoying said it was a product of the frustration caused by the imposition of austerity in the summer of 1988.³³ This theory of “a tough government with a soft economy,” reflected “the yearning for a strong man like Gorbachev in China.” Qin examined three previous occasions in which authoritarianism had been advocated in China. In the first, between the Republican revolution of 1911 and the May Fourth Movement, the strongman Yuan Shikai and others stated that liberty, equality and the republic had only created confusion and rebellion and were incapable of making China a power. Kang Youwei also repudiated the constitutionalism he had advocated at the time of the 1898 reform and reverted to monarchism on the grounds that China was insufficiently mature. In contrast, the Republican leader Sun Yat-sen, the early Chinese Marxist Li Dazhao and the first head of the CCP Chen Duxiu strenuously urged opposition to autocracy, in favour of liberty.

The second occasion was during the 1930s. The Guomintang leader, Chiang Kai-shek, stated that “the rise of a leader and organization of iron and blood will be the dawn of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” Ideologists argued that civil rights could only evolve if all efforts were first concentrated on building up the economy. They maintained that democracy and liberalism were decadent ideas and that autocracy under a talented leader was to be preferred. In contrast, the famous writer Lu Xun, Sun Yat-sen’s widow Soong Qingling and others protested against the Guomintang elevation of the party above the state, and its autocracy.

The third polemic was launched soon after the victory over Japan. Various historians adopted the Nietzschean position of relying on the will of a “superman” to solve China’s problems. At the same time, Chiang Kai-shek advocated a protective military regime, holding that liberalism would reduce the country to anarchy. The prominent

31. The reform movement of 1919, generated by intellectuals, began with protests of the recognition by the post-First World War Versailles Conference of Japan’s suzerainty over China’s Shandong province. The principal slogan of this variegated movement was “science and democracy.” See Chou Ts’e-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

32. In the “Tiananmen Incident” of 5 April 1976, some 100,000 Beijing residents gathered in the square to honour the recently-deceased premier Zhou Enlai and, in many cases, to denounce Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four. The protestors were dispersed by police and the incident precipitated the second fall of Deng Xiaoping.

33. Qin Xiaoying, “Jumping out of the vicious cycle of history—China’s third polemic over authoritarianism,” *Jiangjixue zhoubao*, 12 March 1989, p. 7, in FBIS—CHI—89—062, 3 April 1989, pp. 45–49. Qin also summarized his views in an interview with Zhang Weiguo, “Beijing holds successive seminars on neo-authoritarianism,” *Shijie jingji daobao*, 13 March 1989, p. 10, in FBIS—CHI—89—059, 29 March 1989, p. 41.

philosopher Ai Siqi, the communist leader Zhou Enlai and others denounced these ideas as obscurantist, fascist and neo-autocratic. Zhou Enlai, at talks with the American general George Marshall in 1945, stated that the CCP advocated an American-style democracy, but with some alterations to suit China's conditions. The following year, Mao endorsed democracy as the means of ending China's cycles of dynastic decline, although he later employed a personality cult that repudiated democracy.

Qin Xiaoying thus equated neo-authoritarianism with all previous proposals for an authoritarian regime in China, each of which had ended in a personal disaster for its proponents and a political disaster for China. He further equated current proposals for immediate democracy with communists and non-communists who enjoyed popularity among the Chinese intelligentsia. Other responses to neo-authoritarianism also invoked historical comparisons. For example, Gao Gao argued that if neo-authoritarians sought an enlightened autocrat, they might look at the example of Mao Zedong.³⁴ Citing various liberal policies adopted by Mao, Gao contended that because enlightenment depended on an individual's value judgments and interests and was not constitutionally constrained, "on the day that power and interests are touched enlightenment will all but be squeezed out by autocracy." Gao contended that Mao had been able to silence critics of the transformation of agriculture, launch the anti-rightist campaign and oppose increased foreign trade as reflecting comprador philosophy³⁵ only because he was himself a neo-authoritarian. She concluded that only a social system based on the rule of law and freedom of the press could check existing authoritarian tendencies in China.³⁶

34. Gao Gao, "Improve the social control system taking the rule of law as the main body," *Jingjixue zhou bao*, 12 March 1989, p. 5, in FBIS-CHI-89-058, 28 March 1989, pp. 30-32.

35. In fact, Mao acquiesced in, but did not launch the anti-rightist movement of 1958, which was proposed by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. See Roderick McFarquhar, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Columbia University, 1974). Not Mao, but writers associated with the Gang of Four criticized increased foreign trade as a new form of comprador relations. See Ann Fenwick, "Chinese foreign trade and the campaign against Deng Xiaoping," in Thomas Fingar (ed.), *China's Quest for Independence in the 1970s* (*Stanford Journal of International Studies*, No. 15 (1979)), pp. 199-224.

36. See also Sun Liping, "The present authority crisis and its cause," *Shijie jingji daobao*, 12 March 1989, p. 5, in FBIS-CHI-89-058, 28 March 1989, pp. 32-33. Sun, citing Max Weber argues that resistance to higher authority stems from the regime's lack of a rational-legal basis for its authority. Similar comments were made by other opponents of neo-authoritarianism in interviews with Zhang, FBIS-CHI-89-059, pp. 39-42. Hu Jiwei, former editor of *Renmin ribao* and a National People's Congress Standing Committee member, argued for the principle of equality before the law as a counterweight to authoritarianism. Zhang Xianyang, a researcher of the Research Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the Academy of Social Sciences considered Mao to have been "the greatest strongman in history," while a poet and essay writer, Shao Yanxiang, compared neo-authoritarianism to Nazism and argued that the masses, whom Hitler despised, nevertheless regarded him as enlightened autocrat. The jurist Zhang Zonghou argued that freedom is guaranteed by the authority of law. "A well-known scholar" contended that backwardness was no obstacle to Chinese democracy because China was more advanced than ancient Athens or the United States under George Washington, both of which practised democracy and, one might add (although the anonymous scholar did not), slavery.

Despite their differences, supporters and opponents of neo-authoritarianism argued in a common language informed by western, particularly American, political discourse. For example, both sides invoked the theme of “checks and balances.” Xiao Gongqin, a supporter, observed that disorder was spreading as the authority of Deng Xiaoping’s “New Deal” reform government was eroded.³⁷ Because of diminishing political legitimacy, the regime was increasingly unable to cope with “unstable factors” such as population growth, a decreasing ratio of arable land to population, ecological damage, diminished flood control, a grain crisis, unemployment and a “moral crisis in society.” These factors coincided with inflation and “landslides” generated by a loosening control over the economy, so a vicious circle of instability and further erosion of government authority would ensue. Xiao contended that China had missed a chance of “transitional authoritarianism” by forsaking the “New Democracy” of the early 1950s and attempting a “transition to communism in poverty,” and should now reinforce the authority of those pushing for reform and build a middle class. Authority must apply a system of checks and balances to the “fully authoritarian” structure that was created in the 1950s in order to pre-empt the restoration of “old systems,” prevent anti-social tendencies among state enterprises, and accelerate the disintegration of the existing structure by separating political, economic and cultural systems. The primary check would be “severely coercive means” for suppressing crime and corruption.³⁸

Xiao viewed efforts to establish a “radical pluralistic democracy and local autonomy” as the “political romanticism” of anti-authority intellectuals, derived from earlier experiences with the regime.³⁹ He likened the effort to establish a pluralistic system to “pulling the shoots upward in order to help them grow” and to past efforts to move to communism. He maintained that only the combination of a modernizing authority and an intellectual elite, who enjoyed a “pluralism of thought” propitious to academic study but adhered to

37. Xiao Gongqin, “Checks and balances by authority: the only way to success in China’s reform,” *Shijie jingji daobao*, 13 March 1989, p. 11, in FBIS–CHI–89–056, 24 March 1989, pp. 40–43.

38. Contrasting the “monistic authority” of traditional systems and neo-authoritarianism to the coexistence of “plural authorities,” Hu Shoujin, in “Authority: monistic or pluralistic?—what is our choice?” *Shijie jingji daobao*, 20 March 1989, p. 13 in FBIS–CHI–89–058, 28 March 1989, pp. 34–35, argued that checks and balances between plural authorities would compel officials to obey laws, constrain the power of each system, force authorities to restrain their own powers, prevent power abuses, and guarantee citizens’ rights and freedoms. Hu remarked that “People still remember that today’s old authority was also a new authority on which many people pin[ned] their hopes when it was established.”

39. Ironically, opponents of neo-authoritarianism often attributed the advocacy of the doctrine to fear among intellectuals of another Cultural Revolution and their simultaneous discouragement with the depth of the present regime’s reform efforts. See the interviews with Wang Yizhou, a researcher at the Research Institute of Marxism–Leninism, and Jiang Xianxing, a “young theoretician” of the Institute of Sociology, in Zhang Weiguo, FBIS–CHI–89–059, p. 41.

the four cardinal principles,⁴⁰ could create the middle class needed for a market economy.⁴¹

Within two months of its initiation, the debate over neo-authoritarianism had become heated. Wu Jiayang commented that his opponents had so failed to understand his theory that it was not possible for him to enter into a civil discourse with them. He decried the “hysterical” call for principles that characterized criticisms of neo-authoritarianism and responded that China needed “operational measures” to avoid the “ideological defects” that had given rise to the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.⁴² The debate thus became blurred. Neo-authoritarians paid respect to democracy and “democrats” partly agreed with the basis of neo-authoritarian analysis. For example, Guo Suijian argued that neo-authoritarianism was “totally groundless” because China’s problems were not caused by a lack of authority,⁴³ but concurred with the neo-authoritarians that the economic order lacked macroscopic regulation, was chaotic and abused by overlapping political and economic power. He also agreed that the key solution was the reform of property rights and that there was a need to build “elite politics.” He nevertheless maintained that the autocratic political regimes that had existed in early modern western societies were irrelevant to China, because western autocracy had been built upon capitalism and democratic traditions. The experiences of other East Asian and Latin American regimes were also inapplicable to China because authoritarian regimes in those regions, based on capitalism, had produced a middle class that could compel the neo-authoritarian regime to transform itself into a democracy. If a neo-authoritarian regime assumed power in China—a country without a democratic tradition, but with a traditional economic structure—Guo felt that the result would be a “feudal patriarchal autocratic system,” a closed economy, and “mediocre” politics. Citing Max Weber, Guo predicted that mediocrity and bureaucracy would permeate a neo-authoritarian regime because of the current absence of charismatic leadership, while reform would be suffocated by politics subordinated to the will of one leader.⁴⁴

By mid-March the debate was covered in the leading intellectual

40. These are the principles of upholding the rule of the Party, the people’s democratic dictatorship, Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought and the socialist road. In practice, the four principles reduce to the first principle.

41. See also Deng Ziqiang, FBIS–CHI–89–074, p. 27 for a summary of Xiao’s views.

42. Zhang Weiguo, FBIS–CHI–89–059, 29 March 1989, p. 42.

43. Guo Suijian, “On the error zone of ‘neo-authoritarianism,’” *Gongren ribao*, 17 March 1989, p. 3 in FBIS–CHI–89–059, 29 March 1989, pp. 42–44.

44. See also the views of Yuan Zhimin, a Renda philosophy Ph.D., who argued that both the advocates and opponents of neo-authoritarianism share a goal of establishing “a broad social democracy” in China, a goal which implies political pluralism and a market economy. Yuan concurred with the neo-authoritarians that power had to centralize in the hands of an “elite,” but pointed out that the training of this elite had not yet been adequately considered by the neo-authoritarians. *Ta kung pao*, 18 April 1989, p. 2, in FBIS–CHI–89–074, 19 April 1989, p. 28.

newspaper, *Guangming ribao*.⁴⁵ It was noted that neo-authoritarians maintained that neo-authoritarianism is superior to parliamentary democracy as a system for promoting social progress in developing nations even though democracy is a more advanced type of regime. Developing nations largely lack the conditions for promoting democracy, while neo-authoritarianism could supply these through centralized power. Zhang Bingjiu defined the doctrine as involving a leader with a modern ideology and control over social power and contended that it is more feasible to have strong leaders who would press forcefully for modernization than to implement full democracy immediately. He considered the top priority to be dualization, i.e. “a free enterprise system economically and a centralist system politically.”⁴⁶

Wu Jiexiang reiterated his definition of neo-authoritarianism as a universal transitional stage from traditional to modern society. The old authority declines, but before power falls wholly into the hands of “the ordinary people,” it is intercepted by the “intermediate social stratum” created by old authority. At this stage, both freedom and authority are lacking. A new authority must arise to pull down the old structure and shift the expanded power away from the intermediate stratum, to ensure the development of both individual freedom and centralized power, with social stability maintained. The new authority would guarantee greater individual freedom, but this freedom would still be limited. Four pressures, however, could continue to push forward modernization: democratic public opinion, an economically independent middle class, a “progressive tide” in state finance, and pressure from the outside world. These are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for guaranteeing that the new authority does not degenerate into a traditional autocracy.

In contrast to Wu’s universal neo-authoritarianism, Xiao Gongqin asserted that new authority represented a special political stage through which Third World countries pass during early modernization. It is a regime established by a strongman with a “modern ideology” who seeks the mainstream market world economy, relies on a “colossal bureaucratic system and military might to rule from the top down,” identifies with traditional values, and is open to western science, technology and culture. Because China lacks a middle class, one of the prime conditions for implementing neo-authoritarianism does not exist, but the doctrine remains an ideal of value to China in choosing a model for modernization. Xiao argued that neo-authoritarianism would provide the “visible hand” that would in turn create the “invisible hand” of an independent middle class in a full market economy. It thus may lead to a smooth transition to democracy or it may regress to a backward and conservative traditionalism.

45. Liu Jun, “A brief introduction to the debate on ‘neo-authoritarianism,’” 17 March 1989, p. 3, in FBIS-CHI-89-065, 6 April 1989, pp. 30-32.

46. See also Deng Ziqiang, FBIS-CHI-89-074, p. 27 for a summary of Zhang’s views.

Although it remains a double-edged sword, it is nevertheless “a necessary scourge” for Third World countries.⁴⁷

The Debate Peaks

The discussion of neo-authoritarianism in prominent newspapers was read by top-ranking Chinese leaders. According to a report carried by a Hong Kong radio station, both Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaoping were aware and approved of the neo-authoritarian thesis. On 6 March 1989 Zhao purportedly told Deng that

there is a theory about neo-authoritarianism in foreign countries, and domestic theoretical circles are now discussing this theory. The main point of this theory is that there should be a certain stage in the modernization process of a backward country wherein the driving force should come from strongman politics with authority and western-style democracy should not be adopted.

Deng Xiaoping then reportedly stated: “This is also my idea.” However, Deng had reservations about the term neo-authoritarianism, and said that the specific words for this notion could be reconsidered.⁴⁸

The discourse among intellectuals over neo-authoritarianism reached a peak on 3 April 1989 with a four-hour debate between “neo-authoritarians” and “democrats” at Renda, which coincided with the opening of the Second Session of the Seventh National People’s Congress, China’s CCP-controlled legislature.⁴⁹ It was presided over by Xia Tao, president of the Postgraduate College of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and was attended by 2,000 students and intellectuals, who alternately cheered and jeered the participants.⁵⁰ Both sides agreed that the trend in China was toward democracy, but there was controversy over the presence or absence of democracy’s prerequisites, i.e. a market economy, plural interest groups, and a democratic political culture.

Among the neo-authoritarians making presentations were Wu Jiexiang, Yang Baikui, director of the Division of Public Administration Research of the Political Science Institute of the Chinese

47. The 17 March 1989 *Guangming ribao* article also summarized the opinions of the opponents of neo-authoritarianism already discussed above, including Wang Haocheng, Rong Jian, Wang Yizhou, Huang Wansheng, Yu Haocheng and Zhou Wenzhang. See also Xiao Gongqin and Zhu Wei, “A painful dilemma: a dialogue on the theory of ‘neo-authoritarianism,’” *Wenhui bao*, 17 January 1989, p. 4; Huang Wansheng, “A dialogue on the critiques of new authoritarianism,” *Wenhui bao*, 22 February 1989, translated in *CSA*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 1990–91), pp. 69–93; Wang Yizhou, “Why we cannot agree with the new authoritarianism,” in Liu Jin and Li Lun, *The New Authoritarianism*, pp. 188–195, translated in *CSA*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Summer 1991), pp. 56–66.

48. *Zhongguo tongxun she*, 7 April 1989 in FBIS–CHI–89–066, p. 15.

49. The *Xin wan bao* correspondent erroneously identified the National People’s Congress then in session as the Fourth NPC. It was in fact the Seventh, the Fourth having occurred in 1975.

50. Wen Po, FBIS–CHI–89–065, 6 April 1989, pp. 29–30.

Academy of Social Sciences,⁵¹ Zhang Bingwen, a Beida Ph.D., and Ding Ningning, an economist of the Development Research Department under the State Council. These speakers cited the Four Small Dragons to argue that the promotion of democracy at present would cause chaos, but that democracy could be gradually introduced if “people of authority” had sufficient power, while political and intellectual elites should create the pre-conditions for democracy by realizing political and economic duality. They suggested the projects most favoured by Wu Jiexiang and, presumably, by his mentor, Zhao Ziyang—shareholding and individual property ownership—as key economic reforms that would facilitate the neo-authoritarian enterprise. The “democrats” replied that neo-authoritarianism “despises human rights and civil liberties” and would lead to despotism. Economic liberalization must be accompanied and reinforced by political democratization.

Shortly after the debate at Renda, Wu Jiexiang replied to critics by arguing that democracy must be conditioned on a significant improvement in the market mechanism.⁵² Where there is an imperfect market, transaction costs associated with democratic participation rise to an excessive level because people seek political privileges in place of economic rights. The expansion of political participation under non-market conditions leads not to the separation of politics from the economy, but to an increased capacity for political participants to take shares of the economy by political means. The high transaction costs associated with a politicized non-market economy can only be lessened through centralism. As a market is established, it defines and diversifies individual economic interests and risks which are mirrored in a diversity of political interests. The contract system of a market economy is reflected politically by the strengthening of official responsibility through “contract politics” between the electorate and politicians, which in turn reduces public decision-making to a minimum and diminishes the number of people who seek political rights. These “two reductions” can lower the transaction costs associated with democratic political bodies, compared to those of “traditional” non-market systems.

The development of a market will also separate politics from the economy. The separation of these “two powers” will lay the foundation for a “separation of three powers,” thereby creating a system of checks and balances. The installation of a tripartite system will prevent the centralization of power from turning into autocracy

51. Yang Baikui was arrested after the June 1989 crackdown and released with 210 other detainees on 10 May 1990. WuDunn, *NYT*, 11 May 1990, p. A7. See also Yang Baikui, “Democracy and authority in the course of political development,” in Liu Jin and Li Lun, *The New Authoritarianism*, pp. 91–102, translated in *CSA*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring 1991), pp. 67–80.

52. Wu Jiexiang, “Commenting again on neo-authoritarianism—pushing democratization forward through the market,” *Shijie jingji daobao*, 10 April 1989, p. 12 in FBIS—CHI—89—074, 19 April 1989, pp. 24–26. See also Wu Jiexiang, “An outline for studying the new authoritarianism,” in Liu Jin and Li Lun, *The New Authoritarianism*, pp. 47–53, translated in *CSA*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring 1991), pp. 16–23.

and militate against local separatist regimes. A developed market will allow mutually beneficial relationships in which people free themselves from “dogmatism” and “improve their sense of coexistence and mutual accommodation.” The market will stabilize economic life for manufacturers and consumers, serve as a brake on radical politics and the disruption of society, and create a middle-class majority whose existence will prevent the subordination of the minority to the majority, deprivations of private property, and clashes between democratic principles and policies for economic growth.

Wu maintained that a democratic mechanism provides no guarantees of a democratic outcome; Hitler, after all, came to power via elections. A healthy market is a pre-condition of democratic politics, however, even if it risks creating economic inequality that threatens civil rights. The political conditions for implementing a market system thus become the primary objects for study. The separation of politics from the economy is both one of the most important of these pre-conditions and a result of initiating a market economy. General elections are a step forward only if the elected head of state has the power to separate politics from the economy, which is not guaranteed: he might give way to the interests of voters and social groups and so render himself powerless to prevent “the evasion of the market” and “the carving up of the market.” The former involves consumers looking for low market prices or free commodities and labour, a feature of China’s “unitary” or “manor economy.” The latter occurs in a “dual” or “territorial economy,” in which government departments stake out portions of the market.

To prevent these blockages, Wu urged a “protracted war” against the government to force it to allow competition by producers who do not have the power to carve up the market. Rights that obstruct market operations should be monetized and converted into circulating commodities. This method of transforming the traditional political structure will create government corruption, but it is still the best option as no country has succeeded in the process through the establishment of a parliamentary democratic regime. Those that have tried have ended in a military dictatorship or in political and economic confusion, because a parliamentary democracy cannot exist without the market or the influence of the old political structure.

There are two choices for elected heads of states in developing states. One is to be very weak and to allow all political forces (local interest groups and trade unions) to evade and carve up the market; the other is to be a hard-liner who is free from the control of any forces and is ready to abolish general elections for the effective introduction of the market system. The former may lead the country into confusion and disaster, whereas the latter may create a new authority. In this sense a new authority can avoid detours and speedily bring about democratization through the introduction of the market system.

Wu responded to the frequent query of how neo-authoritarianism would avoid reversion to traditional authority by arguing that

historically neo-authoritarianism emerged during short-term democratic movements, withstood pressure from these movements, eventually introduced a market system and implemented democracy on a trial basis. He quoted Woodrow Wilson's statement that "The constitution is not the source but the expression of our freedom"; in other words, freedom (i.e. private property) was a necessary condition for the creation of a constitutional political system. In China, neo-authoritarianism should be accompanied by pressure from "regular democratic movements," which should operate not in the streets but through the NPC and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). To implement democracy in these bodies, Wu proposed facilitating discussion by reducing the number of deputies and members. The responsibility of deputies and members should be enhanced by selecting them from people who meet age and political requirements, instead of treating legislative posts as sinecures for the superannuated. To improve policy appraisal and democratic consultation and reduce the need for unanimity, "activities" for Party members should be implemented and the open voicing of public opinion should be encouraged.

Proprietary, financial and social pressures could counter any tendency to revert to the old authoritarianism. The way the Tudor monarchy took power from the barons and gave it "to a free land" is a model based on financial pressure. If, for example, a Chinese enterprise dependent upon political connections is less productive than one run by an independent proprietor, the government should take notice and act accordingly. Wu concluded that the international trend of democratization and economic liberalization made the chances of neo-authoritarianism reverting to the old authority less than they would be under a system of political diversity. In modern Chinese history, political diversification prior to the introduction of a market system had generally produced only confusion, underground politics and warlord separatism.⁵³

Another defence of neo-authoritarianism appeared simultaneously in an article by Yan Jirong. Inaccurately quoting the definition of politics set out by the American David Easton, Yan stated that politics is "the authoritarian distribution of values."⁵⁴ Modern politics involve the distribution of property and power by the market and by political parties and elections. Political authority is therefore based on economic freedom and democracy. Yan saw no contradiction between democracy and authority: authority was needed to overcome the absence of order; centralization could counteract localism and the unified domestic market. He argued that "enlightened monarchs" and "the politics of the virtuous and competent"

53. Wu's views are also summarized in Deng Ziqiang, FBIS-CHI-89-074, p. 27.

54. Yan Jirong, "On the relationship between democracy and authority," *Jingjixue zhoubao*, 9 April 1989, p. 5, in FBIS-CHI-89-085, 4 May 1989, pp. 46-47. The definition propounded by Easton is that politics is "the authoritative distribution of values."

would be one step away from rule by the corrupt and unenlightened. Yan believed that both in democratic and non-democratic politics, the people craved rule by “one or a few enlightened political elites.” It was moreover unlikely that a strongman could, in the 1980s, advance modernization by other than democratic means. A democracy run by elites would thus be a system that complied with the wishes of the majority of people. A new authority based on opposition to hegemonism and privileges would be an “arbitration authority” that treated all people alike. It would expand the rational basis of authority and prevent a reversion to old authority. A democratically-orientated new authority would be a management system whose posts and policy-making would be open to all who wished to participate. To achieve this system, it would be better to seek economic freedom from government control before seeking democracy, i.e. popular supervision of the government. Structural reforms were the key to claiming this expanded personal freedom.

While Wu and Yan defended neo-authoritarianism, Zhang Xiaogang argued that some developing countries with authoritarian regimes had failed to support the “new productive forces.”⁵⁵ For example, the government of the Philippines had ignored all social stratification and monopolized economic opportunities, requiring society to restart development through democratic means, although this had been only partially successful. Zhang concluded that unless the new authority actively sided with the “new productive forces,” it would be merely an extension of the old authority in which society sacrificed its civil rights without gaining development opportunities. To judge whether a regime represents the new productive forces, Zhang outlined four factors: whether the regime, first, promotes contract civilization by legalizing commercial relations or orders production through administrative fiat and mobilization; secondly, establishes markets based on non-political factors or discriminates against non-governmental entities; thirdly, permits an independent judiciary, at least regarding economic matters; and finally, defines the legalities of relations between the central and local governments, between the government and enterprises, and between families and enterprises. These factors could be measured objectively and quantitatively, but official ideology, particularly as regards non-governmental economic forces, could also serve as a criterion of judgment. Zhang agreed that transaction costs are higher where the government lacks authority, but argued that a “contract civilization” and entrepreneurship could exist under a non-authoritarian regime.

The defences of neo-authoritarianism in April 1989 did not pass without replies from opponents. Chen Ziming argued that neo-authoritarianism reflected historical determinism.⁵⁶ Democracy was

55. Zhang Xiaogang, “Can the ‘new authority’ represent new productive forces?” *Shijie jingji daobao*, 17 April 1989, p. 15, in FBIS-CHI-89-081, 28 April 1989, pp. 26–27.

56. Chen Ziming, “Shortcomings in the structure of the neo-authoritarianism theory,” *Jiangjixue zhoubao*, 30 April 1989, p. 7, in FBIS-CHI-89-095, pp. 83–86.

seen by neo-authoritarians as an ideal condition that only appears with a high standard of living and experienced officials. Chen contended that this leaves out moral inspiration and the centripetal force of democracy in the reconstruction of the political culture and also neglects the function of democracy in social mobilization and integration. He agreed that democracy is the result of a developed market, but maintained that consideration of democracy solely as an inevitable end result failed to take account of it as an immediate need. The lack of democracy in China reflected this attitude, one that the “cream of the intellectuals” had held for several decades. Wu Xianqing thought that the “totalitarian system” so hindered dualization that even a strongman would be ineffective without the support of the bureaucracy.⁵⁷ If a strongman’s actions were damaging to the bureaucracy, the latter would simply “remove their present Buddha from their temple and install a new Buddha.” Autocratic theory thus can only shackle freedom, for once installed, a “totalitarian” regime does not bestow rights and freedoms. These must be won by the people through long-term economic and political struggle.

The last word in the debate came from Wu Jiexiang, in an article published just after the Tiananmen incident of 4 June 1989.⁵⁸ Wu stated that there are three “base camps” from which to advance neo-authoritarianism, the first being the doctrine of individual ownership. This has three foundation stones: a four-step “crisis of resources” or macro-economic historical theory, in which the centre of critical changes is the property rights system; the juggling of social costs, a theory of micro-economic history in which the causes of the transformation of property rights are found in political costs, “restrained costs,” production costs and trade costs; and an ownership theory of economic growth that seeks causes for the development of property rights in the realization of “primitive impulses” in human nature. The second “base camp” is the “philosophical doctrine of dealing with concrete matters relating to facts,” a theory based on “the operating traditions of positivism and especially the practical traditions of Marxism” that corrects the handling of the relationship of the three philosophical categories of truth, belief and practicality. The third is neo-authoritarianism itself, on which a polemic had just begun. Neo-authoritarianism is not about ultimate concerns, but about the path to choose in order to realize them. Those who are roused to moral indignation by it (particularly novelists, essayists, artists and poets) accept only ultimate concerns.

57. Wu Xianqing, “Can ‘authority’ be an ally of freedom,” *Shijie jingji daobao*, 1 May 1989, p. 14, in FBIS-CHI-89-100, 25 May 1989, pp. 46-47.

58. Wu Jiexiang, “Neo-authoritarianism: the debate has still truly not begun,” *Zhonguo qingnian*, No. 6, 9 June 1989, pp. 10-11, in JPRS-CAR-89-101, 5 October 1989, pp. 9-10. The article, however, was almost certainly written well before the student movement peaked. Wu Jiexiang’s article “The new authoritarianism: an express train toward democracy by building markets” appeared in Lui Jin and Li Lun, *The New Authoritarianism*, which was published in May 1989. It is translated in *CSA*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 1990), pp. 36-45.

Wu maintained that neo-authoritarianism represents marginalism and gradualism. Contemporary politics in China had disintegrated with the end of the doctrine of totalitarianism, while a lack of authority and freedom persisted. Neo-authoritarianism proposes a separation of the four layers that link the economy, society and culture under the command of political power. Each layer should have an independent life, with the state maintaining its centralized power in order to promote the market and stability. When they are separated, each layer will develop its own freedom, political authority will be reformed, and the stage of citizen participation will be attained. If, however, centralized power were immediately relinquished there would be no increase in economic independence and freedom, but only decentralization and splits on the local and departmental levels. Neo-authoritarianism seeks to readjust reform in order to make the transition from political omnipotence to democracy. While he was aware of “the scars left by the old Stalinist authoritarianism in the minds of the Chinese people, especially the intellectuals,” Wu concluded that neo-authoritarianism should not be left at the debating stage.

Despite this note of assurance from the progenitor of the doctrine, the public debate on neo-authoritarianism came to an end with the repression of the 1989 student movement. A number of factors, however, suggest that the neo-authoritarian idea may yet play an important role in Chinese politics. Among these is the similarity of the Chinese academic debate to earlier analyses of authoritarianism by western scholars, the way that those involved in the Chinese debate saw the relationship between politics and economic development in the Four Small Dragons, and the attempted creation of a strong Soviet presidency that could serve as a model for a future neo-authoritarian ascendancy in China.

Neo-authoritarianism as a Regime-Type

In his study of late Francoist Spain, Juan Linz argues that authoritarian systems are a distinct regime-type with limited pluralism, an eclectic “mentality” in place of an ideology, rule by a “maximum leader” or small group, and the “privatization” of political life, in opposition to political mobilization.⁵⁹ Michael Sahlin, in a work on Gowon’s Nigerian regime of the early 1970s, contrasts “old” authoritarian regimes based on traditions and myths of the past, and “new” ones that depoliticize and demobilize through nationalism and development.⁶⁰ He distinguishes between “protective” and “promotional” neo-authoritarianism. *Protective* regimes involve military intervention to protect the status quo from radical challenges from below, low legitimacy, harsh repression and a

59. Juan Linz, “An authoritarian regime: Spain,” in E. Allardt-Rokkan and S. Rokkan (eds.), *Mass Politics: Studies in Political Sociology* (New York: 1970), p. 255.

60. Michael Sahlin. *Neo-authoritarianism and the Problem of Legitimacy: A General Study and a Nigerian Example* (Stockholm: Raben & Sjogren, 1977), p. 34.

dependency on external actors. Late Franco Spain and early Pinochet Chile are examples of old and new protective states. *Promotional* regimes foster change by replacing the oligarchy with “modernizing” elites. They enjoy high legitimacy and view uncontained politics as potential chaos and developmental stagnation, but restrict repression in order to mobilize economically, while de-mobilizing politically. Nationalism and political stability based on a strong, centralized “modernizing” state, are the key components of promotionalism. Gowon’s Nigeria practised a new, promotional authoritarianism. Sahlin conceives that an “old authoritarian” regime can transform itself into a new authoritarian state through factional conflict within the ruling group. Proponents of neo-authoritarianism in China sought a new, promotional authoritarianism precisely through a factional triumph by leaders supporting radical reform over CCP “hard-liners.”

Sahlin also found that two positions developed among western scholars in the 1960s and 1970s concerning the viability of neo-authoritarian regimes. A group typified by Maurice Duverger⁶¹ viewed promotional and protective authoritarianism as indistinguishable because authoritarian regimes are by definition repressive and status quo-orientated. The other group, exemplified by Gunnar Myrdal, regarded neo-authoritarianism as the best that a developing country might hope for during an interim period.⁶² The debate between “democrats” and neo-authoritarians among Chinese intellectuals in 1989 mirrored these earlier disputes between western scholars.

What separates past western and recent Chinese analysis is methodology, not ideology. Western scholars based their discussions on empirical studies, while most Chinese debaters did not undertake systematic case studies. They made relatively few references to countries other than the Four Small Dragons and no detailed examinations of regimes or state–society relations in foreign countries.⁶³ This lack of empirical investigation caused both proponents and opponents to adopt a roseate view of the politics and economies of the Four Small Dragons that misinformed the debate; yet, while this view was distorted, it made the participants positive about the experience and results in the Dragons, and thus encouraged a continued interest by Chinese intellectuals in the viability of neo-authoritarianism.

61. Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (London: Methuen & Co., 1964 (3rd ed.)), p. 426.

62. Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama*, Vol. II (New York: Pantheon, 1968), p. 784. See also Sahlin, *Neo-authoritarianism and the Problem of Legitimacy*, ch. 1.

63. Articles by Cao Yuanzheng, then deputy chief of the Division of Comparative Economic Studies of the Chinese Economic System Reform Research Institute and a supporter of neo-authoritarianism, are an exception. He examined the Brazilian and South Korean cases in “The model of the market economy under a ‘hard government’” and the Chilean and Turkish cases in *Zhongguo: fazhan yu gaige*, No. 10 (1987), translated in *CSA*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring 1991), pp. 24–38.

The Four Small Dragons and the Neo-authoritarian Hypothesis

Both proponents and opponents of neo-authoritarianism hinged arguments on their understanding of state and economy in Asia's Four Small Dragons. Proponents argued that a necessary relationship existed between the substantial economic progress made by the Dragons in recent years and the authoritarian rule that each experienced prior to and during periods of rapid development. Opponents countered that neo-authoritarians misunderstood the roles of the state and economy in the Dragons by underestimating the economic freedom promoted by authoritarian regimes in comparison with China.

The view of proponents of neo-authoritarianism on the relationship between authoritarianism and prosperity in the Dragons is accurate to the extent of Chen Yizi's remark that no nation has entered the ranks of newly industrializing countries in the post Second World War era through a "soft government" and "soft economy." Their limitation of the list of pre-conditions for growth to "tough government," however, ignores the degree, quality and timing of industrialization. Examples used by Chen, such as Brazil and Turkey, show that a combination of authoritarianism and a "free market" economy is no guarantee of sustained growth.⁶⁴ Moreover, the Dragons themselves are experiencing problems stemming from their evolution as low-wage economies dependent on foreign investment, technologies and/or markets for high growth rates.

However the view of opponents of neo-authoritarianism that the Dragons' prosperity resulted from promotion of a neo-classical economy by authoritarian regimes is even wider of the mark.⁶⁵ Except for Hong Kong, the Dragons' regimes have been very intrusive indeed. In keeping with the neo-authoritarian hypothesis, it has been the desire of the state to accelerate the economy that largely

64. By the late 1980s, Brazil suffered from the world's worst inflation and foreign indebtedness and had the most maldistributed income of any major country. See Carlos Geraldo Langoni, *The Development Crisis: Blueprint for Change* (San Francisco: International Center for Economic Growth, 1987), p. 40; Werner Baer, *The Brazilian Economy: Growth and Development* (New York: Praeger, 1989 (3rd ed.)), pp. 124–25 and ch. 7; Samuel A. Morley, *Labor Markets and Inequitable Growth: the Case of Authoritarian Capitalism in Brazil* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ch. 3. Turkish growth and living standards also fell dramatically from the late 1970s to mid-1980s. See Caglar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development* (London: Verso, 1987), pp. 192, 225; Jeffrey D. Lewis and Shujiro Urata, *Turkey: Recent Economic Performance and Medium-Term Prospects, 1978–1990* (World Bank Staff Working Papers No. 602) (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1983), pp. 13–17; George Kopits, *Structural Reform, Stabilization, and Growth in Turkey*, (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 1987), pp. 20–23.

65. For a journalistic but useful introduction to the politics and economy of the Dragons, see Mark London and Brian Kelly, *Four Little Dragons* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 1989.

accounts for the authoritarian character of the regimes of Korea,⁶⁶ Taiwan⁶⁷ and Singapore.⁶⁸ Even in Hong Kong, which is regarded as the most *laissez-faire* economy in the world, the degree of government intervention is greater than is generally understood.⁶⁹

The conception that both sides of the debate had of the economies of the Dragons as perpetual prosperity machines is also partly belied by recent slow-downs in growth and, in some cases, high trade deficits and “brain drain.”⁷⁰ Both sides also shared a conception of the Dragons as countries in which prosperity would impel a “democratic transition,” with the middle class as democracy’s principal agent. These propositions have recently been tested and found wanting with respect to the Dragons. Indeed, the Dragon

66. On the historic and continuing role of the state, and particularly its military component, in the Korean economy, see David I. Steinberg, *The Republic of Korea: Economic Transformation and Social Change* (Boulder: Westview Press), 1989, p. 142; Jon Huer, *Marching Orders: The Role of the Military in South Korea’s “Economic Miracle,” 1961–1971* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989); Donald MacDonald, *The Koreans: Contemporary Politics and Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), pp. 191–192; Richard Nuedde-Neurath, “State intervention and export-oriented development in South Korea,” in Gordon White (ed.), *Developmental States in East Asia* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1988), pp. 68–102; Edward S. Mason et al., *The Economic and Social Modernization of the Republic of Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 294 and ch. 8; Richard Steers, Yoo Keun Shin and Gerardo Ungson, *The Chaebols (Jae Bol): Korea’s New Industrial Might* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), pp. 29–32; Rhee Yang Soo, B. Ross-Larsen and G. Pursell, *Korea’s Competitive Edge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1984), pp. 29–35. On the subordination of Korean labour and increasing income disparities, see Franklin Deyo, *Beneath the Miracle: Labor in the New Asian Industrialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 135–140, 143–45; Hak-kyu Sohn, *Authoritarianism and Opposition in South Korea* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 131–142.

67. See Alice Amsden, “Taiwan’s economic history: a case of etatism and a challenge to dependency theory,” *Modern China*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 341–380 (July 1979); Thomas Gold, *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1986), pp. 97–111 et passim; K. T. Li, *The Evolution of Policy Behind Taiwan’s Developmental Success* (New Haven: Yale, 1988), ch. 5; Robert Wade, “State intervention in ‘outward-looking’ development: neoclassical theory and Taiwan practice,” in White, *Developmental States*, pp. 45–48, 57–58; Ramon Myers, “The economic development of the Republic of China on Taiwan, 1965–1981,” in Lawrence Lau (ed.), *Models of Development: A Comparative Study of Economic Growth in South Korea and Taiwan* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1986), p. 43; John F. Copper, *Taiwan: Nation-State or Province?* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), p. 81; Robert Sutter, *Taiwan: Entering the 21st Century* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), p. 34.

68. Mizra, *Multinationals*, pp. 49–56; Frederic Deyo, *Dependent Development and Industrial Order: An Asian Case Study* (New York: Praeger, 1981).

69. Edward K. Y. Chen, “The economic setting,” in David Lethbridge (ed.), *The Business Environment in Hong Kong* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984 (2nd ed.)), pp. 36–43; Deyo, *Beneath the Miracle*, p. 27.

70. “The drenching of Roh Tae Woo,” *The Economist*, Vol. 315, No. 7654 (12 May 1990), pp. 33–34; James Sterngold, “Korea boils as economy cools,” *NYT*, 11 May 1990, p. C1; “Economic-political unrest erupts in violent protests in South Korea,” *NYT*, 10 May 1990, p. A1; Nicholas D. Kristof, “Hong Kong’s desperation over ’97 can be measured in foreign passports,” *NYT*, 16 May 1990, p. A7; Garry Rodan, *The Political Economy of Singapore’s Industrialization: National State and International Capital* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1989), pp. 191, 197–98; David Sanger, “Singapore aim: high-tech future,” *NYT*, 15 May 1990, p. C1.

most admired by the debaters, Singapore, becomes *more* authoritarian as development proceeds.⁷¹

The misplaced assumptions of both sides perhaps reflect misinformation about these states acquired through officially-inspired writings produced in the Dragons themselves. They may also reflect wishful thinking on the part of two groups of intellectuals who are committed to privatizing the Chinese economy and – sooner or later – introducing a competitive political system. In any case, because both groups admire the Dragons' capitalist economies and the goals of individual and societal prosperity that have driven them, their common sympathies underline the degree to which they had divorced themselves from Marxism and came to resemble western “conservatives” and “liberals” in their political approaches. They also show a significant advantage retained by neo-authoritarians in debates concerning China's political future: the Dragons are admired by Chinese higher intellectuals *and* their regimes are authoritarian. To the superficially informed, the Dragons present “living proof” of the efficacy of authoritarianism, a “fact” that will not be ignored by Chinese elites seeking political stability and prosperity.

The Soviet Strong Presidency: Neo-authoritarianism Applied?

In the mid to late 1980s, Chinese intellectuals avidly followed the rapid political changes in the USSR under Gorbachev. The remarks of Qin Xiaoying, quoted above, on the hope of neo-authoritarians for a “tough government/soft economy” under a “Chinese Gorbachev” will be recalled. While in early 1989 Gorbachev had not created a “tough government,” by the end of 1990 the ideal of Chinese neo-authoritarians had come closer to being realized – albeit in the USSR – through the creation of the “strong presidency” and the elimination of a competing premiership.

The record of the debate about the strong Soviet presidency evokes the previous year's dispute in China on neo-authoritarianism. Proponents included not only those closest to Gorbachev, but also the so-called “conservatives” in the CPSU leadership and among People's Deputies. Partial opposition was based in the Inter-regional Deputies Group, the latter being a parallel of the “democratic” opposition to neo-authoritarianism in China. Proponents of a strong presidency, like the Chinese neo-authoritarians, argued that great executive power would not revert to “old authority,” but was designed to abolish its vestiges. Soviet opponents, like the Chinese who objected to neo-authoritarianism, were concerned with the potential for abuses leading to a reversion to “old authority.” The debates in both countries occurred in the context of economic decline, including stagnant production, budget

71. Tun-jen Cheng, “Is the dog barking? The middle class and democratic movements in the East Asian NICs,” *International Studies Notes*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Winter 1990), pp. 10–16, 40; Rodan, *The Political Economy of Singapore's Industrialization*, pp. 201–204.

and foreign debt crises, high unemployment, rampant inflation and social tensions.⁷²

In spring 1990, the Soviet parliament acted to assuage an officially-termed “shortage of executive power.” Advocates of the presidential legislation, such as the leading marketeer economist Nikolai Shmelykov, claimed it would provide Gorbachev with the “prestige” needed to implement a market economy. Opponents were led by Boris Yeltsin, soon to become president of the Russian Republic, and Yuri Afanaseyev, the anti-Stalin historian. Afanseyev agreed that a strong presidency was needed, but feared that presidential power could grow into “totalitarian power.” He decried the reduced parliamentary power implied by the legislation, and objected to the vague concept of state security as the basis of the president’s emergency powers.⁷³

In accepting the post of president, Gorbachev pledged to use his new powers to speed the country towards a “full-blooded” free market. Contention continued between the Gorbachev and Yeltsin forces over how rapidly to move to an economy based on private property, but both sides agreed that as a minimum a rapid effort should be made to create an unemployment benefits system, sell off land, introduce competition by breaking up state monopolies, and create a commercial banking system, joint stock and consulting firms and a stock exchange. In November 1990, Gorbachev won additional power through the approval of a plan to bring all government administration under his direct control and substitute a presidential cabinet for the Council of Ministers, and its leader, the premier.⁷⁴

72. On China’s troubles in the late 1980s, see John P. Burns, “China’s governance: political reform in a turbulent environment,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 119 (September 1989), p. 489; Lowell Dittmer, “China in 1989: the crisis of incomplete reform,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 37; Anita Chan, “The challenge to the social fabric,” in Goodman and Segal (eds.), *China at Forty: Midlife Crisis?* p. 73; Joseph Fewsmith, “Agricultural crisis in China,” *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 37, No. 6 (November–December 1988), pp. 78–83. On the Soviet Union’s troubles, see Marshall Goldman, “Gorbachev the economist,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Spring 1990), pp. 29, 35–39; Leonard Silk, “Soviet crisis worse, economists declare,” *NYT*, 15 March 1990, p. C16; “Behind the failure of Soviet reforms,” *NYT*, 2 March 1990, p. C2.

73. See V. Dolganov and A. Stepovoi, “The question of a presidency is on the agenda,” *Izvestia*, 27 February 1990, pp. 1–2, in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press (CDSP)*, Vol. 42, No. 9 (4 April 1990), pp. 1–2; G. Ovcharenko and Yu. Ursov, “The country needs a president,” *Pravda*, 28 February 1990, p. 1, in *CDSP*, Vol. 42, No. 9 (4 April 1990), pp. 3–4; A. I. Lukyanov, “On making changes in and additions to the USSR Constitution (Basic Law) and establishing the post of president of the USSR,” *Pravda and Izvestia*, 13 March 1990, pp. 1–2, in *CDSP*, Vol. 42, No. 11 (18 April 1990), pp. 7–8; “On establishing the post of president of the USSR and making changes in and additions to the USSR Constitution (Basic Law),” *Pravda and Izvestia*, 16 March 1990, pp. 1, 2 in *CDSP*, Vol. 42, No. 14 (9 May 1990); V. Dolganov and A. Stepovoi, “The deputies are for an extraordinary congress,” *Izvestia*, 28 February 1990, pp. 1–2, in *CDSP*, Vol. 42, No. 9 (4 April 1990), pp. 4–5; “The extraordinary Third Congress of USSR People’s Deputies,” (verbatim report), *Izvestia*, 13 March 1990, pp. 3–4, in *CDSP*, Vol. 42, No. 11 (18 April 1990), pp. 1–3.

74. Bill Keller, “How Gorbachev rejected plan to ‘shock treat’ the economy,” *NYT*, 14 May 1990, p. 1; Celestine Bohlen, “Soviets unveil limited plan toward ‘Regulated Market’,” *NYT*, 23 May 1990, p. A4; Bill Keller, “Gorbachev urges a fractious party to pull together,” *NYT*, 3 July 1990, p. A1; Bill Keller, “Soviets adopt emergency plan to center power in Gorbachev and leaders of republics,” *NYT*, 18 November 1990, p. A1; Elisabeth Rubinfeln, “Gorbachev, under pressure proposes radical shake-up,” *Wall Street Journal*, 19 November 1990, p. A11.

The establishment of a stronger Soviet executive, accompanied by plans for the marketization and privatization of the Soviet economy, thus closely parallels the idea advanced by the Chinese neo-authoritarians. The “strong presidency” in fact did not become an institution capable of exercising “new authority.” The precipitous abandonment of the pre-existing economic structure and the disintegration of the Soviet “federal” structure in response to rising nationalist movements prevent a “new authority” from taking hold. Neo-authoritarians can argue, however, that instead of representing a practical failure of the neo-authoritarian idea, recent Soviet experience merely represents a transfer of authority to a new strongman, the Russian president Boris Yeltsin, who has accumulated more power, based on greater prestige, than Gorbachev ever enjoyed and is exercising that power to achieve precisely the ends sought by China’s neo-authoritarians.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The debate on neo-authoritarianism demonstrates how completely a significant section of China’s higher intellectuals have repudiated Marxism. The dispute’s ideological base was compatible with that underlying the ideas of liberal and conservative scholars in the west on the proper political path to Third World development. What is perhaps most striking about the positions staked out by “democrats” and “neo-authoritarians” in the debate is not their differences, but their agreement that the proper goal is a political system that secures “freedom,” i.e. a privatized economy, and “democracy,” i.e. inter-elite political competition. The debate is thus significant for understanding how far the politics of the contemporary intelligentsia – and their political patrons – had evolved by the time of the 1989 upheaval in China. This is all the more important because most of these intellectuals are in their thirties or forties and should survive not only the senior “hard-liners,” but also their protégés.

While a significant section of the higher intellectuals seek a regime that has repudiated socialism, there are also reasons to conclude that among these the neo-authoritarians may be in the best position to shape the state after the passing of China’s octogenarian leaders. Stability and prosperity have been the twin goals of Chinese leaders in the post-Mao era. Despite differing misconceptions about the Dragons, both sides of the debate displayed an admiration for the social peace and economic development achieved in those countries. The relative prosperity, stability and the longevity of the Dragons’

75. On Yeltsin’s emerging powers, see Michael Dobbs, “Green light for Yeltsin plan,” *International Herald Tribune*, 1–2 November 1991, p. 1. The Polish president Lech Walesa has also sought emergency powers and is quoted as stating that Poland may need “tough, strong, revolutionary methods...with fear...to reorient the economy.” Barry Newman, “Poland lurches down the road to capitalism,” *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 20–21 September 1991, p. 1.

regimes continue to provide an argument favouring those inclined toward a neo-authoritarian solution in China. A “liberalized” regime along the lines of the Dragons may well satisfy Chinese intellectuals who favoured the “democratic” side of the neo-authoritarianism debate, just as “liberalization” has proved sufficient to mollify the middle classes elsewhere in East Asia. The interventionist role of the state in the Dragons will certainly be attractive to the huge bureaucratic apparatus in China. The Four Small Dragons model thus presents a powerful stimulus for a new push to create a Chinese neo-authoritarianism.

The likelihood of a neo-authoritarian regime will further increase if Yeltsin succeeds in using his considerable powers to transform the Russian economy and restore social peace. In the past it was more acceptable politically for China’s elites to look to Eastern Europe for charting a future political course.⁷⁶ The adoption of a model from the former USSR might make acceptance of neo-authoritarianism easier among the top leaders of the CCP, even if the model is premised on abolishing the remaining features of socialism.

Underlying all other factors that may promote a revival of the neo-authoritarian project is the continuing economic and political crisis in China. The Chinese economy recently emerged from several years of recession. The causes of that crisis, including the central government’s inability to raise sufficient revenue, its subsidization of state-owned industry, and low-growth agricultural production are present still, and threaten renewed economic stagnation. The intelligentsia remains disaffected despite the passage of time and the release of prisoners from the 1989 movement. A renewed interest in a neo-authoritarianism that is effectively anti-socialist and promises the stability necessary to achieve the prosperity found in the Four Small Dragons, should increasingly appeal to Chinese political elites during the transition to the post-Deng era.

76. See also Richard Kraus, “Eastern Europe as an alternative west for China’s middle class,” *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Winter 1989), pp. 323–336.