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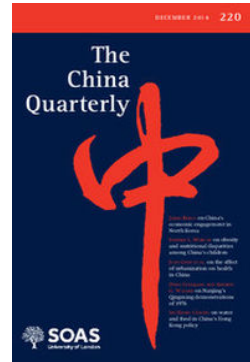
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# Foreshocks: Local Origins of Nanjing's Qingming Demonstrations of 1976<sup>\*</sup>

Dong Guoqiang<sup>†</sup> and Andrew G. Walder<sup>‡</sup>

## Abstract

The Nanjing Incident of late March 1976 was a precursor of, and according to some analysts a trigger for, the more famous Tiananmen Square demonstrations of 4–5 April. The two protests have widely been interpreted as spontaneous outpourings of dissent from Cultural Revolution radicalism, expressed through mourning for the recently deceased premier, Zhou Enlai. A closer look at the background to these demonstrations in Nanjing reveals that the protests there occurred in the midst of, and in response to, a vigorous public offensive by former leaders of rebel factions to overthrow civilian cadres for reversing Cultural Revolution policies. The outpouring of respect for Zhou – and criticism of Politburo radicals – mobilized enormous numbers of ordinary citizens onto the city streets, far larger numbers than the rebel leaders were able to muster. This demonstrated the disappearance of the popular support rebel leaders had briefly enjoyed a decade before. While the Nanjing protests were unanticipated by either the rebel leaders or the Party officials they sought to overthrow, they were only the latest in a series of local political confrontations.

**Keywords:** Cultural Revolution; Tiananmen Incident; Nanjing Incident; Chinese protest

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The massive Tiananmen Square protests of 4–5 April 1976 have long been understood as a popular backlash against the policies of the Cultural Revolution, political sentiments reflected at the elite level by the arrest of the Gang of Four later that year. The pivotal Beijing event was preceded by prolonged and equally large street demonstrations in Nanjing during the previous week. In some accounts, Nanjing is portrayed as an inspiration for the subsequent Tiananmen events. The demonstrations in both cities featured outpourings of respect for the recently deceased Premier Zhou Enlai 周恩来, and scarcely veiled expressions of contempt for Jiang Qing 江青 and other Politburo members associated with the

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Cultural Revolution. Although the immediate result was the purge of Deng Xiaoping 邓小平, these events are seen as a crucial turning point in the history of the People's Republic.

The literature on both demonstrations has focused on narrative descriptions of the events themselves. Chinese publications portray the Tiananmen demonstrations as a spontaneous outpouring of respect for the moderate policies associated with Zhou and Deng and of popular revulsion against ultra-leftism.<sup>1</sup> English language publications have also traced the roots of the Beijing protests to work unit mobilization and the social background of participants, or view them as a response to an escalating criticism campaign against educational and economic policies associated with Deng Xiaoping.<sup>2</sup> The literature on the Nanjing events has a similar profile.<sup>3</sup> In both cases, the narrative accounts emphasize the immediate political context as reflected in national-level political trends.

We offer a novel interpretation of the Nanjing events that roots them firmly in local political conflicts that roiled Jiangsu from the end of 1974 to early 1976. Nanjing's Qingming 清明 protests were less a spontaneous expression of popular sentiment than a reaction to a vigorous political campaign by local rebel leaders. When Nanjing's citizens took to the streets to protest perceived attacks on the legacy of Premier Zhou, they were reacting to a politically charged local atmosphere created by former rebel leaders who were openly trying to undermine veteran cadres.

## The Political Impact of the 1975 Rectification Campaign

The “criticize Lin Biao and Confucius” campaign (*pi Lin pi Kong yundong* 批林批孔运动) of 1974 touched off civil disorders throughout the country, as former rebels mobilized to head off the restoration of former officials to leading posts. The campaign was curtailed at the end of 1974 when Mao became concerned about the disorders and their economic impact.<sup>4</sup> Deng Xiaoping, promoted to the post of CCP vice-chairman and vice-premier in early 1975, was charged with quelling these disturbances and putting the economy back on track. With Mao's support, he initiated a nationwide rectification campaign during the spring and summer of 1975.<sup>5</sup> Two elements of this campaign generated a political backlash in Jiangsu province that fed directly into the background for the Nanjing Incident. The first was the rectification of the railway system, and the second was the rectification of leading Party bodies at the regional and local level. “Rectification” forcefully targeted stubborn factional conflicts that disrupted both government and economy.

1 For example, Yan 1979; Wu, De 2004; Cheng 2005; Shi, Yun, and Li 2008; and Wu, Zhong 2012.

2 Heilmann 1993, 1996; Teiwes and Sun 2004, 2007, 466–475; Zweig 1978, Garside 1981.

3 Louie and Louie 1981; Wu, Xueqing 2002a; Wang, Xueliang 2009.

4 Dong and Walder 2012a.

5 MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 379–395; Teiwes and Sun 2007, 146–178, 189–200.

The national railway system was badly disrupted during 1974, as resurgent rebels used the campaign to attack veteran cadres who had recently returned to their former posts. Two of the most badly affected railway hubs were in Jiangsu: Nanjing and Xuzhou 徐州. In early March 1975, Central Document No. 9, “Decision on strengthening railway work,” ordered a work team to Xuzhou. It restored order with an iron hand, and its subsequent report was transmitted nationwide as a model. Veteran cadres were encouraged to dare to struggle against “hornets’ nests” of factionalism in their units and deal firmly with factional leaders who created disorders.<sup>6</sup> The subsequent campaign in Zhejiang and Henan dealt harshly with former rebel leaders who had led factional resistance, removing many of them from their jobs, arresting some, and sending others to the countryside for re-education.<sup>7</sup> During September and October of that year, Deng Xiaoping gave a series of speeches that praised these efforts, calling for the rapid restoration of old cadres to their posts and for the demotion of inexperienced youth who had been prematurely promoted. He told veteran cadres to ignore accusations that they were restoring the capitalist road.<sup>8</sup>

Mao initially supported Deng’s efforts in this and other policy areas, but backtracked towards the end of 1975. Concerned that Deng was undermining his most cherished policies, Mao elevated Hua Guofeng 华国锋 to the post of acting premier in February 1976 and authorized a criticism campaign against Deng’s “restorationism” and “reversal of verdicts.”<sup>9</sup> The death of Zhou Enlai, the obvious demotion of Deng Xiaoping, and the harsh campaign to denounce “restorationism,” all occurring in mid-January 1976, marked a shift in China’s political atmosphere.

Rebel leaders in the provinces who suffered during Deng’s rectification campaign saw this as an opportunity to make a comeback. Rebel leaders mobilized to attack veteran cadres for the same errors committed by Deng Xiaoping. In provincial capitals like Hangzhou and Wuhan, where Deng’s rectification campaign had suppressed factional strife in 1975, rebel leaders attempted to stage yet another comeback, trying to unseat veteran cadres by putting up wall posters and holding demonstrations at government offices.<sup>10</sup> The national criticisms against Deng for “reversing verdicts” on the Cultural Revolution also sparked a renewed offensive by former rebels in Nanjing, Suzhou 苏州, Xuzhou, and elsewhere in Jiangsu. The rebel campaign in Jiangsu was vigorous and public, and had considerable support among prominent radical figures in the province and their military supporters. In Nanjing, unlike Wuhan and Hangzhou, this rebel offensive sparked an unusually large and broadly based popular protest, one that served as an inspiration for later events in Tiananmen Square.

6 Cheng 2004; Wu, Xueqing 2002b.

7 Cheng 2004; Forster 1990, 198–219; Teiwes and Sun 2007, 274–282; Wang, Ying 2001.

8 Deng 1975.

9 MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 400–412; Teiwes and Sun 2007, 382–461.

10 See Forster 1990, 235–242; Wang, Shaoguang 1995, 258–265.

## The Unresolved Grievances of Cultural Revolution Rebels

Prior to the 1974 “criticize Lin Biao and Confucius” campaign, military officers monopolized political power in Jiangsu. General Xu Shiyou 许世友 had headed Jiangsu’s Revolutionary Committee from its formation in March 1968. Afterwards, he moved decisively against rebel leaders in leadership positions, launching an all-out assault against them in the 1970–1972 campaign against “May 16 Elements.”<sup>11</sup> “Mass representatives” were systematically removed from revolutionary committees, and many of the former rebel leaders were imprisoned. As Party committees were restored after 1970, real authority gravitated to the military officials and veteran cadres. Shortly before the onset of the “criticize Lin Biao and Confucius” campaign in early 1974, Xu Shiyou was transferred to the Guangzhou Military Region. This provided local civilian officials with an opportunity to expand their authority and edge military officers out of leading posts in Nanjing and other cities and counties in the province. They successfully deployed the “criticize Lin Biao and Confucius” campaign to portray the local military as opponents of the Cultural Revolution who had attacked rebel leaders in previous years. Xu Shiyou’s subordinates were demoted from their top provincial positions and took a back seat to the civilian cadres, led by Peng Chong 彭冲 and Xu Jiatus 许家屯, who began systematically to replace military officers with veteran cadres on revolutionary committees throughout the province.<sup>12</sup>

However, Peng and Xu did not restore rehabilitated rebel leaders to significant posts. They pointedly bypassed several prominent rebel leaders who already held Party posts, surviving the military’s purges to play an active role in the 1974 campaign against military domination. Among the most prominent were Hua Linsen 华林森, a Suzhou rebel leader who was appointed to the provincial Party committee when it was re-established in 1970 and who became a member of the Central Committee in 1973; Zeng Bangyuan 曾邦元, a Nanjing rebel leader appointed to the provincial Party committee in 1970; and Shi Zhaoxiang 施兆祥, who held posts in the organization department and Youth League leadership of the provincial Party committee from 1971 to 1973.<sup>13</sup> Peng Chong and Xu Jiatus claimed that the issue of “May 16 elements” was “complicated,” that across the board rehabilitation would be unwise, and that demands for restoration to earlier posts and financial compensation were unreasonable.<sup>14</sup> Even worse, many of the same rebel leaders who expected reappointment to leading posts were targeted for factionalism during the rectification campaign of 1975. They felt increasingly frustrated and betrayed.

The fate of once-powerful rebel leaders was sorry indeed. Wen Fenglai 文凤来, a young instructor from Nanjing University, was the most famous leader of one

11 Dong and Walder 2012b.

12 Dong and Walder 2012a.

13 Shi Zhaoxiang’s handwritten notebooks from this period are one of the sources that we draw upon and will be cited below; he copied internal documents verbatim and kept notes on internal Party meetings.

14 Shi, Zhaoxiang 1974, entries for November 19–26.

of Nanjing's rebel factions.<sup>15</sup> Initially appointed to the standing committee of the provincial revolutionary committee in 1968, he fell victim to the "May 16" investigations and suffered a mental breakdown under harsh interrogation and physical torture. He was released from prison in 1974 but was so shattered by the experience that he was never again politically active.<sup>16</sup> Zhang Jianshan 张建山, a Nanjing University student and one of the top factional leaders in the city, was originally appointed to the provincial revolutionary committee but was dropped after being assigned to a remote north-east China forestry team after graduating. He was hauled back during the "May 16" investigation and broke down mentally under interrogation. During his breakdown he uttered an insult about Chairman Mao and was given a provisional death sentence as an "active counter-revolutionary." He was eventually released to his family's care on medical grounds in 1975 and drowned in a river shortly afterwards. Zhu Kaidi 朱开地, a rebel worker and major factional leader, was appointed to the standing committee of the Jiangsu revolutionary committee in 1968, but also suffered a mental breakdown during the "May 16" interrogations and was never again able to resume political activity after his release from prison.<sup>17</sup>

Those who survived physically and mentally found themselves politically marginalized. Zeng Bangyuan, a Nanjing University instructor and one of the top rebel leaders in the city, was appointed to the provincial revolutionary committee's standing committee in 1968. When the provincial Party committee was restored in 1970, he became a member of that body, only to lose the position during the "May 16" investigations. After he was finally rehabilitated in 1974, he was offered a lowly post as a county Party secretary in northern Jiangsu, but refused the appointment as insulting. He remained in Nanjing, his status uncertain. Tang Shengzhi 唐省智, a factory cadre and rebel leader who was appointed to the provincial revolutionary committee's standing committee in 1968, fell in the "May 16" purges, and after rehabilitation in 1974 became a factory manager in northern Jiangsu. Lu Xuezhi 鲁学智, a worker rebel from Nanjing's Yangtze River Machinery Works, was appointed to the Nanjing municipal revolutionary committee in 1968. He lost that post during the "May 16" investigations, and after his rehabilitation in early 1975, he was appointed to his factory's revolutionary committee. Ge Zhonglong 葛忠龙, a prominent student rebel from Nanjing University, was appointed to his school's revolutionary committee in 1968, but by the end of the year was transferred to a military farm in northern Jiangsu for re-education along with all the other rebel leaders. While in the countryside, he joined the Party and became a soldier, but while stationed in Beijing he was hauled back to Nanjing for the "May 16" investigations, and was isolated in a "study class" for three years. After his rehabilitation in 1974, he became a

15 See Dong and Walder 2010.

16 He never recovered: Wen committed suicide during in the summer of 1976.

17 These biographical details are from interviews with former rebel leaders: Ge Zhonglong, Nanjing, 16 July 2008; Geng Changxian, Yangzhou, 30 November 2009; and Lu Xuezhi, Nanjing, 5 May 2010.

commune Party secretary in northern Jiangsu. Geng Changxian 耿昌贤, a Nanjing University student rebel leader, was appointed to the Nanjing revolutionary committee in 1968, but lost that position when he was sent to a military farm in western Anhui for re-education at the end of the year. In 1970, he was returned to Nanjing for the “May 16” investigations. After his rehabilitation in 1974, he was assigned a job as an instructor in a factory school in Yangzhou 扬州.<sup>18</sup>

Rehabilitation, in short, almost never involved restoration to the prominent positions that rebel leaders had previously held, and the jobs offered to them were frequently lowly posts in the poorest rural districts. Many others remained in Nanjing after their rehabilitation and release from confinement into early 1975, without a formal decision about their new jobs. Among these were two one-time members of the provincial revolutionary committee’s standing committee, Xu Songlin 徐松林 and Zhou Xilu 周锡禄, both of whom were Party members before the Cultural Revolution; Xu Hao 徐浩, a onetime member of the Nanjing revolutionary committee’s standing committee; Xu Jinxing 须锦兴, who had been on the provincial revolutionary committee; and Zhou Wenchang 周文昌 and Tang Damin 汤大民, both of whom had been on the Nanjing revolutionary committee. These individuals all became active during the 1975 effort to obtain redress for the positions lost in the military’s campaigns. At the lower levels in the city hierarchy, former rebels in grassroots work units were similarly left hanging after obtaining rehabilitation for their alleged participation in an imaginary “May 16 elements” conspiracy.<sup>19</sup>

These former rebels found unlikely political allies: military officers in the provincial government who had been their primary tormentors several years before. Military officers were pushed aside by veteran civilian cadres during 1974. Many of them remained in government posts but in distinctly subordinate roles. Wu Dasheng 吴大胜, the acting head of the provincial revolutionary committee and Party committee and head of the provincial military district in late 1973, was demoted to a second-ranking Jiangsu Party secretary and vice-head of the Jiangsu revolutionary committee. His new portfolio – head of provincial sports activities – signalled his loss of authority. His top military deputy, Jiang Ke 蒋科, kept his positions as vice-head of the provincial revolutionary committee and member of the standing committee of the provincial Party committee, but was put in charge of nothing.<sup>20</sup> Another prospective military ally was Yang Guangli 杨广立, political commissar of the 60th army corps and vice-head of the provincial revolutionary committee. He had a history of uneasy relations with Xu Shiyou, and had cultivated ties with Shanghai radicals and Jiang Qing

18 Interviews with former rebel leaders: Zeng Bangyuan, Nanjing, 2 December 2007; Lu Xuezhi; Ge Zhonglong; and Geng Changxian.

19 Interviews in Nanjing on 24 March and 4 April 2008 with former rebels from, respectively, a shipbuilding plant and a radio factory.

20 Interview with Shi Zhaoxiang, Suzhou, 18 April 2010; *Xinhua ribao* 1977d.

as early as in 1971. He cooperated with Peng Chong and Xu Jiatun in their attacks on Wu Dasheng and Jiang Ke in 1974 and retained important provincial posts as vice-head of both the revolutionary and Party committees. Because he had ties to radical leaders in Shanghai and in Beijing, local rebels saw him as an important ally in their efforts to regain their former positions.<sup>21</sup>

## Dissent in Suzhou

After the 1967 power seizure in Suzhou, one faction of the rebel movement sided with local military authorities and actively cooperated with their efforts to impose order. Owing to their ties to the local military, they were not targeted during the “May 16” investigations. Their leader was Hua Linsen, a model worker and Party member who was head of his factory’s design office in 1966. Hua had led the early rebellion against the municipal authorities and had emerged as one of the city’s top rebel leaders.<sup>22</sup> When the Suzhou revolutionary committee was formed, he became vice-head, serving under the local military officer. One of Hua’s most important allies was Shi Zhaoxiang, who was vice-head of the city’s Youth League before the Cultural Revolution. Shi led a rebel faction in the city government organs and was put on the standing committee of Suzhou’s revolutionary committee in 1968.<sup>23</sup> Hua and his allies profited from their cooperation with the local military. In 1969, Hua was a delegate to the Ninth Party Congress, where he was elected as an alternate member of the Central Committee. In 1970, he became vice-Party secretary of Suzhou. In 1973, he attended the Tenth Party Congress and was elected to the Central Committee. Shi Zhaoxiang was also elevated to posts on the provincial revolutionary and Party committees, where he served as vice-head of the organization department and as Youth League secretary.<sup>24</sup>

While the Suzhou rebels survived owing to their cordial relationship with the local military, they were clearly subordinate to the military officers and were routinely assigned less important portfolios, such as trade unions, Youth League, women’s federation, public health, and education. Hua Linsen, after all, was a member of the Central Committee, but was subordinate to an army officer in Suzhou. Therefore, when Peng Chong and Xu Jiatun moved against the military overlords in 1974, they supported their efforts. As a result, when the military officer in charge of Suzhou was demoted, Hua Linsen effectively became the leading authority in the city, although he was not formally appointed first Party secretary.<sup>25</sup>

21 Interview with Shi Zhaoxiang; Li, Lunchu 1977.

22 Interviews with Shi Zhaoxiang, Wang Yongzhu, Li Yongwu, Sun Yao, Yang Jun (all former rebel leaders), Suzhou, 16 December 2012.

23 Suzhou City Annals 1995, 365; Hua Linsen’s web-biography, <http://baike.baidu.com/view/499368.htm>. Accessed 22 December 2013. Interviews with Shi Zhaoxiang, Suzhou, 18 April and 15 July 2010.

24 Interviews with Shi Zhaoxiang, 18 April and 15 July 2010.

25 Ibid.



Hua Linsen understood that his interests were different to those of the veteran cadres in Nanjing, so he strengthened his ties with powerful rebels in nearby Shanghai. Hua had collaborated with Wang Hongwen 王洪文 and Zhang Chunqiao 张春桥 early in the Cultural Revolution, and after these figures had moved to Beijing they instructed their Shanghai associates, Ma Tianshui 马天水 and Wang Xiuzhen 王秀珍, to keep in close contact with him.<sup>26</sup> In Suzhou, Hua conducted a crash campaign to confer Party membership on former rebel leaders and place them in leading positions in work units and government agencies.<sup>27</sup> In doing so, he openly favoured members of his own faction and largely bypassed rebel leaders from the faction that had opposed him in 1967 and 1968.

In July 1975, several of Hua's factional opponents wrote letters of complaint about his manoeuvres in Suzhou to the Jiangsu provincial Party committee and to the Party centre in Beijing. Deng Xiaoping became aware of the complaints, which signalled that factional strife was still prevalent in Suzhou. This kind of haggling over leadership positions was precisely the kind of thing that Deng wanted his rectification campaign to curtail. The provincial Party committee dispatched a work team to Suzhou in August of that year and ordered Hua to halt his mass recruitment of Party members and the promotion of rebel allies. In early November, Nanjing appointed three veteran cadres to head Suzhou's Party committee and began transferring other veteran cadres to run its administrative departments. Hua was suspended from his post, and the former rebels were told that they were not yet qualified for leadership positions.<sup>28</sup>

Hua and his allies fought back. He went to Shanghai at the end of 1975 for "medical treatment" and lobbied the Shanghai rebels for help. His followers in Suzhou conducted a campaign to undermine the new leaders appointed by Nanjing, and the city became paralyzed by factional conflict. When Hua learned that a criticism campaign targeting Deng Xiaoping was about to begin, he wrote to Wang Hongwen in Beijing to air his complaints.<sup>29</sup> The radical figures in the national leadership took note, and "the Suzhou question" became a major political issue in both Nanjing and Beijing.

## Conflicts in Xuzhou

The northern Jiangsu industrial and railway centre of Xuzhou suffered especially severe and prolonged factionalism in the late 1960s. The first two revolutionary committees formed in the region collapsed. Finally, in August 1969, the commander of the 68th army corps established a revolutionary committee that created a fragile sense of order in the region. Xuzhou's subsequent persecution

26 Suzhou Municipal Trade Union 1977, 9; *Xinhua ribao* 1977a; Su 1977.

27 Suzhou Municipal Trade Union 1977, 6–10.

28 Jiangsu sheng gongpin fuqing da pipan zu 1977, 1–4, 14–16.

29 Ibid.

campaigns primarily targeted the leaders of only one of the two major mass factions: 22,800 were targeted in the “cleansing of the class ranks,” and 6,700 fell victim to the “May 16” investigations.<sup>30</sup> The other faction had close ties with the military authorities and largely escaped the purges. In October 1973, after learning that veteran civilian cadres would soon be sent from Nanjing to take over Xuzhou, the military officers quickly moved large numbers of their favoured faction’s rebel leaders into Party and government posts.<sup>31</sup>

During 1974, when Nanjing’s civilian officials called for the rehabilitation of the victims of the “May 16” investigations, they inadvertently reignited Xuzhou’s long-simmering factional rivalries. When Xuzhou’s new Party secretary, following Nanjing’s lead, called for the rehabilitation of persecuted rebels, the leaders of the mass faction that had prospered under the military objected strongly to the rehabilitation of their erstwhile foes. Members of the oppressed faction began to demand rehabilitation, and accused their factional opponents of being complicit with the crimes of the military leadership. This led to street demonstrations and disrupted work in factories and communes. Aggrieved victims of the purges formed delegations to travel to Nanjing to lodge their complaints.<sup>32</sup> The newly appointed civilian leadership in Xuzhou was unable to control the situation, and the Xuzhou Party and government were paralyzed.

As a key railway hub and centre of coal production, Xuzhou became a major target for Deng Xiaoping’s 1975 rectification. In early March, a work team was sent there, headed by the minister of railways, Wan Li 万里, and Xu Jiatun. It ordered the rehabilitation of victims of the suppression campaigns and dealt harshly with the most militant of the rebel leaders, arresting and publicly sentencing several of the most prominent individuals.<sup>33</sup> They ordered the reorganization of leadership bodies and the removal of those who had strong factional ties. On 2 June 1975, the Party centre issued a document identifying the Xuzhou rectification campaign as a nationwide model.<sup>34</sup>

The campaign hit the Xuzhou faction that had prospered under the military, still occupying leading posts, especially hard. This group, led by the former rebel leader Kong Qingrong 孔庆荣, saw the criticism campaign against Deng Xiaoping as an opportunity to reverse their recent misfortunes. Kong had led one of Xuzhou’s major factions and had been vice-chairman of the 1969 revolutionary committee, and later, a member of the Party standing committee. In

30 Xuzhou City Annals 1994, 43–50; Xuzhou Party History 1999, 403.

31 Xuzhou Party History 1999, 422, 424.

32 Xuzhou Prefecture Delegation 1974a, 1974b, 1974c.

33 Xuzhou Party History 1999, 432; Wu, Xueqing 2002b; interview with Tian Houqiang, Xuzhou, 29 December 2012 (Tian Houqiang is an instructor at the Xuzhou Education Institute and a researcher on the local Cultural Revolution); interview with Zhang Xiaoyang, Xuzhou, 30 December 2012. Zhang Xiaoyang, a senior high school student in 1966, was Xuzhou’s most prominent Red Guard leader and led the faction that supported the military after the rebels split in 1967. He organized a number of demonstrations in 1974 and 1975, was arrested and imprisoned during the 1975 rectification campaign, and remained in prison until 1990.

34 Wu, Xueqing 2002b.

1973, he was a delegate to the Tenth Party Congress. Kong, like Hua Linsen in Suzhou, became a strident critic of the new civilian leadership in Nanjing. The two worked together to use the campaign against Deng to undermine Peng Chong and Xu Jiatun in Nanjing.<sup>35</sup>

## The Rebel Offensive in Nanjing

While spending time in a Shanghai hospital at the end of 1975, where he was sheltering from his political problems back in Suzhou, Hua Linsen was informed of Mao's recent criticisms of Deng Xiaoping by Wang Hongwen's secretary, who told him, "this campaign will resolve a few problems."<sup>36</sup> Hua informed his allies in Suzhou, who immediately went on the offensive against the veteran cadres recently assigned to lead their city. They argued that the new veteran cadres were "capitalist roaders" who should not be trusted to lead the campaign. They formed a petition delegation to travel to Nanjing to demand that provincial leaders intervene on their behalf in Suzhou, but they were rebuffed.<sup>37</sup> In early January 1976, Wang Xiuzhen, Shanghai's vice-Party secretary, met with Hua Linsen and told him that the Jiangsu leadership had committed serious errors.<sup>38</sup> Encouraged, Hua wrote directly to Wang Hongwen, denouncing Peng Chong and Xu Jiatun for pursuing a revisionist line on the cadre question and for purging the "new-born revolutionary forces." Wang Xiuzhen personally carried this letter to Beijing.<sup>39</sup>

Peng Chong and Xu Jiatun tried to emphasize that the situation in Jiangsu was "basically good" and that the Party must exercise firm leadership over the campaign, which must not degenerate into factional mobilization. Hua Linsen decided to take counter-measures.<sup>40</sup> Leading radicals in Beijing supported his position. At a Beijing Party conference on 2 March, Jiang Qing and Wang Hongwen, acting on Hua's recent letter of denunciation, took the Jiangsu leaders to task. Jiang asked Peng how he thought Jiangsu's problems could ever be exposed and corrected without Hua Linsen's participation in key meetings. Wang Hongwen told the Jiangsu officials that a lot of people were making accusations about their leadership, and that if these problems were not resolved, Jiangsu would fall into chaos.<sup>41</sup>

After returning to Jiangsu, the provincial leaders did as they were told and convened an enlarged meeting of the provincial Party standing committee that included Hua Linsen and Kong Qingrong, neither of whom would normally have attended. Peng Chong gave a keynote speech that called for the study

35 Xuzhou Municipal Trade Union 1977a, 1977b; and interview with Zeng Bangyuan, Nanjing, 25 February 2008.

36 Suzhou Municipal Trade Union 1977.

37 Hua 1976a.

38 Suzhou Municipal Trade Union 1977.

39 Hua 1976a.

40 Hua 1976b; interview with Shi Zhaoxiang, Suzhou, 18 April 2010.

41 Suzhou Municipal Trade Union 1977; *Xinhua ribao* 1977b; Liu et al. 1997, 163.

and criticism of Deng Xiaoping's errors and for resolutely carrying out Chairman Mao's instructions. But, he also issued a veiled warning to the rebel leaders: "young cadres should avoid committing new errors."<sup>42</sup> Hua Linsen responded that the provincial leadership had been deeply infected by revisionism and only made a pretence of opposing it.<sup>43</sup> Military officials in attendance voiced agreement. Yang Guangli, a military officer who served as vice-secretary of the provincial Party committee, said that during 1975, "criticize factionalism" was in fact "criticize the Cultural Revolution," and that "rectifying leadership" was in fact "persecuting rebels." Peng Chong and Xu Jiatun, he charged, had fully implemented a thoroughly revisionist line in Jiangsu and were now resisting the new campaign to oppose "restorationism."<sup>44</sup>

This meeting gave the dissidents from across Jiangsu an opportunity to coordinate their activities. Between sessions, Hua Linsen urged Kong Qingrong to revive his struggle in Xuzhou. Because Xuzhou had become a national model of rectification under Deng's leadership, Hua advised him to link the Xuzhou rectification to the nationwide campaign against Deng. Campaigns in Suzhou and Xuzhou, he argued, should be coordinated and support one another towards their common goal.<sup>45</sup>

Peng Chong and Xu Jiatun were aware of their exposure on the issue. On 8 March, Xu Jiatun met with Hua Linsen and offered to replace the Suzhou Party secretary with someone more acceptable. Hua refused, insisting that the Suzhou conflicts were a matter of political line, not simply a question of who was appointed to the top position. Peng then informed Hua that he would hand over the Suzhou problem to Beijing for resolution. Hua felt that the provincial leaders were shifting the decision to Beijing while trying to influence the centre in their favour. He withdrew angrily from the Party conference and returned to Shanghai.<sup>46</sup> On 11 March, he wrote a second letter of denunciation to Wang Hongwen, charging that the Jiangsu leaders were refusing to change.<sup>47</sup>

In March 1976, as rebel leaders were on the offensive in provincial Party meetings, their followers began to form new rebel organizations, write wall posters, and travel to link up with one another. The names of these new "fighting groups" recalled the style of mass organizations during the late 1960s. The charges of revisionism against Deng Xiaoping and the provincial authorities echoed the same charges made a decade before. Drawing on the familiar script of 1967 and 1968, they put up wall posters in public places and transcribed their texts onto mimeographed flysheets that were distributed in work units and the city streets.

On 31 March, the Nanjing Party committee issued a statement calling for an end to the spreading of gossip and rumours, and forbidding wall posters, linking

42 Shi Zhaoxiang notebooks, entry for 2 March 1976.

43 *Xinhua ribao* 1977c.

44 *Xinhua ribao* 1977d.

45 Suzhou Municipal Trade Union 1977; Xuzhou Municipal Trade Union 1977a.

46 Hua 1976b; interview with Shi Zhaoxiang, Suzhou, 18 April 2010.

47 Hua 1976b.

up with others, forming fighting groups, and disrupting classes and production.<sup>48</sup> The rebels completely ignored the decree. The highest-ranking military officers in the provincial leadership supported the mobilization and urged the leaders to form new battle groups and link up with other rebels.<sup>49</sup> Rebel leaders contacted Nanjing correspondents from the *People's Daily* to convey their complaints to Beijing.<sup>50</sup> The correspondents relayed the local rebels' charges, but they also reported on disturbing new developments on the streets of Nanjing that were completely unanticipated, and that ran directly counter to the aims of the mass mobilization against the Nanjing leadership.<sup>51</sup>

### Popular Counter-Mobilization: The Nanjing Incident

In the midst of this rebel offensive, a much different and much larger popular mobilization pushed Nanjing's politics in the opposite direction. It began with frustrated efforts at Nanjing University and other work units to hold memorial meetings in honour of Zhou Enlai. It escalated in response to articles published in Shanghai's *Wenhui bao* 文汇报 that appeared to link the criticism of Deng to the denigration of Zhou. By the end of March, massive street demonstrations over several days expressed open criticism of radical figures like Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao. Protesters from universities swarmed to the Nanjing railway station and pasted wall posters and slogans on trains headed to Beijing, an action that some accounts credit for helping to inspire the more celebrated April 5 protests in the nation's capital.<sup>52</sup>

In many Chinese cities, public memorials to Premier Zhou were reported in the days and weeks leading up to the Qingming festival, and were usually held in defiance of local bans on such activities. Large collections of memorial wreaths were prominently displayed in Xi'an, Zhengzhou, Luoyang 洛阳, Kaifeng 开封, Taiyuan, Wuhan and Hangzhou, and they frequently became sites for public assemblies and the posting or reading of statements critical of Politburo radicals.<sup>53</sup> In Hangzhou, wall posters attacked Ma Tianshui, Shanghai's Party secretary and a protégé of Politburo radicals. Party members from a steel mill placed a large commemorative wreath in memory of Zhou at the labour bureau on 1 April, atop a flagpole on the roof of the building, where it could be seen for several blocks. Other factories and work units in Hangzhou followed suit, as did individuals at Zhejiang University. Wall posters in the city declared, "whoever opposes Premier Zhou opposes revolution," and "be strictly on guard against Lin Biao-type bourgeois careerists and plotters seizing Party and state power." Excitement about these political expressions was centred around Hangzhou's

48 Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 213.

49 Huang 1977.

50 Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 209–212.

51 Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 211–214.

52 Wu, Xueqing 2002a; Wang, Xueliang 2009.

53 Forster 1986; Heilmann 1993; Yang 2002, 555.

main downtown department store, the gates of the university, and several major squares.<sup>54</sup>

Activities of this kind were especially widespread and public in Jiangsu, and they culminated in massive demonstrations in Nanjing on a scale matched only on Tiananmen Square. Efforts to memorialize Zhou and express opposition to officials who sponsored the rebel resurgence were reported in Nanjing, Suzhou, Xuzhou, Wuxi 无锡, Changzhou 常州, Huaiyin 淮阴, Funing 阜宁, and other cities and county seats.<sup>55</sup> The participants were not aligned with either of the rebel factions that had risen up during the Cultural Revolution, and were uninvolved in the factional conflicts of recent years. This is the primary reason why these events were so unanticipated. The leaders who emerged at Nanjing University were primarily “worker-peasant-soldier” students who had arrived in Nanjing from other regions only after the universities reopened in 1972. Faculty members, mindful of their persecution in past campaigns, did not take the lead, although most obviously sympathized with the demonstrators.<sup>56</sup> Factory workers too young to have participated in the conflicts of the late 1960s, but who chafed at intrusive political controls over their personal life and the lack of opportunity in the mid-1970s, were also drawn to these protests.<sup>57</sup>

The backgrounds of some of the individuals who helped spark the movement provide an indication of the movement’s origins. Li Xining 李西宁, the son of a military officer, was a junior high school student in Yangzhou in 1966, and was briefly a Red Guard. He was sent down to the countryside in 1968 and was shocked by village poverty, which made him reconsider his political views. After a stint as a factory worker, he attended Nanjing University and remained at the university after his 1975 graduation to become the Communist Youth League secretary of the mathematics department. He approved of Deng’s rectification campaign, sympathized with the veteran cadres, and opposed the rebel resurgence. He organized the largest of the protest demonstrations and pasted up a large banner denouncing “careerists and conspirators who were plotting to usurp the Party and seize power.”<sup>58</sup>

Li Liangyu 李良玉 was the son of a small town official in northern Jiangsu, and was in junior high school in 1966. His father was one of the first victims of the movement, which turned Li against the Cultural Revolution. His dissatisfaction grew after he was sent to the countryside where he was dismayed by the poverty and by rural officials’ abuse of power. He enrolled at Nanjing University’s history department in 1973. He was convinced that China needed

54 Forster 1986.

55 Sources cited below, also Yan and Gao 1996, 492.

56 Interview with Li Xining, Nanjing, 15 January 2007.

57 See, e.g., the memoir of the young worker who became active in the Nanjing protests, Zhang 2008.

58 Interview with Li Xining; and Li, Xining 1978. Li was arrested in April 1976, released in December, and fully rehabilitated in December 1978.

major changes and was strongly opposed to the resurgence of rebel forces. His class was one of the first to organize a memorial meeting for Zhou Enlai.<sup>59</sup>

Kang Yuyi 康育义 was a young instructor in Nanjing University's geology department in 1966. From a landlord family, he was rejected by all of the Red Guard organizations and was uninvolved in their battles. When the university was reopened in 1972, he felt relieved that the Cultural Revolution was finally over, but was alarmed by the resurgence of rebel forces. His research took him to remote regions of rural China where he observed abject poverty; he found the criticism of Deng Xiaoping for "emphasizing productive forces" to be absurd. During a large public demonstration in Xinjiekou 新街口 Square near the end of March, he fell into a conversation with someone and began to express his political views. Encouraged by bystanders, he was pressed to stand up and make a speech, attracting a large and enthusiastic audience.<sup>60</sup>

Politburo radicals were fully informed of the escalating counter-mobilization in Nanjing. Correspondents for the *People's Daily* filed regular reports, and rebel leaders like Hua Linsen, alarmed by these developments, sent messages to Beijing as well. On 30 March 1976, Wang Hongwen phoned the editor-in-chief of the *People's Daily* and complained that wall posters attacking Zhang Chunqiao were appearing in the streets of Nanjing while the city authorities claimed that there was nothing they could do about it. He ordered the paper's Nanjing correspondents to keep the dissident activists under surveillance, and encouraged rebel activists to oppose the movement with street actions and wall posters of their own.<sup>61</sup>

With Mao's approval, on 1 April, Wang Hongwen issued a directive to the Jiangsu provincial leadership on behalf of the Party centre. It condemned the protests as a political incident intended to "split the Party centre led by Chairman Mao." He called for the immediate removal of all banners and wall posters, investigation of "the plotters who have fomented this incident behind the scenes" and who are "fomenting disorder and sabotage," and he forbid the disruption of railway stations.<sup>62</sup> On 2 April, the Jiangsu leadership transmitted the centre's directive to Party organizations and mobilized cadres and workers to cover over the offending wall posters and slogans.<sup>63</sup>

Informed of the content of the directive, rebel leaders in Nanjing put up a series of wall posters denouncing the commemoration of Zhou Enlai and accused the provincial and municipal leadership of manipulating the protest demonstrations.<sup>64</sup> Zeng Bangyuan, the rebel leader who was still a member of the provincial revolutionary committee, put up a wall poster that praised the memory of

59 Interview with Li Liangyu, Nanjing, 25 February 2006; and Li, Liangyu 2003, 431–442.

60 Interview with Kang Yuyi, Nanjing, 10 May 2006. Kang was arrested in April 1976, released at the end of that year, and rehabilitated in 1978.

61 Zhu 1997, 172–73.

62 Central Committee, Chinese Communist Party 1976.

63 Wu, Xueqing 2002a, 21.

64 Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 215.



Premier Zhou but denounced Peng Chong and Xu Jiatun and other veteran officials for betraying Mao's proletarian revolutionary line.<sup>65</sup> On 3 April, a dozen or so former rebels who still held positions on the municipal revolutionary committee marched to the offices of the city government to demand the strict enforcement of the 1 April directive, the arrest of "counter-revolutionary activists" and a mass meeting to denounce "Nanjing's counter-revolutionary incident."<sup>66</sup>

These actions were quickly lost in the rising tide of protest against the rebel resurgence. Even larger protests broke out on 3 April in response to the dissemination of Beijing's condemnation. Protesters put up wall posters and chanted slogans that were even more confrontational and aggressive. Over 2,000 faculty and students from the Nanjing Industrial Institute demonstrated at a museum located in the downtown building where Zhou Enlai had lived during the 1946 peace negotiations with the Nationalist Nanjing government. An estimated 140,000 marched the same day to a park south of Nanjing to mourn Premier Zhou. Between 3 and 6 April, the crowd on the Nanjing streets swelled to an estimated 600,000.<sup>67</sup> These events peaked just as the parallel demonstrations in Beijing were underway on 5–6 April.

## Conclusion

The 1981 "Resolution on Party history" declared that the Cultural Revolution spanned the entire decade after 1966, and came to an end only with the arrest of the Gang of Four. This came as something of a surprise to Western scholars, who had researched the subject for more than a decade and who believed that the Cultural Revolution had ended with the imposition of military control in 1968. Some still reserve the term "Cultural Revolution" for the period of free mobilization by Red Guard and rebel forces from 1966 to 1968. The true spirit of the Cultural Revolution, in this view, was rebellion against authority, not the bureaucratic oppression and factional struggles that characterized the subsequent period.<sup>68</sup>

As more is learned about the regional conflicts of the 1970s, the sharp distinction between the first two years of mass conflict and the later years of the decade begins to blur.<sup>69</sup> Factional mobilization openly defiant of the Jiangsu leadership was prevalent well into 1976, representing protagonists whose political identities were formed in the conflicts of a decade before. Factional conflicts that had been forced underground during harsh military oppression from 1969 to 1972 were re-energized and reached a fevered pitch in early 1976. From this perspective, the designation of the Cultural Revolution as spanning an entire decade becomes less far-fetched.

65 Zeng 1976; interview with Zeng Bangyuan, Nanjing, 2 December 2007; Tao 1977.

66 Nanjing Archives Bureau 1985, 215–16.

67 Wu, Xueqing 2002a, 22.

68 See, e.g., Chan 1992; Unger 2007.

69 Publications on Hangzhou (Forster 1990) and Wuhan (Wang, Shaoguang 1995) were the first to document in great detail these local conflicts.



However, the Nanjing events of March–April 1976 illustrate a political landscape fundamentally different from that of a decade before. While rebel forces born in the struggles of 1967 and 1968 were on the offensive in early 1976, they were blindsided by a popular backlash that was even larger and much more powerful than the relatively meagre forces that they were able to muster. The rebels who mobilized in 1976 were a rump faction without a broad mass following. They represented the interests of former rebel leaders in the recovery of the official posts that they had been stripped of by military officials several years before. They were essentially an interest group engaged in intra-bureaucratic struggles, and lacked any broad constituency in the province. Their ability to present challenges to the Jiangsu leadership was dependent entirely on sponsorship by powerful radical officials in Beijing and Shanghai, and ultimately by Mao himself. They were little more than a fading echo of the previous decade's mass movement.

Their opponents, on the other hand, were broadly based and were able to mobilize large sectors of the urban population with virtually no elite sponsorship and with little organization or leadership. What is most striking about this account of the local origins of the Nanjing Incident is that it grew up in the midst of, and in direct opposition to, a vigorous campaign by former rebel leaders. Ordinary citizens were not taking to the streets simply to express growing public sentiment in support of policies associated with Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai. The Nanjing protests grew up in reaction to a very different mobilization that occurred at virtually the same time. What is even more remarkable is that the street demonstrations grew even larger in reaction to the initial attempts to suppress them. This was yet another indication that the Nanjing Incident, like the more famous Tiananmen events, signalled the beginning of a new era in Chinese politics. Popular protests changed the political landscape in ways that were unanticipated by either the civilian cadres or the resurgent rebels who were locked in their protracted bureaucratic rivalry.

**摘要:** 1976年3月末的“南京事件”，是4月4至5日更为著名的天安门抗议示威运动的先声——或者如一些分析人士所言，是那场著名运动的触媒。一种广为流传的解释是，这两起抗议示威行动表面看来是群众自发悼念不久前去世的周恩来总理，实际上却宣泄了人们对“文化大革命”激进路线的普遍不满。然而通过对南京抗议示威运动背景的进一步深入考察，我们不难发现这场抗议示威运动的发生，与前造反派头头们为复活“文化大革命”各项政策而公开抨击并试图打倒地方党政干部的斗争有关，是社会公众对上述斗争的一个反应。对周恩来的敬仰——以及对政治局内激进派的公愤——促使大量普通市民走上街头，其数量大大超过那些前造反派头头的追随者。这与十年前造反派头头获得广泛支持的情况形成鲜明反差。虽然南京的抗议示威活动出乎那些前造反派头头以及他们试图打倒的地方党政官员们的预料，其实这不过是当地一系列持续不断的政治对抗的最新发展。同时，这些抗议示威活动也对全国政治图景产生了决定性的影响。

**关键词:** 文化大革命；天安门事件；南京事件；中国人民的抗议行动

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