Research Note

The "Shekou Storm": Changes in the Mentality of Chinese Youth Prior to Tiananmen*

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In 1988, a year before the greatest urban mass protest in modern Chinese history, three major events took place in the cultural, ideological and theoretical realms. One was the broadcasting of the TV series *River Elegy* (*Heshang*) in June and the extensive discussions and disputes about it in July and August. The second was the controversy over the political theory of Neo-Authoritarianism, which started in the second half of 1988 and reached a peak in early 1989. The third event was the so-called Shekou Storm (*Shekou fengbo*) that began in February 1988 and lasted more than eight months. While *River Elegy* was the high tide of cultural reflection (*wenhua fansi*) which aimed at examining the cultural and historical roots of current socio-political problems, the Neo-Authoritarianism was a theoretical trend among some young social scientists and members of Communist Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang's think-tanks who were struggling to address pressing issues arising from the reform. The significance of these two events has been realized by many people studying the evolution of Chinese society in the 1980s and the background of the 1989 movement. In contrast, the Shekou Storm, which made an equivalent sensation throughout the country, has received much less attention.[1]

This article first presents a profile of the Shekou Storm, and then discusses its origins and implications. It looks at some of the social effects of the reform and opening to the world in the 1980s, especially new trends that occurred in the values of China's youth. It is argued that, when rapid economic reforms and moderate political relaxation engendered new opportunities for personal welfare and social mobility, many Chinese people, especially youths, became more independent and took more initiative, thus becoming increasingly alienated from the existing party-state. From this perspective, the 1989 movement was not just a cultural and political crisis reflecting the views of a small group of

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1. Stanley Rosen describes the event briefly in his "Political education and student response: some background factors behind the 1989 Beijing demonstrations," *Issues and Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 10 (October 1989), pp. 36–37, and "Youth and students in China before and after Tiananmen," in Winston L. Y. Yang and Marsha L. Wagner (eds.), *Tiananmen: China's Struggle for Democracy, Its Prelude, Development, Aftermath, and Impact* (College Park: University of Maryland, School of Law, 1990), pp. 211–12.

intellectuals; it was also an outcome of a decade-long transformation of ideology among a vast number of ordinary people at grassroots level. This transformation was to a surprising extent promoted by the press which published many articles in the grey zone challenging long-held official norms and spreading unorthodox ideas. All these trends were reflected in the Shekou Storm which constituted an important part of the social and cultural background of the Beijing spring of 1989.

A Profile of the Shekou Storm

The "Shekou incident."[2] Shekou is an industrial district of eight square kilometres in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ) of Guangdong province. In 1988, there were about 26,000 employees working in this district, 80 per cent of them young workers. On 13 January 1988, the local branch of the Communist Youth League (CYL) at Shekou held a symposium for about 70 Shekou youths featuring well-known "experts" on youth education from the Beijing-based China Research Centre for the Ideological Education of Youth. In past years these youth educators, Li Yangjie, Qu Xiao and Peng Qingyi, had been widely applauded for their talks on ideology and reports on youth.

At the start of the discussion, the person in charge asked the three experts to discuss their impressions of Shenzhen and Shekou. All of them spoke glowingly of the great changes which had taken place in this SEZ. Qu Xiao stated that "the Party's correct decisions on the policy of reform and opening to the outside world have been reflected in the efforts and successes of the leadership at various levels and of the vast population of Shenzhen. ... " "Shenzhen is not a kite with a broken string that has lost its way in the sky of the socialist motherland; rather, it is a magnificant eagle following the socialist navigation lane." In his speech Qu Xiao also mentioned that certain people had come to Shenzhen with the sole objective of tapping the wealth created by others, but they were only a small group of "gold diggers." He noted that the goals of these people were diametrically opposed to the spirit of "opening up, bringing up new things, and devoting oneself" advocated by the SEZ.

2. Sources for the following narration are from: "Shekou qingnian yu Qu Xiao, Li Yanjie tanshuai duihua: qingnian jiaoyujia yudao qingnianren tiaozhan" ("A frank dialogue between Shekou youths and Qu Xiao, Li Yanjie: youth educators met challenges from youths"), *Shekou tongxun bao* (*Shekou Bulletin News*), 1 February 1988, p. 1; Zeng Xianbin, " 'Shekou fenbo' dawenlu" ("Questions and answers on the 'Shekou incident' "), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), 6 August 1988, p. 1; Li Yanjie, Qu Xiao and Peng Qingyi, "Women daodi jiangle xie shenme" ("What did we really say"), *Renmin ribao*, 12 September 1988, p. 3; Ding Xing, " 'Taojinzhe' yinqi de Shekou fengbo" ("The Shekou Storm caused by 'gold diggers' "), *Rencai kaifa* (*The Development of Human Talents*), No. 10 (October 1988), pp. 16–18; Yang Fan, "Shekou fengbo de qianqian houhou" ("The Shekou Storm"), *Zhongguo qingnian* (*Chinese Youth*), No. 8 (August 1988), p. 5; Liu Binjie, "Shekou fengbo liuxia de sikao" ("Thoughts from the 'Shekou Storm' ") *Zhongguo qingnian bao* (*Chinese Youth Daily*), 16 September 1989, p. 3; and Qu Xiao, "Qu Xiao tan Shekou fengbo" ("Qu Xiao on the 'Shekou Storm' "), *Dangdai qingnian* (*Contemporary Youth*), No. 2 (February 1990), pp. 10–12. Some of the translations are from FBIS-China, 21 September 1988, pp. 53–57; and 28 September 1988, pp. 68–70.

At this point, he met challenges from his audience. One youth spoke up: "What is wrong with gold diggers? The American West depended on the activities of gold diggers and speculators for its development." Peng Qingyi replied, "America is America, how could it be spoken of in the same breath as the special zones of our socialist China? The surname of the United States is capitalism. We cannot make a wholesale transfer of the capitalist methods of developing the West to construct our special zones. We are taking the socialist road with Chinese characteristics." A heated debate on "gold diggers" ensued. One young man said: "We find newspaper propaganda disgusting. It says Shenzhen takes the socialist road with Chinese characteristics. What Chinese characteristics are there actually? The characteristics of Shenzhen are foreign characteristics! In Shenzhen, the architecture, streets, urban structure, and management of enterprises are just the same as those abroad." Another young worker said: "Why can't we make money in Shekou and Shenzhen? 'Gold diggers' came to Shekou with an explicit motivation of making money, but indirectly they have contributed to the building of Shekou. For example, individuals run restaurants with the aim of earning a livelihood or making money. However, they also turn over taxes to the state and bring convenience to the masses. What is so bad about 'gold diggers' like them?" One youth expert insisted that people should learn from the example of many individual operators who contributed a large portion of their incomes to the state to be spent on public welfare. But one youth replied: "I should enjoy the money that I earn with my own toil, why give it away?"

Qu Xiao also said that he was "greatly disheartened to see so many foreign motor vehicles running around our land." As a representative of the Chinese People's Congress, he had found that among the cars parked in front of the People's Hall in Beijing, only one had been made in China. He said, "this is an irregular situation." Later, one of the youths said: "Why should you be disheartened? Since we ourselves lack the know-how to manufacture motor vehicles, what is wrong with buying them from abroad?" Another youth viewed Qu Xiao's outlook as "superficial," because "lagging behind" has resulted from problems in "our system." He stated: "Under the current theme of opening up, absence of anything foreign is in itself a sign of lagging behind." When the educators talked about young people's duty to love the motherland, a young man replied that the love for the motherland should be in concrete activities rather than empty sermons. Peng Qingyi asked him in a threatening tone: "Do you dare to tell me your name?" He immediately presented his business card. The young workers laughed.

After Qu Xiao had spoken, someone rose and said: "We hope that our three teachers will not do meaningless propaganda work but rather discuss some more practical questions." Another youth followed immediately, standing up and saying: "You have roamed everywhere and done your propaganda work, but here you do not have any market!" A third man also spoke thus: "There is definitely no market for you people to come here to propagandize. Workers in the foreign-invested or jointly-

invested enterprises will never listen to what you have to say. We are here to make money. There are no such things as ideals and making contributions to the state! Propaganda work in the newspaper carries little truth."

At the end of the symposium, the youth experts declared that they were "pleased with" the young people's sincerity and forthrightness. One of them admitted: "Your feedback makes us think that we must conduct some study. At least [in the future] we will not casually express our views without having studied the place first."

The "incident" becomes a "storm."[3] Although the youth experts had said that they welcomed different views and found them "enlightening," the next day, 14 January, Qu Xiao gave a talk in Shenzhen in which he attacked the opinions of some Shekou youths as "obviously wrong." His talk was shown on television. Moreover, on 15 January, an aide to Li Yanjie, Guo Haiyan, reported on "the wrong words of a few youth" to the department in charge. Guo's report was totally negative about Shekou youth, pointing out that the youths attending the symposium had "said something obviously wrong," and that "the whole atmosphere was sarcastic and even hostile." The name of the young man who presented his business card was included in the report. The Shekou youth and local CYL committee felt it was necessary to respond to these attacks in order to "defend the honour of Shekou youth." On 1 February, therefore, the local newspaper *Shekou Bulletin News*, which had sent two young reporters to attend the symposium, published the story. The "Shekou incident" immediately caught the attention of society and several other newspapers carried reports on it. A "storm" arose.

In the following months, the two sides continued exchanging fire. While Qu Xiao and others criticized the "wrong ideas of some Shekou youths," using them as negative materials in talks given in various

3. The following section is, in addition to the sources cited above, based on: Wei Haitian, "Shekou: chenfu shuojiao yu xiandai yishi de yici jilie jiaofeng" ("Shekou: an intense confrontation between stale sermons and modern ideas"), *Shekou tongxun bao*, 28 March 1988, p. 3; Wei Haitian, "Shekou qingnian yu Qu Xiao deng tongzhi haiyou naxie fenqi" ("What other divergent views were there between Shekou youths and Qu Xiao as well as other comrades"), *Shekou tongxun bao*, 11 April 1988, p. 3; Liu Luna, "Dui qingnian de sixiang jiaoyu ye yao guannian gengxin" ("Ideological education for youth also needs new ideas"), *Xiamen ribao* (*Xiamen Daily*), 28 May 1988, p. 4; Mi Bohua, "Yige hao xianxiang" ("A good phenomenon"), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, 18 August 1988, p. 1; Xu Jingchun, " 'Shekou fengbo' de qishi" ("Revelations from the 'Shekou Storm' "), *Gongren ribao* (*Worker's Daily*), 26 August 1988, p. 3; Zhong Shizhen, " 'Shekou fengbo dawenlu' fanying de wenhua xintai – diaocha shilu" ("Cultural mentality reflected from the 'Questions and answers on the Shekou incident': a survey"), *Anhui ribao* (*Anhui Daily*), 7 September 1988, p. 3; Lin Jian, "Shekou qingnian gongren zhengzhi yishi diaocha" ("Survey on the political consciousness of Shekou young workers"), *Shekou tongxun bao*, 19 September 1988, p. 3; Yang Fan, "Xinjiu guannian de pengzhuang – 'Shekou fengbo' taolun zongshu" ("Collision of new and old ideas – a summary of the 'Shekou Storm' "), *Jingjixue zhoubao* (*Economics Weekly*), 2 October 1988, p. 5; Sui Wen, "Jinghua linghun de gongchengshi: ji quanguo youxiu qingnian sixiang jiaoyu gongzuozhe Peng Qingyi" ("An engineer of purifying souls: the outstanding ideological-political worker of the country, Peng Qingyi"), *Guangming ribao* (*Guangming Daily*), 12 September 1989, pp. 1, 4; Xin Wenbu, "Weishenme yao zhizao shekou fengbo" ("Why stir up the 'Shekou Storm'?"), *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* (*Chinese Education Daily*), 8 August 1989, pp. 1, 4. Some of the translations are from FBIS-China, 21 September 1988, pp. 57–60; and 26 October 1988, pp. 19–21.

places, the youth and media of Shekou kept striking back. *Shekou Bulletin News* published a series of rebutting articles in March and April. After the Communist Party's central mouthpiece, the *People's Daily*, published a seemingly even-handed report on the debate ("Question and answers about the 'Shekou Incident' ") on 6 August, the local tempest became a nation-wide "storm." Following *People's Daily*, hundreds of newspapers across China entertained animated discussions on this issue. The three "experts" had chances to reiterate their views and further criticize "those few people in Shekou" for committing "five wrongs": in "standpoint, viewpoint, facts, road and methods." On 19 September, *Shekou Bulletin News*, on the other hand, published the result of a survey of Shekou youth's political consciousness conducted by the local CYL committee and the social science department of Qinghua University to prove that Qu Xiao and Li Yangjie's comments on Shekou youth were incorrect and their views were outdated.

Of particular importance was that *People's Daily* opened a special column for the discussion; from 8 August to 14 September, the newspaper published about 35 letters selected from among the 1,531 that it received bearing on the discussion. Moreover, in January 1989, a collection of 109 letters and articles from newspapers nation-wide was published by the Chinese Press Publishing House.[4] Participants in the discussion included people from a wide variety of social backgrounds ranging from well-known professors and scholars to ordinary clerks and workers. While many of the participants were Party and CYL cadres in charge of ideological work at different levels and in different places, many college students, graduate students (including some overseas Chinese students), engineers, managers and army officers also expressed their opinions in the newspapers. Even the head of the Press Bureau of the Party's Central Propaganda Department, Zhong Peizhang, wrote a letter to the *People's Daily*, expressing his "personal ideas." The issues that were most ardently discussed were the impact of the commodity economy on ideological education, the definition and moral standing of "gold diggers," and the experience of the SEZs. Throughout the whole heated discussion, there was no sign that either side would give up or make any compromise; opinions were remarkably diverse not only among discussants but also inside the Party's mouthpiece, the *People's Daily*. People unanimously agreed that the Shekou Storm had a significance that went far beyond that of the incident itself. As the *People's Daily* later commented, "the so-called 'Shekou Storm' was not just an incident which happened on that tiny plot [Shekou]; it is actually related to or reflects an inevitable and nation-wide debate in the ideological sphere. This debate would have come about sooner or later anyway."[5]

4. Ma Licheng (ed.), *Shekou fengbo* (*The Shekou Storm*) (Beijing: Zhongguo xinwen chubanshe, 1989). Ma Licheng was an editor of *People's Daily* who had read all the letters sent to the newspaper. According to his count, among the 1,531 letters, only 266 (17.4%) sympathized with the views of the three youth experts (p. 329).

5. *Renmin ribao* editorial note, 8 August 1988, p. 3.

Background: The Revival and Decline of Ideological Education in the 1980s

In some sense, the Shekou incident and the ensuing "storm" were predictable. They reflected the development of China's reforms from the economic field to the cultural and ideological realm, and the fact that, along with the rapid progression of the market economy and the emergence of pluralist interests as well as ideas, the conventional ideological-political education of the Communist Party – its format and content, and even its basic legitimacy – was being seriously questioned by 1988. What was the impact of social changes in the post Cultural Revolution era on ideological education?

Political-ideological education had always been a very important component of the Chinese Communist system. Its goal was to teach the youth patriotic, collectivist and Communist ethics and outlooks, and to train generations of "revolutionary successors." Political-ideological education had also performed the function of youth socialization and social mobilization since the establishment of PRC in 1949. It had been very effective and influential in the 1950s and 1960s in imbuing youth with the Communist "revolutionary tradition," and mobilizing them as well as the rest of society, for political and economic campaigns. The great movement to "learn from Lei Feng" and the raging wildfire of Red Guards in the 1960s to a large extent were the fruits of political-ideological education, displaying its impressive capacity to socialize and mobilize young people.

Until the end of the 1970s, ideological education consisted mainly of "political reports" – speeches given by the Party's ideological cadres – and "model propagation" – the development of a few exemplars such as Lei Feng, a soldier of the early 1960s who followed Mao loyally and did many altruistic things. By combining this form with the content of Communist ethics, the Party successfully cultivated a generation of diligent and conscientious successors to the "revolutionary cause" in the 1950s and 1960s who sacrificed most of their personal desires, needs and interests for socialism and functioned willingly or obediently as the "gears and screws of the socialist machine."

After the Cultural Revolution, however, there emerged a new generation of youth who had experienced a painful transition from illusion to disillusionment and therefore were full of doubts and perplexities.[6] For this generation, ideological education, at least with its "traditional form

6. The disillusionment and perplexity of youths were clearly shown in a letter from Pan Xiao, a pseudonym of two youths, to the editors of *China Youth*. The letter appeared in the March 1980 issue of the magazine, which initiated a great discussion on the meaning of life from May 1980 to March 1981. For the "Pan Xiao discussion," see David Ownby, "The audience: growing alienation among Chinese youths," in Carol Lee Hamrin and Timothy Cheek (eds.), *China's Establishment Intellectuals* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1986), pp. 212–246.

and content," had lost its effectiveness. The widespread "crisis of faith" among the youth reflected the loss of the ideological loyalty that had been the proud achievement of such education. A major expression of this "crisis of faith" was a deep aversion to any more political preaching. When a political educator spoke on the platform, the audience either read novels, chatted or took a nap; few paid any attention to what was being said. A guest speaker would often be put in an embarrassing situation. Instead of being welcomed by the audience, the speaker would be faced with deliberately difficult and provocative questions submitted as anonymous notes. All these were events of common occurrence in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Young people openly denounced political education as "empty sermonizing," "rude suppression of human feelings," "dry as dust," "false, bragging, and hollow words," and so on.

In the midst of this general slump of political education, however, Li Yanjie, a lecturer in Chinese literature at Beijing Teachers' College, obtained surprisingly different results, becoming unmatched in the whole educational field. His speeches were ardently welcomed by many young people, whether at schools or at factories. He always presented his "political-ethical reports" to full houses. Following his talks, the large audiences pondered his words, got excited, expressed their admiration and often burst into applause. In the early 1980s Li Yanjie's "reports" became all the rage nation-wide. By the beginning of 1983, he had given over 300 speeches to audiences totalling some 300,000 people, and more than 400 other invitations were waiting for him. Several thousand recordings of his speeches circulated in the country. Moreover, he received about 10,000 letters from youths throughout the country, and over 2,000 people visited his home at Beijing Teachers' College. He was so well-known that the media praised him as the best friend of youth. It is said that, after talking with Li Yanjie, at least one young female gave up the idea of suicide in response to a thwarted personal life. In 1983 and 1985, Li was sent to more than ten countries in Western Europe and North America to present his "new-style" ideological speeches to overseas Chinese students.

The media and the authorities enthusiastically discussed the popularity of Li's kind of ideological education.[7] Why were his speeches so appeal-

7. Li Fengjiu, "Qingnian de liangshi yiyou – shitan Li Yanjie de chenggong jingyan" ("A good teacher and helpful friend: Li Yanjie's successful experience"), *Anshan shizhuan xuebao* (*Journal of Anshan Teachers Institute*), No. 2 (1983), pp. 75–78; Shi Junshen and Wang Baodi, "Cixing shi zenyang chansheng de: fang Beijing shiyuan jiangshi Li Yanjie" ("How magnetism is produced; interview with Li Yanjie"), *Wenhui bao* (*Wenhui Daily*), 16 May 1982, p. 2; Yao Huiqin *et al.*, "Qidi qingnian xinling de ren – Li Yanjie" ("Li Yanjie, the person who inspires youths' hearts"), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, 8 December 1981, p. 1; Tang Xun, "Xiwang you gengduo de qingnian zhiyou" ("Hopefully there will be more friends of youths"), *Guangming ribao*, 22 August 1982, p. 2; Fang Yandong, "Yao you guanzhu mei de yanjing: Li Yanjie tan qingnian" ("The need for eyes with which to see beauty: Li Yanjie on youths"), *Jiefang ribao* (*Jiefang Daily*), 13 May 1982, p. 2; Lin Mohan, "Qingnianren xuyao shenme" ("What do youths need"), *Guangming ribao*, 7 July 1982, p. 4. Also see Li

ing and how did he stir the hearts of many youths? First, he adopted a fresh attitude toward youth; he significantly improved the already stereotyped image of political-ideological educators as rude, supercilious, punitive and patronizing. Li appeared amiable and approachable to the young people; "youth are my teachers, I am a friend of theirs" were the two phrases that he most often repeated. His sympathetic and understanding attitude easily touched the hearts of many young people who had been depressed and dejected because of the mental trauma of the Cultural Revolution. They felt that he really cared about them and understood their pain, perplexity and desire.

Secondly, instead of holding forth dully about Communist principles, Li told interesting and real stories. In view of the prevailing want of knowledge because of the interruption of normal education in 1966–76, Li, as a university lecturer, made full use of the rich materials provided by history and literature, introducing to his audience the lofty mottos, glorious deeds and exalted feelings of great figures in history, ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign. Some of the famous non-Chinese names mentioned and quoted by him were Darwin, Hegel, Engels, Newton, Einstein, Heisenberg, Beethoven, Chopin, Shakespeare, Friedrich Schiller, Victor Hugo, Guy de Maupassant, Doris Lessing, Alexander Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky and Thomas Edison. He conveyed moral and political principles through beautiful stories and tried to use vivid images of real people to exert subtle influence on young people's outlooks. Each of his reports contained 40 or 50 stories. In addition, he was an eloquent speaker; his talks integrated philosophical thoughts, literary knowledge, political comments and current affairs. He was so skilful in combining the "humour of comedy, plots of fiction, conflict of drama, and passion of poetry," that many people commented that "listening to Li's speech is a comprehensive treat of politics, knowledge and arts."

Finally, there was no mistaking what his speech was aimed at: what he was talking about was exactly what many youths were most concerned with and interested in. To counter the ideological perplexity, loss of ideals and disappointment with the Communist Party, and to address many other problems faced by millions of young people in their daily lives, including education, work, unemployment, social relations and marriage, Li discussed numerous topics such as "Morality, ability, knowledge, learning, truth, goodness and beauty," "Love, marriage and the family," "State, nation and patriotism." More importantly, he cited a great number of meritorious and moving cases of contemporary youths themselves, presenting examples of ordinary persons whose deeds "radiated with the light of patriotism, heroism and Communism."

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Yanjie, "Ni yao guanxin zuguo de weilai ma? Shouxian yao guanxin qingnian yidai" ("Are you concerned with the future of the motherland? First, be concerned with the generation of youth"), *Gongren ribao*, 27 April 1982, p. 2; and "Zuguo ernu zai wei Zhonghua tengfei er pinbo" ("The children of our country are striving for the take-off of China"), *Gongren ribao*, 22 April, p. 3 and 23 April 1983, p. 2.

For example, in one of his published manuscripts, in addition to citing 18 Chinese and 17 foreign cases from ancient and modern history, he also told 38 real stories from current youths as the evidence of the patriotic, collectivist and socialist spirit in the society. Obviously, compared to the perfect, flawless image of Lei Feng who died in 1962 and ever since then had been a Communist model, Li's "ordinary people and minor matters" were more vivid, appealing and persuasive.

This new-style political report brought fresh air and new dynamism to ideological education and for a while mitigated to some extent the tense relations between youth and the party-state. It diffused the rebellious feeling among the youths and convinced them to pursue the officially-approved way of life – to "study and work for China's modernization." Hence every year, Li Yanjie and his associates kept receiving hundreds of invitations from local Party and youth organizations all over the country. By August 1986, they had received about 100,000 letters and more than 6,000 visitors.[8] The authorities praised Li Yanjie, many other ideological workers quickly emulated his style, and Li's approach soon became the typical form and a new "orthodoxy" of ethical and political education. Others using his style included Qu Xiao, Zhu Boru, Zhang Haidi, Liu Ji, Zhang Yi and Peng Qingyi. When the Research Centre for Ideological Education of Youth was established in Beijing in May 1987 under the Central Committee of the CYL, 25 prominent youth educators were invited as affiliated research-speakers of the Centre, including all the above.[9]

In terms of their general approaches, these educators can be sorted into two categories. Some sought materials for their talks from various scholarly fields and the lively experiences of contemporary youth; Li Yanjie was the champion of this group. The second group, instead of telling the stories of others, more or less talked about themselves. All the members of the second category had certain unusual experiences or special achievements which they could use to inspire the masses. They included PLA officer Zhu Boru (the "living Lei Feng of the '80s"), young female Zhang Haidi ("with disabled body but high ideals"), the hero of the Sino-Vietnamese border war Xu Liang, the famous actor and dancer Peng Qingyi, and especially Qu Xiao whose tortuous experiences before and during the Cultural Revolution won him the title "herdsman in exile." As the President of Yingkou Education Institute, Liaoning province, in the early 1980s, Qu Xiao had been victimized by political movements and undergone various physical and mental sufferings for 20 years, but his belief in Communism and his loyalty to the Party and nation had never been shaken. He submitted himself unconditionally to all decisions of the Party. He also accepted its unfair treatment with the explanation that "a mother's beating of her son is an expression of love." Around 1985,

8. Hua Tianwen, "Li Yanjie shi zenyang zoushang shehui de" ("How did Li Yanjie go to the society"), *Gongren yuebao* (*Workers Monthly*), August 1986, pp. 11–12.

9. "Qingnian sixiang jiaoyu yanjiu zhongxin chengli" ("The Research Centre for Ideological Education established"), *Renmin ribao*, 20 May 1987, p. 1.

through coverage in newspapers and live transmissions on radio and television, Qu Xiao became well-known nation-wide. Even though his loyal behaviour reflected more the Confucian mentality of filial piety than Marxist revolutionary principles, his unusual experiences and his persistence in conviction affected a lot of people, including thousands of the young.

Although the new-style ideological education was distasteful to some intellectuals and college students, as soon as it appeared, it won popularity within society, especially among the off-campus youths and in the provinces. Official support can only partially explain the success of the newly emerged educators. More importantly, for most youths of the early 1980s, these talks not only opened doors to knowledge and the future, but awakened old ideals, values and feelings that had lain buried deep in their memory. In short, to this generation of Chinese youth, Li Yanjie and others related new evidence and living cases to reconfirm the old, now challenged, but somehow still halfheartedly cherished, social ethics and political beliefs such as patriotism, collectivism, loyalty, devotion and Communist ideals that had once been the centre of their lives.

The new approach was an important reform and, in some sense, a partial break with the old political education. The change, however, had mainly occurred in the "form" or "method" of ideological indoctrination, and the content and direction continued to be the same patriotic, collectivist and Communist values. The basic format was still the commendation and propagation of a few fine examples whose exemplary deeds reflected the approved merits. During the early years of the 1980s, reforms had started undermining the socio-economic structure, but had not yet caused fundamental changes in social consciousness which, to a large extent, was still contained within the monistic value system of Sinicized Marxism.

However, by the later years of the 1980s, the social setting on which both the "form" and the "content" of the new-style ideological education relied for popularity had been profoundly changed. The reform tide had brought about great changes to the socio-economic structure as well as in people's mentality and behaviour. First, most youths were already out of the shadow of the Cultural Revolution; they did not linger over exposing past traumas and nursing old scars; instead they became increasingly concerned about seeking the political, social and cultural roots of seemingly recurrent turmoil in the nation. The one-time tranquillizing Li Yanjie-style "talk" gradually lost its effect. Moreover, people were no longer content with the oversimplified interpretation of the Cultural Revolution: the Gang of Four taking advantage of Mao Zedong's misjudgments. They wanted to explore the deeper reasons that both the authorities and the youth educators tried to evade.

Secondly, reforms engendered different and pluralistic economic institutions and interests which, in turn, led people to diverse outlooks and values. Complex social reality produced more "sophisticated" youths who would no longer blindly accept, adore and imitate the officially-endorsed models, even those who were living among them. Instead, young people

now tended to select their own models from quite different perspectives, which inevitably made the "new idols" diverse. Diversified social life provided youths with more opportunities and choices for individual development; the emergence of various channels of social mobility progressively reduced "being politically progressive" to a less important position. All these changes significantly diminished the appeal of the new-style ideological education.

Thirdly, the policy of "opening to the world" brought into China the tremendous influence of Western culture, which provided alternative social and political theories and ideas to Chinese youths who were more and more sceptical of the orthodox Communist ideology. Consumer goods and cultural products from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Western countries flooded the Chinese market; through classrooms, translations, newspapers, popular magazines, radio and television programmes, let alone various commercial advertisements, Chinese youths, especially college students and workers in foreign-invested or joint-venture enterprises of the SEZs, rapidly became acquainted with Western values of individualism, independence, equality, autonomy and free choice. Naturally, Western influence further weakened the validity of the arguments that were repeated by youth educators such as Li Yanjie and Qu Xiao.

Fourthly, it was the social reality of rampant corruption, official speculation and abuses of power that made any ideological and idealistic propaganda empty, powerless and seemingly hypocritical. Reform caused a series of ideological confusions and policy contradictions; a profound conflict existed between the continuing propaganda of collectivism and the new encouragement of "individually digging gold" by the government. As part of the conventional propagation, the ideological talks of Li, Qu and other youth educators were unable to give persuasive answers to questions arising from the confusing social life. Therefore they were less welcome and more likely to encounter challenges from the audience.

Finally, as shown above, the highly praised new-style political education was in fact only "old wine in new bottles," a new way to undertake ideological indoctrination. Any political education has to serve the current political purpose and justify the policies advocated by the Party, such as the Four Cardinal Principles (Party leadership, proletarian dictatorship, socialism and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought). The youth educators were obliged to support and convey the Party's policies, and they trivialized or glossed over the deep problems of the Party and society. They had to convince young people to trust the Party leadership and ignore some fundamental but impermissible issues. For example, when one of the protagonists of the Shekou incident, Qu Xiao, heard of a young man's comment that "the Party's general mood is unhealthy," he responded that the youth's wording was incorrect, "the accurate formulation should be 'there exist some unhealthy tendencies within the Party'."[10] Such meticulous phrasing showed clearly Qu's painstaking

10. Wei Haitian, "What other divergent views," p. 3.

effort to defend the Party's image, thus turning himself into its apologist, which was increasingly incompatible with the expectation of many young people.

In summary, the new-style political education invented by Li Yangjie became outmoded in both form and content by the late 1980s; the once fresh image had faded, and the earlier inspiring arguments fell far behind the pace of social change. In the early 1980s, Li had repeatedly quoted the words of youth – "you can't use the key of the 50s and 60s to open the lock of the 80s"[11] – to explain why the old form political education did not work any more. Now when he and others insisted on using the "key of the early 80s to open the lock" of Shekou youths in 1988, they were also unable to do so.

In May 1988, the *Beijing Youth Daily* held a conference on youth ideological education; the participants were mainly the teachers of political and ethical classes and concerned specialists of educational institutions in northern cities. The conference revealed the prevailing frustration and flagging morale of ideological workers in fulfilling their duty. A CYL secretary of a key high school described the responses of a typical student in his school to ideological education: "If you talked of Marx and Communism on the platform, he might dare to unplug the amplifier. Even when the school principal gave a speech, if he was not interested, he read maths or foreign language books, or just took his bag and left." There was also a growing aversion to political inculcation in the general public. It took the newspaper at least nine months to prepare for the conference. A major problem was funding. The organizers had enormous difficulty in raising money; none of the places they went to for donations wanted to make contributions when they realized the conference was to study ideological education.[12] Hence, the Shekou incident was only one of the numerous cases which indicate that ideological education, even with its improved new style, was in discord with the social environment and the needs of most youths, and its state-approved legitimacy was facing a serious challenge from an increasing proportion of the society.

Changes in the Values of Youth[13]

The Shekou Storm not only showed the unfavourable attitude of many young people towards ideological education but also, perhaps more

11. Li Yanjie, "Weilai shi shuyu women qingnianren de" ("The future belongs to our youth"), in *Shidai de baogao* (*The Time Report*), No. 4 (1981), p. 15.

12. "Zairenshi – you tongku, ye you xinwei: beifang chengshi qingshaonian sixiang jiaoyu yantaohui jishi" ("Re-evaluation – some agony, but some gratitude: report of the conference on youth ideological education of northern cities"), *Beijing qingnian bao* (*Beijing Youth News*), 31 May 1988, p. 4.

13. For studies of changes in the values of Chinese youth in the 1980s, see Rosen, "Political education and student response," pp. 12–39; Stanley Rosen, "Value changes among post-Mao youth: the evidence from survey data," in Perry Link, Richard Madsen and Paul G. Pickowicz (eds.) *Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People's Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), pp. 193–216; and Stanley Rosen, "The impact of reform policies on youth attitude," in Deborah Davis and Ezra F. Vogel (eds.) *Chinese Society on the Eve of Tiananmen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 283–305.

importantly, reflected some profound changes in the value system of society which had paralleled the course of reform and opening to the world. A value system includes the criteria by which judgment is passed on the meaning of life and people's behaviour. Changes in values are usually the result of changes in social life and institutions and can often indicate the direction of fundamental social development. The economic reforms in the 1980s promoted greatly the newly-emerged consciousness of the commodity economy and the market. The ideas and concepts accompanying the commodity economy rapidly infiltrated the realms of social relations and cultural life, inevitably undermining the established values and moralities and calling for new ethical standards. On the other hand, the spread of Western ideas, theories and cultural products in China provided different modes of thinking, co-ordinates of behaviour and structures of values to Chinese youths who were thirsty for new ideas and knowledge. Indeed, two different value systems had existed since the beginning of the reform and been in constant conflict with each other; and there had been a gradual breaking away from the Confucian ethics and socialist culture that seemed to many people to emphasize only devotion to the state, submission to authority and unification of thoughts. The Shekou Storm was only the most recent act of this multi-scene play. It showed that, by 1988, the unified value system centred on collectivism had been seriously weakened, and people's sense of collective good was eroded. They tended to pay more attention to their own needs and happiness, stress the importance of individuals and strive for individuals' rights and interests. Chinese youths were more and more willing to accept what they regarded as the Western individual-oriented value system. Stanley Rosen calls this change the "decollectivization of morality."[14]

In the Shekou Storm, some people argued that the unified and monistic value system demands an absolute division into two extremes when judging people's thoughts and deeds – either good or bad, comrade or enemy – without allowing any possible "grey area" or middle position. For example, the key issue of the Shekou Storm was how to define and judge the "gold diggers." Qu Xiao and some other educators, following the accustomed way of thinking, argued that "gold diggers" referred to those who were making use of reforms and the special policies of SEZs to take the wealth created by others. They set "gold diggers" absolutely against "builders": the former were capitalist speculators and self-seeking pioneers, the latter were socialist contributors, with nothing in common between the two.[15] On the other hand, the Shekou youths and most discussants saw common characters applicable to both, insisting that the gold diggers were also those who tried to get rich through their hard work and legal channels. These people were not "gold robbers" but labourers

14. Stanley Rosen, "Students and the state in China: the crisis in ideology and organization," in Arthur Lewis Rosenbaum (ed.), *State and Society in China: The Consequences of Reform* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p. 172.

15. Ironically, some critics of the youth educators consciously or unconsciously followed the same mode of thinking in their using the dichotomies of collectivist and individualist, traditional and modern, etc.

and creators. Gold diggers and builders were the same no matter whether in China or in the United States. People always have mixed motives, that is human nature; why should one who is digging gold for the society and nation not have a reasonable desire to seek his own interest at the same time?[16] Many people insisted that there should be more than one criterion with which to evaluate people's deeds. Concerning morality, law is the lowest moral standard. As long as people do not violate the law, they should be "allowed to hold different moral ideas. To endure and respect the [different] moral standards of others is an issue of basic human rights."[17] Some argued that, in a country with a population of one billion with "low cultural quality," there must be a united guiding thought and national spirit; people's ideas and values must be unified.[18] But others replied that the new national spirit must be built on the basis of pluralistic values.[19] One letter discussed further the social and political meanings of the issue:

> A basic requirement of democratic politics is to respect citizens' rights and independent spirit. In a democratic society, so long as one operates under the constitution, one has the right to entertain and debate different views. Even if one's argument is 100 per cent correct, one cannot force others to accept it, otherwise one violates the rights of the audience. The varieties and multi-levels in thinking, morality, culture and life are the vivid manifestation of democratic politics, whereas the traditional political-ideological work always expects hundreds of responses to a single call and thousands of persons with the same face.[20]

Some writers during the Shekou Storm criticized that the morality upheld by the ethical and ideological education in the past decades emphasized society or group at the expense of the individual. The collectivist value system required everyone to submit unconditionally to society and therefore depreciated the feelings, personalities and reasonable interests of individuals who were regarded as only standardized parts or tools like screws or bricks. The collective dominance made individuals lose dignity and real personalities; and because they lacked the motive for self-development, society could not develop either and became lifeless. According to these writers, the individual-oriented value system, in contrast, approved and encouraged the development of individuals which was the foundation of the development of the state and nation.[21] Egotistic

16. Li Chaoyuan, "Zhuanqian he fuwu shehui zheliangzhe shi keyi tongyi qilaide" ("Making money and serving the society can be unified"), *Renmin ribao*, 22 August 1988, p. 3; Ma Licheng, *The Shekou Storm*, pp. 27, 32.

17. Ma Licheng, *The Shekou Storm*, p. 236.

18. Li Xiaohu, "Bingfei chenfu shuojiao" ("Not a stale sermon"), *Renmin ribao*, 17 August 1988, p. 3.

19. Yang Fan, "Collision of new and old ideas," p. 5.

20. Li Chengyang, "Sixiang gongzuo yao shiying minzhu zhengzhi yaoqiu" ("Ideological work should meet the demands of democratic politics"), *Renmin ribao*, 17 August 1988, p. 3

21. This argument has a long history in China, see Benjamin I. Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Philip Huang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Modern Chinese Liberalism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972); James R. Pusey, *China and Charles Darwin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); and Andrew Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

motives could advance historical development, whereas altruistic ones would severely hinder social progress. The new era started by gold diggers had established individualism which would bring about a commodity economy, the rule of law and democracy. Individualism affirmed the rights of not just one but everyone, and required that people's self-development should not harm the rights of development of others; in other words everyone should take some responsibility for the society.[22]

One article that appeared in the *Shekou Bulletin News* in April 1988 sharply attacked the officially-created "culture of gods" in which a few paragons such as Lei Feng became "gods." It also severely criticized "abstract" and "surrealistic" ethical criteria. Requiring ordinary people to accept the unrealistic ideals of such models led only to hypocrisy. What Li and Qu propagated was exactly this kind of "model culture" of which they had themselves become part. The article criticized the educators for wanting all people to follow one mode of behaviour and thinking, in order to turn the living and diversified "many" into the approved "one" and millions of individuals into the derivatives of one prototype. The author claimed that what Chinese youth needed was just the opposite, to turn "one" into "many," and let everyone be him or herself. No one should have the right to force others to accept his or her idea. The highest objective of life was "self-domination and self-perfection," while the greatest tragedy in the history of human civilization was the autocracy of thoughts. Only millions of individuals with distinctive characters, spirit of criticism and creativity could make a distinctive and vigorous nation.[23]

In December 1988 and January 1989, *Shekou Bulletin News* published three articles under the general title "A Tentative Discussion of the Science of Individualism and Scientific Individualism." They systematically and keenly attacked moral prototypes such as Lei Feng and the ethical slogan "impartiality and selflessness" (*dagong wusi*, literally "great public and no private"). According to the articles, they not only encouraged the slavish mentality of an obedient, docile tool of the Party, but also helped the lazy and fostered the sense of gaining without lifting a finger to work. The author stated that these "moral supreme beings of heaven" had become an "ideological burden, a yoke on people's minds"; the moralists only talked about duties, and never spoke of citizens' rights. The articles also critized the officially-propagated ethical proposition "the real meaning of life lies in giving rather than taking." In reality, "only a thoroughly slavish and nihilistic life can speak solely of making contributions and not at all of taking." The author further justified his argument by citing the *Communist Manifesto*: "In a Communist society,

22. Wei Lei, "Shekou fengbo yinchude lixing sikao" ("Rational thinking from the Shekou Storm"), *Renmin ribao*, 24 August 1988, p. 3; Ma Licheng, *The Shekou Storm*, pp. 60, 91–92.

23. Cao Changqing, " 'Shen de wenhua' shi dui ren de quanmian zhixi – Li Yanjie, Qu Xiao yu Shekou qingnian zhenglun yinfa de sikao" (" 'The culture of gods' totally suffocates people – thoughts from the debates between Li Yanjie, Qu Xiao and Shekou youths"), *Shekou tongxun bao*, 25 April 1988, p. 3.

the freedom of development for each individual is the condition for the freedom of development for all."[24]

Indeed, in the late 1980s the opinion was becoming popular that, between collective interests and individual interests, the latter should take precedence over the former. As one author observed, in the 1950s and 1960s the people tended to believe that "if there is water in the large river then small streams will be full; if there is no water in the large river, the small streams will dry up." In the 1980s more and more people held the somewhat different view that "if there is water in small streams then the large river will be full; if there is no water in the small streams, then the large river will dry up."[25]

Alongside the changes in the mentalities and values of Chinese youths, the former ethical models were increasingly losing attraction. Many participants of the Shekou Storm pointed out that the youths were more likely to reject the officially-created examples.[26] The break with the "traditional" idols and the rise of "individualism" gave youths, especially those of the SEZs, the courage to challenge the authorities. The Shekou Storm symbolized the clash between the prevailing "authority of teachers" (*shidao zunyan*) and the demand for equality and democracy. The youths were no longer content with the outmoded educational pattern of "we talk, you listen and understand," or the style of "preaching the way, answering queries, and resolving difficulties"; they demanded dialogue and communication with teachers on an equal basis. They believed there should be no difference in social status and rights of the educators and the educated, and no one should try to monopolize the interpretation of truth. Furthermore, while Qu Xiao took the painful mistreatment he had experienced for many years as only a mother's mistaken punishment of a son, the Shekou youths and their supporters stated that the relationships between government and people should not be that of master and dog, mother and son, or upright officials and obedient subjects, but should be the relations of obligations and rights based on laws.[27]

24. Jingwa Silang, "Shilun gerenzhuyi kexue he kexue gerenzhuyi" ("A tentative discussion of the science of individualism and scientific individualism, parts 2 and 3"), *Shekou tongxun bao*, 26 December 1988, p. 3, and 9 January 1989, p. 3. English translations can be found in *Chinese Education*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 56–66. In fact, there was an earlier open and controversial discussion on "Impartiality and selflessness" in *Shehui bao* (*Society*) in late 1986. The newspaper was banned during the anti-bourgeois liberalization movement in early 1987.

25. Zhang Jing, " 'Shekou fengbo' yu jiaoyujia de xuanze" ("The 'Shekou Storm' and the choice of educators"), *Qingnian yanjiu* (*Youth Research*), No. 11 (November 1988), p. 3.

26. Zhang Shihong, "Shangpin jingji dailai de kunhuo he xuanze – Shanghai sixiang lilun gongzuozhe tan 'Shekou fengbo' " ("Confusions and choices from the commodity economy – ideological workers of Shanghai talked about the 'Shekou Storm' "), *Renmin ribao*, 29 August 1988, p. 3; Ma Licheng, *The Shekou Storm*, p. 90.

27. Ma Licheng, *The Shekou Storm*, pp. 38, 89; Mi Bohua, "A good phenomenon," p. 1; Xu Jingchun, "Revelations from the Shekou Storm," p. 3; Zhong Peizhang, "Yiyi xiangyuxi, qifeng gongpandeng" ("Probing the problem and solving the difficulty together"), *Renmin ribao*, 5 September 1988, p. 3.

A Generation Gap

When probing the issue of why the ideological education that was represented by Li and Qu was in rapid decline in the late 1980s, it is useful to look at it from a generational perspective. The recurrent conflict between collective-oriented ethics on the one hand and values derived from the commodity economy and Western influences on the other reflected some new developments in the generational relations and generational clashes of Chinese society. In other words, the Shekou Storm revealed a generation gap.

Coincidentally, just as the Shekou Storm was unfolding, a popular sociology book entitled *Disidai ren* (*The Fourth Generation*) was published in Beijing in August 1988.[28] It immediately gripped the attention of a vast number of readers, especially youths. The authors of the book presented a very interesting analytical framework which divided the Chinese people into four generations which shaped the social life of China in the 1980s. Each generation had experienced different historical eras in their formative years, which moulded distinctive characters for each of them, and in turn gave rise to clashes and gaps between them. In this view, the relationships among the four generations were an important aspect of social relations.

According to the authors, the first generation grew up during the early decades of the 20th century and entered society before 1949; they were the creators of the People's Republic, including not only the political elites of the Communist party but also all others who lived and went through that turbulent and violent era. In the 1980s they were gradually fading out of social life though some of them still significantly affected the political scene. The authors described them as "a generation of heroes" who had firm beliefs and staunch wills. Mao Zedong was both their leader and their representaitve. The second generation refers to those in their 50s and early 60s who occupied various leading positions in society. They were educated and socialized between 1949 and 1966, and were heavily influenced by the beliefs and values of the first generation. They had willingly given up their personal choices and devoted themselves to the cause of the Party, becoming the "dustless screws of the revolutionary machine." Collectivism was the core of the value system of the second generation; Lei Feng was the best example whom they had assiduously or dutifully emulated. The book described them as an extremely dull generation that was blindly subordinate to and dependent on the first generation – a "grey-coloured generation."

The third generation was "born into the new society and grew up under the red flag." As the Red Guards and later educated youths sent to the countryside, they were socialized and became mature during the tumultuous and perilous years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), which decisively shaped their natures. They went through the fanaticism and disillusionment, experienced the hardship of rural life, and saw the reali-

28. Zhang Yongjie and Cheng Yuanzhong, *Disidai ren* (*The Fourth Generation*) (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1988).

ties of the society with their own eyes. Some of them became college students between 1977 and 1979 after many years of delay, and actively took part in the Democracy Wall movement in the late 1970s and the campus elections of 1980. There were many labels for this generation in the early 1980s, such as the "sceptical generation," the "lost generation," the "confused generation," the "reflecting (*fansi*) generation," the "awakened generation," and the "rising and promising generation," among others. Their complex experiences created so many contradictions in their mentalities, personalities and behaviour that they became the most difficult one to understand. The book called this generation "people at the edge" (*bianyuan ren*) who had one foot caught in history and the other striding towards the future. This was the authors' way of saying that this generation embraced many different principles and often had contradictory attitudes toward major issues such as "tradition" and "modernity." Although this was probably not a unique trait of the third generation, among the four generations in the 1980s they were the one that was most likely to weigh, assess and judge new changes and new choices with at least two different standards.

The fourth generation included college students who were born in the 1960s and entered the universities after 1980 as well as their larger age cohort in the society. The book stated that the first three generations were the products of a "political era," despite the great differences between them. The fourth generation, on the other hand, was the product of an "economic era" which began in 1979. The characteristics of members of this generation reflect the features of this new era. They were the children of the second generation and younger brothers and sisters of the third. In contrast with the former three generations, especially the willingly docile one of their parents, they had a strong self-consciousness; "self" (*ziwo*) was the centre of their world and the starting point of their values. In social life, they no longer just accepted the choice of the society, or "let the Party arrange everything" for them as the second generation did. They wanted to control their future and design their position in society by themselves. "For them, one's whole life should be a process of continuous self-design and self-realization." They were more sceptical, opposed political-moral indoctrination, and eagerly embraced various foreign ideas and cultures. They disobeyed the instructions of the elder generations and persisted in their own explorations. In the late 1980s, there were also many labels for them: "self-worshipping," "rebellious," "impatient," to name a few; perhaps most commonly, they were called the "me generation."[29]

29. For discussions on China from a generational perspective, see Li Zehou and Vera Schwarcz, "Six generations of modern Chinese intellectuals," *Chinese Studies in History*, Vol. 17 (Winter 1983–84), pp. 42–56; Michael Yahuda, "Political generations in China," *The China Quarterly*, No. 80 (December 1979), pp. 793–805; C. Montgomery Broaded, "The lost and found generation: cohort succession in Chinese higher education," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 23 (January 1990), pp. 77–95; Perry Link, *Evening Chats in Beijing* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), pp. 237–244; and Thomas B. Gold, "Youth and society," *The China Quarterly*, No. 127 (September 1991), pp. 594–612. In his article, Gold differentiates "cohort" from "generation."

Using the above framework, the general term "youths of the 1980s" often mixes up two distinctive age cohorts, or, as more commonly described in China, two "generations" that grew up in different social backgrounds and had different life experiences. When people used the term in the early 1980s, they generally referred to the third generation, whereas by the later years of the decade it meant the fourth generation. The most important distinction between the two is that the former had experienced the Cultural Revolution during their formative years while the latter had not. Although it is difficult to tell exactly when the expression the "youths of the 80s" shifted meaning, the college students coming to campuses after 1980 constituted an important part of the fourth generation.[30] After the student disturbances of 1986, the term was applied solely to this youth group.

In the early 1980s, the generational issue was mainly focused on the third generation. When Li Yanjie, Qu Xiao and the like addressed this generation, they shared the background of their audiences: similar education, experiences and ideals which came from the same "political era". These enabled the educators to understand youths' thoughts and desires, and their talks were therefore relatively well suited to the occasion. On the other hand, as a youth group "on the edge" and striding across two eras, the third generation inevitably bore the imprints of two different periods. Its long overlapping history with the second generation made the two ideologically and psychologically close, which gave them much common language during the time of rapid historical transition. One reason for the sympathetic and positive response among the third generation to Li's new-style ideological speeches was that he used these as a "common language" to bridge the gap between the second and third generations.

By the late 1980s, however, the social conditions in many parts of China had significantly changed, and so had the age-cohort meaning of "youth." Li and other educators were now mainly facing the fourth generation who had new traits and new quests which made cross-generational communication more difficult. Moreover, the youth educators persisted in applying their own beliefs and values to their audience, using the image of the second generation to mould the fourth, despite the fact that there was hardly any common foundation between the two, and in many cases their ideas and goals were in conflict with each other.

In the later years of the 1980s, the clash between the second and fourth generations was the most intense and noticeable aspect of

30. As Broaded says, after a brief window of opportunity in 1977–79 for students (of the third generation) who had been denied an earlier opportunity to attend university, "the educational authorities reduced the size of the recruitment pool by tightening age restrictions, so that only recent middle school graduates could sit for the entrance exams." The great majority admitted to colleges in 1980 came directly from high schools. Broaded, "The lost and found generation," p. 87. Also see Chen Lizhi, "Disidai daxuesheng jiazhiguan zouxiang qianxi" ("A shallow analysis of the value orientation of the college students of the fourth generation"), *Qingnian yanjiu*, No. 8 (August 1990), p. 17; and Yu Dian, "Dangdai Zhongguo qingnian zhishifenzi de daicha" ("The generation discrepancy of today's young intellectuals of China"), *Qingnian yanjiu*, No. 2 (February 1988), p. 46.

generational relations in Chinese society. "The focus is that the fathers keenly grieve that their children have lost the most valuable sense of responsibility and sense of mission, whereas the children insist on changing the way of life."[31] The second generation always believed in the superiority of their morality and this "superiority complex" made them demand that their children follow their examples. They were mostly concerned with, and made most comments on, the mentality and behaviour of the fourth generation. On the other hand, in the view of the fourth generation, parents had the least understanding of their children who had had fundamentally different formative experiences and characteristics. The fourth generation was to large extent the product of the commodity economy, pragmatic education and Western influence in the 1980s. As soon as they emerged in society, the second generation began to feel strange and uncomfortable, as well as hoping to admonish the young rebels with paternal authority. Unfortunately, one of the conspicuous traits of this generation was not taking their fathers seriously. "Therefore, if the second generation is averse to the fourth generation, that is quite natural; for the second generation who has been used to obedience, disobedience is almost unforgivable. But for the fourth generation, obedience is never the highest principle."[32]

One key to the difference in the values of the two generations can be found in their respective interpretations and usages of the concept of "self" (*ziwo*). The second generation was conditioned to view "self" as implying "selfishness" (*zisi*), which should be negated and suppressed with the Communist spirit of Lei Feng-style new socialist men. Therefore, most words with "self" as prefix used by the second generation had negative or restrictive meanings, such as self-criticism (*ziwo piping*), self-examination (*ziwo fanxing*), self-remoulding (*ziwo gaizao*) and so on, where the way of criticism, examination and remoulding was largely passive and dependent. To the fourth generation, however, the meaning of "self" was positive, implying active, constructive, independent and original things; the words it forms are self-consciousness (*ziwo yishi*), self-designing (*ziwo sheji*) and self-realization (*ziwo shixian*).[33]

One of the letters published in the *People's Daily* fully expressed the anger and aversion that many second-generation intellectuals had for the fourth generation. The author was obviously one of the many overseas Chinese youths who had given up affluent lives in other countries, left their families and returned to China to help the socialist construction in the early 1950s. With an explicit sense of moral superiority, the author showed deep contempt for modern gold diggers. He claimed that the youths who returned from abroad in the 1950s were idealists, not gold

31. Li Hongbing, "Daide yihuo – huxiang zhushi de sidairen he disidai ren" ("Puzzle of generations: the four generations facing at each other and the fourth generation"), *Renmin ribao*, 25 March 1989, p. 5.
32. Zhang Yongjie and Cheng Yuanzhong, *The Fourth Generation*, pp. 132–33.
33. *Ibid.* p. 203.

diggers. Even though the life was arduous and salaries were minimal, they worked very hard and did not have complaints. Moreover, despite the fact that the author experienced torture during the Anti-Rightist Movement and the Cultural Revolution, he, after being rehabilitated, still firmly believed in the policies of the Party.[34] The words of a political scientist conveyed the evaluations of the second generation on themselves and the fourth generation as well:

> We always see the interests of the motherland, the people and the Party as superior to everything else; [therefore we] make no apology to this era and society. This enterprising spirit and sense of responsibility is precisely what today's youths lack. In this transitional period, some youths actually do not understand and do not fit into the demands of the time, somewhat like the Western youths of the 1960s. ... [They] should often think of the motherland and people while coming up with their own designs and creations.[35]

Li Yangjie, Qu Xiao and Peng Qingyi all belonged to the second generation who were educated and socialized in the 1950s. In 1988, the year when the Shekou Storm occurred, Li was 58 years old, Qu was 56 and Peng 57. As some discussants pointed out, they had been nurtured by an overwhelming collectivism, and they had the valuable spirit of dedication. But they excessively eschewed personal will, individual consciousness and independent ideas; they saw the collective needs and the Party's arrangements as their own aspirations and ideals, and they were afraid of admitting and seeking personal interests. This accustomed mode of thinking made them frown upon the heterodoxies of the fourth generation who displayed strong independence and individualism, and sought for individual interests openly and boldly.[36]

The Shekou Storm showed that the youth educators of the second generation had failed to achieve their primary objective of persuading the youths of the fourth generation to give up their individual choices and return to the belief in collective values. The youths strongly defied both the format and the content of the moral education. For the fourth generation, "the greatest suffering is nothing other than inculcation."[37] A discussant thought the song "I Have Nothing" by Cui Jian, China's top rock-and-roll star, quite demonstrated the mentalities of this generation. "In their minds, there is no god in the world, [they] don't want to be

34. Huang Tianyou, "Wo dui taojin he zhengren de kanfa" ("My opinions on gold digging and punishing people"), *Renmin ribao*, 22 August 1988, p. 3.

35. Li Hongbing, "Puzzle of generations," p. 5.

36. Wang Yun, "Geming chuantong jiaoyu bixu jianchi" ("The revolutionary education tradition must be upheld"), *Renmin ribao*, 19 August 1988, p. 3; Ma Licheng, *The Shekou Storm*, pp. 163–64, 174, 327–28.

37. Zhang Yongjie and Cheng Yuanzhong, *The Fourth Generation*, p. 124.

bound up by abstract, rigid moral ideas."[38] An overseas Chinese student further criticized the "traditional way" of Chinese education:

> In Chinese history, education had always been from elder generations to younger ones. But from a historical perspective, the ideas of the new generations had always been more progressive than those of elder ones. ... The Shekou Storm indicates that some modernized youths are no longer willing to follow the rules passed on from Confucius, to listen obediently to the teachings of the elders; they also want to teach the elders. This is no doubt historical progress.[39]

Many young participants in the Shekou debates were local cadres of the Party or Youth League. It was they who often mounted the sharpest struggle against the youth educators. In return, the teachers were most disgusted with these young challengers. In the last days of August 1988 when the "storm" was reaching its highest level, Peng Qingyi was interviewed by Chen Jin, a young cadre of the Investigation and Research Department of the Party Committee of the Baiyun District, Guangzhou. When Chen asked if Peng felt that, under the new circumstances, the existing pattern of ideological work had become ineffective, Peng bitterly rebuked him: "Your generation is quite wildly arrogant, swollen with pride; whom do you think much of? Frankly speaking, how many are competent in your eyes? Not even Deng Xiaoping!"[40] Perhaps this comment can be seen as an extreme and desperate response of the second generation to the "historical progress" claimed by the fourth generation.

The metamorphosis of Chinese society in the 1980s produced a fourth generation that was launching an all-out assault against the values and moral principles cherished by its parents; and at the same time, forming its own generation-identity distinct from those of the other three generations in society. Zhang Yongjie, the 25-year-old author of *The Fourth Generation*, when interviewed by a reporter of *Chinese Youth Daily*, stated: "The establishment of generation-identity might need a symbolic activity as a turning point. It is hard to say what it is, but it is very likely to be the clear establishment of a certain concept that incarnates the will of the generation. ... By that time, their figures and faces will become clear to other people."[41] It may be too soon to draw a historical conclusion, but there may be reason to view the great democratic movement

38. Su Zhenshuang *et al.*, "Shekou chongjibo" ("The Shekou shock wave"), *Nanjing ribao* (*Nanjing Daily*), 30 August 1988. According to another article that analysed the fourth generation, this "I have nothing" mentality did not really mean a "value vacuum." Rather, the youths of this generation had the vagabond spirit; its most important characteristic was circumstantial ethics, which in their case led them to "I do whatever I feel right." See Liu Qing, "Cong 'wo bu xiangxin' dao 'yi wu suoyou': Xinshengdai wenhua de yanjiu beiwang lu ("From 'I do not believe' to 'I have nothing': a study note on the culture of the new generation"), *Dangdai qingnian yanjiu* (*Studies on Contemporary Youth*), No. 8 (August 1988), pp. 5–6. The English translation can be found in *Chinese Education*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 87–91.

39. Ma Licheng, *The Shekou Storm*, pp. 233–34.

40. *Ibid.* p. 124.

41. Nie Beiyin, "Disidai ren de liangnan xuanze – fang Disidai Ren zuozhe zhiyi Zhang Yongjie" ("Dilemma of the fourth generation: interview with Zhang Yongjie, one of the authors of *The Fourth Generation*"), *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, 1 October 1988, p. 2.

of 1989, which was centred on college students and their age cohort in urban areas, as an impressive feat revealing the overall political colour of the fourth generation. This kind of activity turned up repeatedly, indomitably and sometimes impetuously, such as in the student demonstrations at the end of 1986 which spread to about 150 universities and many cities, but they were not understood from the perspective of generational relations and generational conflicts. Moreover, if the 1988 book *The Fourth Generation* was the first theoretical effort which tried to describe the full image of this group of youth and remind the whole society of its value and potential, then the small incident that happened in the "tiny plot" of Shekou as well as the following nation-wide "storm" can be seen as spontaneous but very symbolic announcements by the off-campus majority of the fourth generation.

Political "Edge Ball" (cabianqiu) in the News Media

The Shekou Storm was also amplified by the news media to affect public opinion, and its social background was the resurgence of demands for political reform and press reform from late 1987 onwards. In the second half of 1987, in response to the pressure for political reform, Zhao Ziyang, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, advocated more dialogue between the leaders and masses in order to "raise political transparency" (*tigao zhengzhi touming du*), apparently a moderate echo of Gorbachev's glasnost.[42] As a result, the Party also gave the news media a little more space. This sign of new political liberalization undoubtedly encouraged new hopes for the long overdue press reform. The press was seen by the Party as one of the most important means of political and social control and therefore was kept under strict control. During the late 1970s and 1980s, the Party had opened many doors to reform, and had more or less loosened the reins on the news media, though very unwillingly and with repeated reversals. On the other hand, in these years, thousands of journalists not only advocated various unorthodox ideas of reform despite obvious political risks, but raised the demand for press reform and made sustained efforts to push for every inch of press freedom they could obtain.[43] Playing political "edge ball" was one of the main and successful strategies of China's press corps to propagate reform ideas and attack conservative forces.

Political "edge ball" refers to reports, discussions or debates initiated

42. Wu Guoguang, "The dilemmas of participation in the political reform of China, 1986–1988," in Roger Des Forges, Luo Ning and Wu Yanbo (eds.), *Chinese Democracy and the Crisis of 1989: Chinese and American Reflections* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 144.

43. For the efforts of journalists to promote press reform and political reform, see Michael Berlin, "The performance of the Chinese media during the Beijing Spring," Frank Tan, "The People's Daily and the epiphany of press reform," Judy Polumbaum, " 'Professionalism' in China's press corps," all in Des Forges, Luo Ning and Wu Yanbo, *Chinese Democracy and the Crisis of 1989*, pp. 263–275, 277–294, 295–311, respectively. Also see Li Mei, "Renmin ribao tongren de 'heping yanbian' shi" ("A history of the 'peaceful evolution' by the colleagues of *People's Daily*"), *Tan-so* (*The Quest*), Nos. 11, 12 (1992), Nos. 1, 2, 3 (1993).

by the press on issues that are sensitive and controversial but not too dangerous politically. Time and again, reporters and editors took advantage of the ambiguity, confusion and contradiction in government policies, reporting on controversial figures who emerged from the reform and their unorthodox activities, discussing sensitive policy issues, and "running controversial stories without even seeking permission that would have been routinely sought in the past."[44] For security reasons, the topics they chose and the language they used generally fell into an obscure or "grey" zone, just inside the lines set by the Party. In other words, they cautiously probed the tolerance of the Party, little by little pushed for more space for press and public opinions, and skilfully got involved in the politics of reform. In fact, in 1988 and the early months of 1989, especially in the south and south-east coastal areas, the press could be very active and aggressive in reporting and commenting on current affairs, as long as it did not openly criticize top leaders such as Deng Xiaoping, challenge the Four Cardinal Principles, or question the legitimacy of the Communist regime. Shanghai's weekly *Shijie jingji daobao* (*World Economic Herald*) was the best known for its consummate skill in these activities.[45] For example, right in the middle of the movement against bourgeois liberalization in 1987, it published positive reports on political reforms in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev. Anyone could understand the oblique references these reports made. In short, the political "edge ball" played by the press often effectively agitated public opinion, which constituted a certain pressure on the policy makers. It also had the function of weakening the political and ideological authority of the Communist Party. The Shekou Storm was a very successful case of this kind.

First, it was the press that turned an ordinary debate that occurred in a tiny spot into a nation-wide "storm." In this sense, it is not purely fictitious to say that the Shekou Storm was stirred up by the media.[46] When the Shekou debate happened on 13 January 1988, the offical newspaper of Shekou district, *Shekou Bulletin News*, originally did not want to publish a story about it. According to the editor-in-chief Zhang Mengfei, debates in Shekou were too common to be newsworthy. "However, the next day Qu Xiao gave a talk in Shenzhen, particularly attacking the youth of Shekou. What he said was shown on TV. Then there was also that infamous report. We felt we could not remain silent any more. We must protect the reputation of Shekou youths ... we decided to publish the story."[47] On 1 February *Shekou Bulletin News*

44. Polumbaum, " 'Professionalism' in China's press corps," p. 302.

45. For the political "edge ball" played by the *World Economic Herald* in the reform, see Cao Changqing, "Kangzheng de shengyin: Shijie jingji daobao" ("Sound of resistence: the *World Economic Herald*"), *Beijing zhi chun (Beijing Spring)*, February 1994, pp. 35–38.

46. Qu Xiao, "Qu Xiao on the Shekou Storm," pp. 10–12; Ma Licheng, *The Shekou Storm*, pp. 123–25; Liu Binjie, "Thoughts from the Shekou Storm," p. 3; and Xin Wenbu, "Why stir up the Shekou Storm," pp. 1, 4.

47. Zeng Xianbin, "Questions and answers," p. 1.

published on the front page the news entitled "A frank dialogue between Shekou youths and Qu Xiao, Li Yanjie – youth educators meet challenges from youths." This brought further discussion in the news media, thus becoming the beginning of a real "storm."

In March and April, *Shekou Bulletin News* published in a row three articles which were said to analyse this "conceptual clash" from theoretical perspectives: "Shekou: an intense confrontation between stale sermons and modern ideas" (28 March); "What other divergent views were there between Shekou youths and Qu Xiao as well as other comrades?" (11 April); and " 'The culture of gods suffocates human beings on all fronts' – thoughts from the debates between Li Yanjie, Qu Xiao and Shekou youth" (25 April). Because of these articles, the messages that the debates between the youth educators and Shekou youths were the "confrontation between stale sermons and modern ideas," and that "the traditional ideological education has lost its effectiveness" rapidly spread over the country, stirring up a great wave in the press. The newspapers of Guangzhou, Tianjin, Nanjing, Anhui, Sichuan, Beijing and other places reported and commented on this incident. Some newspapers even held special forums on it.[48] According to a critic after the suppression of the Beijing Spring in 1989, "basically the tune of all the articles that appeared in the newspapers overwhelmingly leaned to that of the newspaper in Shekou."[49] As a theorist said in a symposium held by *Shekou Bulletin News* in Beijing in July: "Shekou is a small place, but the newspaper can have a great impact."[50] *Shekou Bulletin News* was undoubtedly the initiator of the nation-wide discussion and played a leading role in the first few months of the "storm." Six months later, with the report "Questions and answers on the Shekou incident" on 6 August, *People's Daily*, the mouthpiece of the Party, took over the leading role. The 6 August report was seen as a "heavy bomb" which made a stormy sea stormier, reaching a high water mark. Nationally, as has been shown, several hundred newspapers published various reports and comments, and many famous people in the fields of theory, literature and journalism participated in the discussion.

The media not only reports news, but influences and even shapes public opinion. Prior to the involvement of the *People's Daily*, the press was almost overwhelmingly sympathetic to the Shekou youths; in apparent contrast, the 6 August report and following discussions in the *People's Daily* included opinions from both sides, seemingly objective and impartial. But the way of editing showed clear tendentiousness. To take the 6 August report as an example, it put four youth teachers – protagonists of the Shekou incident – on one side, and nine persons (including the administrative leader of Shekou, the editor-in-chief of *Shekou Bulletin News* and two others, none of whom attended the Shekou

48. Su Zhenshuang *et al.*, "The Shekou shock wave"; Zhang Shihong, "Confusions and choices," p. 3.
49. Xin Wenbu, "Why stir up the Shekou Storm," p. 4.
50. *Ibid.*

symposium) on the other side, more or less giving an impression of nine versus four, with all nine of the speakers criticizing the four educators. In Qu Xiao's words, "whatever we said, the other side refuted."[51] This at least indirectly displayed the attitude of the reporter who compiled the story and the editor who decided to publish it, if not the position of the newspaper. Moreover, in order to attract more people to take part in the discussion, *People's Daily* published two "inside comments" by the editorial department, which held opposite views to each other on the Shekou incident and political-ideological work, thus unprecedentedly making disagreements inside the newspaper known to the public. This move was both a gesture "raising the transparency of the newspaper, as a small step of press reform,"[52] and a message telling the audience and the whole media that these issues were subject to discussion and different opinions were allowed. This naturally evoked further challenges against orthodox doctrine and ideological education. No wonder all three youth educators had such grievances against the *People's Daily*, on various occasions repeatedly blaming it for "not reporting our opinions accurately and comprehensively," "writing accounts inconsistent with the facts," "being irresponsible," "affecting public opinion," and "confusing people's minds." They charged that, by running the discussion in the way it did, *People's Daily* in fact "negated our Party's long-standing good tradition of ideological-political work," "negated the long-time valuable contribution of ideological-political workers," "dampened the enthusiasm of a great many of them, and brought about improper loss to the cause of the Party."[53] The impact went far beyond that intended by the protagonists of the Shekou incident. Some people in Hefei, Anhui province, expressed the worry commonly felt by many ideological-political workers: "Li Yanjie and other comrades have been loyal to the Party and worked diligently and conscientiously for the Party. If *People's Daily* as the Party's newspaper does not back them up, this will make many comrades doing ideological work for the Party feel bitterly disappointed."[54]

The unusual format was also shown in the editing of the debates on the focal issue of value judgments about the gold diggers. Dozens of letters and articles with diversified views appeared in the *People's Daily*, and the newspaper made neither guiding comments nor criticism of the individualism that was represented by the Shekou gold diggers and which was against what was later to be called the "principal melody of socialist spiritual civilization: the ideological education of patriotism, collectivism

51. Qu Xiao, "Qu Xiao on the Shekou Storm," pp. 11–12.
52. *Renmin ribao* editorial note, 8 August 1988, p. 3.
53. Li Yanjie, Qu Xiao and Peng Qingyi, "What did we really say," p. 3; Ma Licheng, *The Shekou Storm*, pp. 127, 317–18; Qu Xiao, "Qu Xiao on the Shekou Storm," pp. 10–12. Four years later, Li Yanjie was still very bitter, claiming that the true story of the Shekou incident had never been reported. See Stanley Rosen, "The effect of post-4 June re-education campaigns on Chinese students," *The China Quarterly*, No. 134 (June 1993), p. 330.
54. Zhong Shizhen, "Cultural mentality," p. 3.

and socialism."[55] This seemingly impartial posture in practice did not fulfil the duty to maintain the inviolability of the orthodox ideology. The Party's newspaper departed from the Party's line, and, in the words of a critic, "caused theoretical confusion."[56] The newspaper in fact provided opportunities and space for the critics of official doctrine to speak out publicly. Given the fact that the newspaper had long been viewed as the official voice of the Party, this position may have led many people to conclude that the Party's policy had changed. This impression was in turn bound to inspire and enhance the denunciation by other newspapers of political education and orthodox ideology, and to help spread the influence of unorthodox ideas.

According to Qu Xiao, in early September 1988, the deputy editor-in-chief of *People's Daily* and the director of its Commentary Department visited the educators and apologized for the "fault" in publishing the 6 August report. They also asked the youth educators to write another article, which the newspaper would publish as the end of the discussion.[57] It is not known whether the "apology" from *People's Daily* was due to pressure from above. On 12 September the newspaper did publish an article entitled "What did we really say?" by the three educators. But interestingly, on 14 September, it again published two diametrically opposed "inside comments" on a news report "the Shekou Storm in Shekou" (*Shekou fengbo zai Shekou*) that had appeared in the newspaper of 2 September. Instead of giving an authoritative conclusion to the discussion and drawing a clear line between right and wrong, which had been the traditional pattern of "open" discussions in the press, *People's Daily* printed an obscure but meaningful editorial note:

> Obviously, the readers hold different views on these issues. Even within the editorial department of this newspaper, there has been a divergence of opinions. Temporary differences in understanding some issues is a normal phenomenon. ... It is unnecessary to draw conclusions hastily on certain issues, and it would be useless to do so. Practice is the sole criterion of truth. When several years in the future we look back at the past, [we] may eventually realize that everything [we have debated] is in fact clear.[58]

Not hastily drawing a conclusion does not necessarily mean that there was no conclusion. In the past, the newspapers had organized many discussions, in which usually the majority of the letters that appeared held the officially correct standpoint, and only a few selected divergent arguments were published for the purpose of contrast and criticism. But the whole Shekou debate displayed a very different picture: the great majority of responses the press received and published were directly or indirectly opposed to the orthodox doctrine. The tendency or conclusion

55. The editorial of *People's Daily* on 25 June 1993, reiterating what Jiang Zemin, the General Secretary of the Party, set forth in Shanghai in November 1992. According to Jiang, these three "isms" should be used to resist the flagging of the senses of responsibility and morality spreading in the society (*Renmin ribao*, 25 June 1993, p. 1).

56. Liu Binjie, "Thoughts from the Shekou Storm," p. 3.

57. Qu Xiao, "Qu Xiao on the Shekou Storm," p. 12.

58. *Renmin ribao* editorial note, 14 September 1988, p. 3.

was self-evident, but did not fit into the official ideological frame and meet the Party's needs; therefore it could not be explicitly stated in the official newspapers, at least not in the "mouthpiece of the Party." This unconventional way of ending the discussion is itself very significant in that it was not so much a way to strike a balance as to convey the conclusion which the readers already knew. Anyone who was familiar with the standard format of the newspaper-run discussions could easily decipher the real situation from this unusual move of *People's Daily*.

In short, from Zeng Xianbin's tendentious "Questions and answers on the Shekou incident" to the suggestive concluding words of the Editorial Department, the leading role of *People's Daily* in promoting heterodox public opinions during the Shekou Storm was obvious to all, though contradicting the supposed function of the Party's mouthpiece. Because of the role – political "edge ball" – played by the media, particularly the *People's Daily*, the orthodox ideology and value system as well as their authoritative representatives fell into a very difficult and awkward position. That is why these loyal ideological workers bore grudges against the press. As Qu Xiao bluntly put it, the *People's Daily* in the Shekou Storm administered "a stab in the back."[59]

It was also noticeable that the press published and transmitted a lot of messages which slightly exceeded the bounds allowed by the Party. For example, the debate unfolded around the legitimate question of how to "improve the ideological work in the new era," which was also the reason why the discussion could last such a long time and have so wide an influence. Apparently, the authorities allowed the debate in the hope that the participants would confine it to the issue of "improving" (*gaijin*) ideological work, but most discussants used another term, *gaizao* (reform, remould).[60] In the forum held by the *Nanjing Daily*, some people specifically discussed why *gaizao* was used to describe what was needed in ideological-political work while *gaige* (reform) was used for everything else. They said it might be because *gaizao* implied the search for a n··· system with different aims from those of the past.[61] In Chinese, the term *gaizao* has two basic meanings: revising the original thing to suit the need; and fundamentally changing the old and establishing the new to suit the new situation and need.[62] When Li, Qu and Peng, by citing the words of "central leaders," claimed that to reform (*gaizao*) ideological-political work "does not mean to negate the long-term good tradition of ideological-political work of our Party,"[63] they obviously referred to the first meaning of the term. But from the context of numerous other articles, people got the impression that most discussants used the second meaning.

59. Qu Xiao, "Qu Xiao on the Shekou Storm," p. 12.

60. It might be Zhao Ziyang who first used the phrase "gaizao sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo" ("reform ideological-political work"). See Xin Wenbu, "Why stir up the Shekou Storm," p. 4.

61. Su Zhenshuang *et al.*, "The Shekou shock wave."

62. *Xiandai hanyu cidian* (*Modern Chinese Dictionary*) (Beijing: Shangwu chubanshe, 1979), p. 345.

63. Li Yanjie, Qu Xiao and Peng Qingyi, "What did we really say," p. 3.

More often than not, the audience read such messages in the newspapers as meaning "traditional ideological-political work has been rigorously challenged in style and content," "its basic model and value conceptions need to be remoulded," or even more straightforwardly, "the traditional ideological-political work will vanish along with the development of the commodity economy."[64]

Li Yanjie and Qu Xiao were the representatives of ideological education in the 1980s. Although there had been some criticism of and resentment towards them,[65] because of the Party's control over the press, nothing negative about them could be read in the media, and different voices could be heard only in unofficial situations. During the Shekou Storm, for the first time, the open challenge to the whole idea of ideological-political work and its agents came directly from the Party's propaganda machine. In the purge of the press after June 1989, the official mouthpieces repeatedly accused some newspapers of having mounted the Shekou Storm for the purpose of abolishing ideological-political work in the name of reform (*gaizao*).[66]

Freedom of speech was another obvious subject people seized on and made an issue of during the "storm." To the media under the supervision of the Party, freedom of speech and the press had been an extremely sensitive topic and a politically forbidden zone. But during the Shekou Storm, many ideas and arguments advocating freedom of speech appeared in the press. Shanghai's *Qingnian yidai* (*Youth Generation*) published an article which mentioned with admiration the bold words of Shekou youths such as "Shekou should be special both economically and politcally," "public ownership must be changed in order to benefit the commodity economy," "the thought of making money is a patriotic idea," and so on. Although these opinions were somehow a little too naive, extreme and idealistic, the author commented, "there has never been the custom in Shekou of punishing people because of what they say." The Shekou youths were fortunate because they after all grew up in a "free environment which relieves people of fear" (in the words of Yuan Geng, a Shekou top administrative official). At the end of the article, the author quoted again Yuan Geng's comments: "there is freedom in Shekou, but I think Chinese young people of today should have more freedom."[67]

Shekou Bulletin News was proud of Shekou's free environment which rid people of fear. "In the past nine years no one in Shekou had labels stuck on him and has been judged politically because of what he said.

64. Zeng Xianbin, "Questions and answers," p. 1; Yang Fan, "Collision of new and old ideas," p. 5.

65. Zhong Peizhang, the Chair of the Press Bureau of the Central Propaganda Department of the Party, mentioned that, two years before the Shekou Storm, a graduate student asked him a sharp question: "the reform needs to stimulate people opening up, initiating, bringing to full play the intelligence, talent, and creativity of every person. Why did [the authorities] praise Qu Xiao and continue the propagation of [the ideas of] obedient tools and denial of individual personalities?" (Zhong Peizhang, "Probing the problem," p. 3.)

66. Xin Wenbu, "Why stir up the Shekou Storm," p. 4.

67. Shi Fang, "The inspiration of Shekou youths," p. 5.

Shekou has already moved a historic step in enabling people to speak out their own opinions without scruple."[68] The reporters of *Nanjing Daily* wrote a long record of the forum the newspaper organized, using such subheadings as "Watch out for 'power [means] truth'," "There should be a Shekou environment," "Silence is most terrible," "Still the problem of system," "Eating and democracy are both important," and so on. In the discussion, a local CYL cadre was not impressed by the ideas of Shekou youths; as he put it, "some of their ideas could hardly match ours." The "incident" happened in Shekou because of its free environment, which was the most important advantage the SEZ had over inland areas. The reason why the political air inland remained stagnant was the political structure. The report informed the audience that there should be a larger "Shekou environment" which relieved people of fear so that their real opinions could be heard. Someone mentioned that, in a survey of about 200 high-level leaders, 91.7 per cent of them thought newspapers provided too little space and too few opportunities for the masses to express their opinions.[69] Even in the *People's Daily*, people cannot read how Yuan Geng, the senior cadre of the Party and top leader of Shekou, steadfastly upheld the Four Cardinal Principles, but instead that he firmly supported the "bourgeois" principle of free speech by quoting the idea of Voltaire: "I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to my death your right to say it."[70]

Through the propagation of the press, Shekou became not only the pioneer of economic reform, but also an example of future political change – more freedom of speech. After the Beijing Spring started and the 26 April editorial of *People's Daily* which defined the student movement as "turmoil" was published, another article appeared in *Shekou Bulletin News* on 1 May 1989, which proudly stated that "Shekou and Beijing University are two bright spots on the land of the country, one in the south, the other in the north, ... both have only a few square kilometres and a few tens of thousands of people, [but] vigorously advocate democracy and freedom."[71]

A New Discourse and its Political Meaning

The hundreds of articles and discussions on gold diggers, on ethics, morality, obligation and freedom under the commodity economy, and on the relationship of individuals to society include many fresh phrases, vocabularies and concepts which are different from the official language and orthodoxy. As Mark Poster says, "language is not simply a tool for expression, it is also a structure that defines the limits of communication and shapes the subjects who

68. Wei Haitian, "Shekou," p. 3.
69. Su Zhenshuang *et al.*, "The Shekou shock wave."
70. Zeng Xianbin, "Questions and answers," p. 1.
71. Xiao Tang, "Shekou qingnian de jiazhiguan" ("Values of the Shekou youths"), *Shekou tongxun bao*, 1 May 1989, p. 3.

speak."[72] Some specially designed languages are particularly suited to this function. Historically constructed language customs, once fallen into a pattern or a discourse, will tend to monopolize political discussion and communication. In some sense, the ideological shackles of the Communist Party were put on society by a series of officially approved expressions and concepts, in short, by official language. Indeed, language norms and customs function as a deep structure underlying people's thoughts and ways of thinking, and are therefore very difficult to change.

During the Shekou Storm, what Li Yanjie, Qu Xiao and Peng Qingyi spoke was still the established and officially approved language which expressed the orthodox ideologies and values. They strove to correct the unorthodox wording and conceptions of the Shekou youths and lead them back to the official discourse. Moreover, in fact, Li and Qu themselves, like Lei Feng before them, had become a symbol in the 1980s. Their names represented a series of established political meanings and value judgments, and the officially "reformed" ideological education and socialist moral standards. Hence, the challenge to them was a challenge to the orthodox discourse, and an attempt to break the restraint of hegemonic ideology. The Shekou Storm made "Shekou youth" into a concept or symbol that represented a different set of assumptions, conceptualizations and judgments – in short, a newly-emerged unorthodox discourse.

Indeed, many people noticed the great discrepancies between the two poles of the debate in their conceptions, modes of thinking and vocabularies.[73] Different language and conceptual definitions reflected different systems of logic and exposition. Much new jargon and many new terms which carried heterodox ideas emerged from, and spread through, official newspapers. That was bound to corrode gradually the power of the discourse of the Party culture, and seriously weaken the control of official language over people's minds. The concepts and terms used by the Shekou youths and their supporters, such as gold diggers, self-designing, self-realization, individualism, individual standard, pluralistic values, freedom of speech, dialogue on an equal basis, professional ethics, spirit of enterprise, and so on, might not be really "new" since most of them had been around for some time and were prevalent in the West. But when they appeared in so many state newspapers in such large numbers and with such great frequency, and, more importantly, when they were given positive meanings, they certainly performed the function of remoulding the way of thinking by providing an alternative set of social rationales, a new theoretical framework, and a new realm of "common comprehension." In short, they helped give birth to a new and heterodox discourse which could immeasurably undermine the Party-authoritative discourse and the authority of the Party itself. As Lynn Hunt points out in another

72. Mark Poster, *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism: In Search of a Context* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 128.

73. Zeng Xianbin, "Questions and answers," p. 1; Wang Haitao, "Shengchanli biaozhun he sixiang gongzuo" ("The criterion of productivity and ideological work"), *Renmin ribao*, 7 September 1988, p. 1; Ma Licheng, *The Shekou Storm*, pp. 175–77.

context: "Words did not just reflect social and political reality; they were instruments for transforming reality."[74]

Conclusion

To a large extent, all the three major events which occurred in 1988 – *River Elegy*, New Authoritarianism and the Shekou Storm – bore the stamp of Western ideological and cultural influences. To use the generational differentiation discussed in this article, *River Elegy* and New Authoritarianism were the results of efforts of young intellectuals of the third generation, who were inspired by Western modernization theory, to search for China's path to cultural and political change. The Shekou Storm, on the other hand, revealed on a broader social scale the changes in ethics and lifestyle of the fourth generation resulting from the re-emergence of a commodity economy in China with Western blessing and ideological support. The cultural reflections of *River Elegy*, the political speculation of New Authoritarianism and the social debates of the Shekou Storm were all important components of the general intellectual atmosphere and social crisis leading up to the mass movement of 1989. They both mirrored and were parts of a new trend of social thought, or a new ideology. Again, that ideology – market liberalism – had existed in China before and may not be "new" to people in the West, but it certainly differed from the Sinicized Communist ideology which had dominated Chinese thought in recent decades. It did not just threaten the paramount authority of the Communist regime which had been based on this belief system; it also presented once again alternative ideas about life, society and the nation to the Chinese people. When the *People's Daily* concluded the discussion on the Shekou Storm, it stated that when people looked back at the past after several years, the issues that had been discussed would be clear. Now, more than six years later, at least one thing is quite clear: the changes in youth values, outlooks and behaviour, and in social mores in general had already become a forceful current which would breach established barriers, affect public opinion and lead eventually to Tiananmen Square.

74. Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 17.