

Intellectuals in Social Development in China

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China

25–27 January 2002
Beijing, China

The crucial question of the role of Chinese intellectuals towards the (Party) state, which occupied generations of elite intellectuals throughout the past century, was one of the issues at the conference on 'Intellectuals in Social Development in China'. Social development in this context also means political development. With the development of more professionalism and the anticipated dominance of technocrats among the political elite, the search for overall ideological solutions for the development of society became an outdated question.

By Nora Sausmikat

The opening remarks and keynote speakers were well chosen but four out of six speakers were not present personally and their speeches needed to be read out by somebody else. These keynote speakers included, among others, Li Rui (the former deputy minister of the organizational department of the Central Committee and former secretary of Mao Zedong), Liu Ji (the former deputy chairman of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, consultant of Jiang Zemin and head of the propaganda department, today head of the Sino-Euro international business school), Wu Jiang (a former close

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This conference was organized by the department of international politics under Prof. Zhao Baoxu and Prof. Shen Mingming. The participants were scholars from various disciplines and foreign countries (Australia, Denmark, Singapore, USA), but also former high-level politicians and old cadres, prominent writers, and journalists. The majority of participants came from China or were overseas Chinese.

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- 1 The May Fourth debate refers to the debates during the May Fourth movement in 1919, the urban intellectuals movement that started as a reaction to the unequal Versailles treaty and saw the solution to China's problems in the institutionalization of 'democracy and science'.
- 2 Hu Yaobang (1915–1989), Chinese Communist political leader, became general secretary of the Communist party in 1980 and party chairman in 1981, effectively replacing Hua Guofeng as leader of the Communist party. In the wake of student demonstrations for greater democracy, to which he was thought to be sympathetic, he was forced to resign as party secretary in 1987. In 1989, upon his death, students renewed their protests.
- 3 Li Dazhao (1888–1927), professor of history and librarian at Beijing University, was co-founder of the Chinese Communist party in 1921. He was a leader in the May Fourth movement and organized several Marxist study groups.
- 4 Sun Yatsen (1844–1925) was the founder of the Guomindang (Chinese Nationalist Party) and the first president of the Republic of China. He has been canonized and worshipped by both the Guomindang and the Communists as a national cult figure and, in particular, by the former as the source of political legitimacy since 1925. His 'three principles of the people' (*san min zhu yi*), have been propagated as the guiding principle for the reconstruction of China as a modern democracy.

associate of Hu Yaobang and dean of the education department at the Party's university), and the former vice president of Beijing University, Ji Xianlin. Li Rui's long speech introduced the central problem of the conference: the (self-)definition and function of Chinese intellectuals in a non-democratic environment. He demanded in an unusually open manner democratic reforms, a free press, and the phasing out of the long enduring, totalitarian dictatorship. Simultaneously he called for the realization of 'real Marxism'. Like the following speakers, he also focused on the reflection of the role of intellectuals since the May Fourth movement of 1919,¹ and addressed both the central question 'Who are we?' and the necessity to protect independence as well as a critical spirit.

Throughout the whole conference, the most heated debates were caused by such themes as the evaluation of Hu Yaobang,² the emancipation of intellectuals as an important modernization force, and the question of whether the implementation of a democratic system could help to free intellectuals from their dependency on the party.

The evaluation of the role of intellectuals in Chinese history was also concerned with their traditional dependence on politicians and their lack of independence. Yu Keping (Beijing, Centre for Comparative Politics), for example, demonstrated by using the destinies of prominent people like Qu Qiubai, an important protagonist of the May Fourth movement and scholar of Li Dazhao,³ that too much critical spirit will only lead to failure. Yu and many other participants used an old metaphor of Mao Zedong, '[i]ntellectuals are the hair on the skin', i.e. they do not possess their own skin. Li Jingpeng (Beijing University), on the other hand, stated that Mao Zedong's description of intellectuals was wrong. So as to prove that intellectuals are the central force for modernization, he referred to the Enlightenment movement (1915–1919) and to the 'Enlightenment movement of scientific socialism' from 1919 to 1921. In his closing remarks he urged the intellectuals – despite their major role in modernization – to work on their weaknesses, i.e. peasant consciousness, grade orientation, and opportunism.

The journalist Yang Jisheng from the Xinhua news agency provocatively stated that there is no such group as intellectuals in China if defined as an independent group. Other more substantial critiques reflected on the Party's history, especially the anti-rightist movement and the Cultural Revolution. Zhao Baoxu and others with him stated that without open reflection and much more detailed research on the

Cultural Revolution there would be no chance for democratization in China. Notwithstanding the positive evaluation by Cai Decheng (editor of *Keji Daobao* (Science Report)), that intellectuals became emancipated during the 1990s and his call for active support entrance into the WTO because this would guarantee stability and human rights in the long run, the discussion returned to the definition of intellectuals. Xu Xianglin (Beijing University) pointed to the necessity of producing 'big democratic thinkers' to promote modernization, while others like the nationalist Pan Wei (Beijing University) questioned whether China needs democracy at all. He argued that democracy is a Western product that nobody understands anyway.

Xu Datong (Tianjin University) deconstructed in a very interesting way the belief of some Western and Chinese scholars, that Sun Yatsen's⁴ theory of the 'three principles of the people' can be identified as a condensed form of ancient, democratic ideas in China. He highlighted the aspect that only the preservation of power and stability pressured the rulers to be concerned with the people, and that the concept of 'the three principles' has nothing to do with democracy. Qin Hui, another protagonist of the search for indigenous elements of democracy, who has slowly advanced to become 'China's Habermas', elaborated the tensions between the three philosophical schools of Confucianism, legalism, and Taoism and compared them with liberalism. In the eyes of Qin Hui China's hope lies in the formation of a 'new Confucianism', which creates a theory of the people and not of the state. Feng Chongyi (Sydney University) analysed the changing role of intellectuals confronting commercialization and globalization and discerns new possibilities of independence for professionals.

There was wide consensus that intellectuals should not be treated as instruments for politicians. Interestingly and partly due to the possibility for debates, the discussions did much more to reveal the concern of the participants than did the papers. Against the background of the recent debates inside China, the hot topic was political reform. All in all the conference was very well organized, the organizers provided the participants with a lot of information besides the copies of the papers. <

Dr Nora Sausmikat is research associate at Duisburg University, Political Sciences, East Asia Institute, and is currently working in a project on the influence of democracy discourses on political reform (chaired by Prof. Heberer). She obtained her PhD with a dissertation on the memory of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Her research interests include democracy and political transition, history of Chinese intellectuals, biography research, national reflection on the past, and women's studies.
sausmikat@uni-duisberg.de
nsausmikat@aol.com

Chinese Communities in the Netherlands

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China

9 March 2002
Amsterdam, the Netherlands

'The Research Network on Chinese Communities in the Netherlands' meeting proved that interest in its activities has greatly increased, not only among researchers but also among representatives from non-governmental organizations, state organs, and the general public. The (morning session) presentations of research on young and single asylum seekers from China and on the Chinese community in Batavia during the nineteenth century were attended by people related to the Chinese communities in the Netherlands (including its former colonies and Belgium) in many different ways: as police and immigration officers, interpreters, workers in social welfare, and of course as researchers. During the afternoon symposium on 'China in the Netherlands', three public lectures and discussions were held in addition to video showings.

By Leo Douw

Mirjam Blaak and Frenny de Frenne (the Pharos Foundation, Utrecht) dwelled on the present life situation of young and single asylum seekers from China, and on how the asylum seekers themselves experience this situation. They made clear that lit-

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'The Research Network on Chinese Communities in the Netherlands' meeting was funded and organized by Asian Studies in Amsterdam, the University of Amsterdam, and the International Institute for Asian Studies.

tle systematic knowledge on these comparatively recent arrivals exists and that research on such a group informs us on the group itself, but also on the treatment that Dutch public organizations give them. Leonard Blussé and Menghong Chen (both of Leiden University) focussed on the so-called Kong Koan archives from Batavia in the Netherlands East Indies, which covers the administration of the Chinese community in Batavia from the mid-eighteenth until the mid-twentieth century. Its materials allow an often-perplexing view on how the Dutch colonial administration ruled its cul-

tural minorities, and how that experience may serve discussions on present-day migrant politics and society.

The public lectures in the afternoon intended to counteract the ingrained manner of thinking, which views globalization processes as a one-sided movement extending Western culture, ideology, and organization to the East. Paul Geense (Erasmus University Rotterdam) pointed to the dangers of this approach by positing that the infamous Dover Incident in the year 2000, in which 58 Chinese were killed, was not sufficiently followed up by the Dutch authorities. These authorities consistently ignore that Chinese entrepreneurs, also those residing in the Netherlands, have an interest in human trafficking. Barend ter Haar (Leiden University) provided a handful of telling examples of how artifices of Chinese culture, such as Chinese traditional medicine, and the practice of geomancy are misinterpreted by Dutch 'adepts', who adapt them to their own uses. Christiaan Jörg (University of Groningen) nicely illustrated the overwhelming Chinese

presence in the Netherlands in the shape of massive porcelain imports and uses from the seventeenth century onwards. The lectures were alternated by the showing of Yan Ting Yuen's impressive documentary *Chin.Ind.*, which deals with the experience of a Cantonese migrant couple who survive successfully but rather unhappily in the Netherlands by working in a Chinese restaurant.

During the past few years, a new stage in the situation of migrant communities has been reached, due to the rise of the leftist anti-globalization movement and more recently the rightist anti-terrorism rhetoric. The increased interest in the research on Chinese communities in the Netherlands is an apparent result of these changes, warranting a follow-up meeting, which is to provide a broadly based forum for discussion. <

Dr Leo Douw is a lecturer of Modern Chinese History and Society at the University of Amsterdam and the Free University Amsterdam.
lm.douw@let.vu.nl