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TOTALITARIANIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN CHINA AND THEIR IMPLICATION FOR THE NATION'S POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The argument of my paper is that higher education in China is going through a process of totalitarianization and democratization at the same time. On the one hand there are organizational controls and ideological indoctrination of students and cooptation of the faculty by the Party-state. On the other hand, there are democratic breakthroughs on the part of both students and professors. Whatever happens in the ivory tower inevitably affects what happens outside of it. Whether the Party-state is going in the direction of totalitarianism or democracy depends on the result of the tug-of-war between the forces of totalitarianization and democratization in both state and society. My analysis is based on an examination of the available data in research from a perspective of the sociology of higher education. I hope that a better understanding of what happens at the university and the role of higher education in China's development will help all the stakeholders of higher education in making wiser policies and practical decisions.

Keywords

China, Higher Education, Democratization, Totalitarianization, Intellectuals.

Resumo

O argumento do meu artigo é que o ensino superior na China atravessa um processo de totalitarização e democratização ao mesmo tempo. Por um lado, existem controlos organizacionais e doutrinação ideológica dos estudantes e cooptação do corpo docente pelo Partido-Estado. Por outro lado, há avanços democráticos por parte de estudantes e

professores. O que quer que aconteça na torre de marfim afeta inevitavelmente o que acontece fora dela. Se o Partido-Estado está a caminhar na direcção do totalitarismo ou da democracia depende do resultado da disputa entre as forças da totalitarização e da democratização, tanto no Estado como na sociedade. A minha análise baseia-se na análise dos dados disponíveis em pesquisas sob uma perspectiva da sociologia do ensino superior. Espero que uma melhor compreensão do que acontece na universidade e do papel do ensino superior no desenvolvimento da China ajude todos os intervenientes no ensino superior a tomarem medidas e decisões práticas mais sábias.

Palavras-chave

China, Ensino superior, Democratização, Totalitarização, Intelectuais.

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TOTALITARIANIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN CHINA AND THEIR IMPLICATION FOR THE NATION'S POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

ZHIDONG HAO

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s own experience tells us that whoever controls the intellectuals and university students will control the future of the country. Thus, totalitarianization or democratization in higher education is of paramount importance for the ruling CCP's goal to keep power in its own hands. Success in control of the university is an indication of success in other fields of life.

My argument in this paper is that totalitarianization and democratization in higher education in China happen at the same time, although the former is the dominant mode under the current CCP rule. The two are at a stalemate. But political repression and economic growth are not enough to legitimize the CCP control, and in the long run, the Party will have to democratize if it wants to stay in power. An analysis and understanding of how totalitarianization and democratization work in higher education is important for us to understand in which direction China may go in the future since colleges and universities play an important role in the political development of the entire nation.

It is true that what we discuss in this paper cannot represent all of higher education in China since most of our data is based on studies of only a few higher education institutions in China. Statistics for 2017 show that China had 2,913 colleges and universities with a student number of close to 38 million (Ministry of Education, 2018a). But they should still give us a fairly good idea of what is happening in higher education since the political nature of the Chinese state makes it probable that what happens in one university will happen in other universities as well.

In the following pages, I first explain the nature of the Chinese state in terms of authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Then I examine the historical role of higher education from a sociological point of view. Thirdly and fourthly, I illustrate the totalitarianization and democratization of college students and professors respectively. This will be followed by a conclusion.

The Nature of the Chinese State: From Authoritarianism to Totalitarianism

It seems that China is entering a new era. It may be entering a revolutionary period following Deng Xiaoping's reform and Jiang Zemin's and Hu Jintao's rejuvenation (see Cheek, 2015, on the three recurring periods in China's modern history and Zhidong Hao 2020a for an explanation). If many scholars believe that the eras of Deng, Jiang, and Hu were characterized by resilient authoritarianism (Nathan, 2003; Minxin Pei, 2003), the Xi Jinping era may be moving towards totalitarianism, or in Fukuyama's (2020) term, "aspiring" totalitarianism, or what Ringen (2016) calls "perfect dictatorship". I call this a totalitarianization process.

What is the difference between authoritarianism and totalitarianism? Huntington (1991:12) defines a traditional authoritarian regime as one that "is characterized by a single leader or a small group of leaders, no party or a weak party, no mass mobilization, possibly a 'mentality' but no ideology, limited government, 'limited, not responsible, political pluralism,' and no effort to remake society and human nature." This might be true under Deng, Jiang, and Hu when collective leadership by the standing committee members of the Politburo was emphasized, the CCP occasionally tried to place more responsibility on the administrative leaders rather than the Party leaders, and limited civil society organizations were encouraged. To be sure, there was still a one-Party dictatorship, and the Marxist ideology was strongly adhered to, at least verbally. But the society by and large was more open than under Mao. So it makes sense for scholars like Andrew Nathan and Minxin Pei to debate a resilient authoritarianism.

But things have changed since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012. Although Xi has inherited many control mechanisms from the previous eras, as we will discuss later, he has consolidated them in various ways so that the system now more resembles totalitarianism. Hannah Arendt's (1958) seminal work on the origins of totalitarianism discussed "the Leader's absolute monopoly of power and authority" or the regime's "unlimited power" (pp. 405 and 456), absolute control (p. 341), ideological indoctrination (pp. 6, 341), terror (p. 341), organization (p. 364), and concentration and extermination camps (p. 437). Huntington (1992:12) further defines a totalitarian regime as one that is characterized by "a single party, usually led by one man; a pervasive and powerful secret police; a higher developed ideology setting forth the ideal society, which the totalitarian movement is committed to realizing; and government penetration and control of mass communications and all or most social and economic organizations" (see also Fukuyama, 2020)

The reeducation camps in Xinjiang are not concentration camps but they do bear many similarities. China under Xi also embodies other characteristics of totalitarianism. Every corner of the country is under the Party's control (*dong xi nan bei zhong, dang shi lingdao yiqie de*東西南北中，黨是領導一切的), and all in China will have to submit to one ruler (*dingyu yizun*定於一尊). Nobody can "issue groundless criticism of the CCP decisions and

policies" (*wang yi zhongyang* 妄議中央), meaning that no-one can criticize the Party-state and its paramount leader for whatever they do. The dominant ideology will be the "China dream" (*zhongguo meng*中國夢), or the revival of the Chinese nation, an ideal society everybody is supposed to be committed to realizing. The CCP branches have to be established in civil society organizations (if there are still any left) and even in private enterprises. The traditional mass media has to follow the Party line closely, and social media is closely watched so that anything that might deviate from the Party line will be quickly deleted. So almost all the indicators of totalitarianism are there. It then makes sense to talk about totalitarianism and totalitarianization at this stage of China's development with the understanding that it is built on the authoritarian mechanisms created by Xi's predecessors, and in many senses, it is reverting to Mao, or in Fukuyama's (2020) terms, reviving "parts of the old Maoist model."

But at the same time, there are also forces of democratization. After all, Chinese intellectuals and political elites have strived for more than a century for the democratization of China. As Cheek (2015) points out, democracy is an enduring idea throughout the past 100 years and more (see also Zhidong Hao, 2020a). Even in earlier eras, there was a tradition of literati activism critical of the royal court (Elman, 1989). The Chinese democracy movement later has gone through many forms in many generations including Liang Qichao's democracy for the elites, Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles, Chiang Kai-shek's stages from military rule to provisional constitutional rule and then to constitutional rule, and Mao Zedong's democratic centralism and people's democratic dictatorship, etc. Mao won the support of many intellectuals in his revolution because he claimed to build a democratic state. Many believed him first and then were disappointed. But that has not stopped intellectuals from continuing to strive for the democratization of China, for example, in the 1950s by the so-called "rightists", and in the 1980s by student movements and open-minded Party leaders like Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. Even when Xi Jinping is moving toward totalitarianism, some human rights lawyers, university professors, and other intellectuals have continued to challenge Xi's policies on the suppression of the freedom of speech, on the Party's ethnic policies, the Belt and Road Initiative, etc. although such efforts have become increasingly difficult inside China.

In a nutshell, totalitarianization and democratization coexist even though the former dominates China now. How does higher education fare in this tug-of-war between the two, then? That is what this paper wants to explore. But first I will examine the historical role of higher education in China's political development from a sociological point of view before we come to the politics of higher education in contemporary times.

The Historical Role of Higher Education in China's Political Development

igher education, public or private, plays at least three roles: to serve the interests of the state, to produce professional and independent new knowledge, and to produce democratic citizens. Kant thought that the mission of the university "was to serve two primary functions: first, to provide educated bureaucrats for the state, and second, to conduct research whose goal was the production of new knowledge" (cited in Taylor, 2010: 18). This covers at least the first two roles. Weber (1973: 20) says that the state may require those in the university to sing the tune of him whose bread they eat. So, if the state provides for the university, higher education serves the interests of the state. Consequently, universities do serve the state, even if it is totalitarian or authoritarian. This is also the first role discussed above.

But Weber apparently thinks that there is a problem here. He says that "such a castration of the freedom and disinterestedness of university education, which prevents the development of persons of genuine character, cannot be compensated by the finest institutes, the largest lecture halls, or by ever so many dissertations, prize-winning works and examination successes" (Weber, 1973: 20). He seems to say that higher education should not be influenced by the state or other particular interests and should remain free and disinterested from partisan politics in teaching and research. This appears to speak to the second role of professional and independent knowledge production. So, he apparently acknowledges the first role but believes that it should not go too far.

The third role of the university being a gadfly, or conscience of society, or a critic of unjustness and unfairness in society, i.e., a democratic role, does not seem to get much attention. Even Marx, who was so concerned about social justice, alienation, class struggles, etc., did not dwell on the role of higher education in social development. But we can see this from a Marxian point of view in Gramsci, for example, when he talks about ideological or cultural hegemony of the ruling class, or in Louis Althusser when he talks about the subjugated groups' "submission to the rules of the established order" (cited in Yan Xiaojun, 2014:495). Gramsci also discussed organic intellectuals who serve the interest of the bourgeois state (see Zhidong Hao, 2015:105). Such hegemony can only be countered by a critical stance developed by intellectuals. Hence the third role of higher education, a critical role, a challenge to an unjust system, and a call for a more democratic system. In Henry Giroux's (2018:157) words, higher education has a potential role as a public sphere capable of educating students as informed, critical thinkers capable of not only holding power accountable but also fulfilling the role of critical agents who can act against injustice and resist diverse forms of oppression. Qian Liqun (2012) calls this a reflexive, inquisitive, critical, creative (in thought, culture, and scholarship) role, or in a word, a revolutionary role of the university. So, when Durkheim talks about higher education "as a means of cultural transmission, socialization, social control, or social processes" (Clark, 2007: 5), it can go all the three ways. Students can be socialized into or influenced by knowledge of totalitarian ideologies, or democratic

understandings, or disinterested professionalism. Social control and processes can exist in any of these directions. Higher education is the foremost battleground for these political struggles, and does play important roles in all the three ways.

Let us now take a look at how such socialization, social control, and social processes happened in Chinese history, especially before Deng's opening and reform era in the late 1970s. We will see especially how higher education produced both intellectuals who sustained autocratic and dictatorial rule, whom we may also call "organic intellectuals," and rivals who challenged the incumbent government (Perry, 2015: 1-2, on the distinction; Perry, 2020).

In imperial China, as Perry (2015: 2-4) points out, the Confucian examination system served "as a mechanism to attract, evaluate, and enlist intellectual talent for government service" who helped sustain the system for centuries. They helped unify the written language, homogenize political culture, standardize academic curricula, and coopt the intelligentsia. The literati entered into alliance with the monarchy and "provided the knowledge of precedent and statecraft that could legitimize power and make the state work" (Perry, 2015: 4-5, citing Arthur Wright).

But higher learning in imperial China also produced opposition leaders (Zhidong Hao, 2003: 26-29). These include Kong Fu, the eighth-generation grandson of Confucius, who participated in the peasant uprising led by Chen Sheng and Wu Guang against the Qin dynasty; the leading scholars and university students in Eastern Han (25-220), "who launched a critical movement against the current politics, government policies, and the conduct of members of the imperial household as well as the eunuchs and the emperor"; Pi Rixiu (ca. 833-883), a famous poet and thinker, who joined the Huang Chao uprising against the Tang dynasty (618-907); the Donglin Academy scholars led by Gu Xiancheng in the beginning years of 1700s, who "spoke out against exploitation by government officials" and "demanded open criticism and reform" (see also Elman, 1989); and Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864), who started the Taiping Rebellion. This tradition was inherited by later revolutionaries like Sun Yat-sen, Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, and of course Mao Zedong. It is true that this critical and revolutionary role was not the dominant role played by higher education in imperial China as compared to its supportive and organic role, but there is also no doubt that higher learning did produce not only opposition thoughts, but opposition leaders as well.

This is also true in the revolutionary era of Mao Zedong. To serve the interests of the CCP state, the new government in 1949 "abolished all private colleges and universities (religious and secular alike) and implemented a Soviet-style system of specialized academies and institutes under tight communist Party control" (Perry, 2015: 8). The goal was to transform higher education into a place to train the Party's own supportive and organic or establishment intellectuals, i.e., to be both "red" and "expert." It succeeded to a great extent, but it did not prevent elite intellectuals and college students from criticizing the Party-state for its dictatorial power and advocating for democratization in the so-called Hundred Flower Movement in 1957 (Zhidong Hao, 2003: 73-86).

Similar events happened after Deng Xiaoping came to power in late 1970s. He reopened the universities and again wanted to train students to serve the Party-state. But many students immediately started the Democracy Wall Movement in 1978-79 to challenge the Party's rule and wanted more democratization (Perry, 2015: 10-12; Zhidong Hao, 2013: 96-103). The student protests in 1986-87 and then again in 1989 did the same. Again, we see the tug-of-war between totalitarian control and democratic challenge.

We will now examine the totalitarianization and democratization in higher education and the roles they are playing in China's political development after the suppression of the democracy movement in 1989, but especially under Xi Jinping. As I discussed at the beginning of the paper, if we can term the 'Deng, Jiang, and Hu era' as a period of mostly authoritarianization, we will see how higher education has gradually evolved in the direction of totalitarianization, along with democratization. And this has played a big role in the Party's goal of stability maintenance.

The Totalitarianization and Democratization of Students under Xi

As I said earlier, many totalitarian controls were already in place before Xi. By totalitarian controls, I mean tight organizational and ideological controls. I will first discuss these two political controls of students and then move onto how these controls leave many cracks in the system which make students' democratic resistance possible. This section discusses students and the next section discusses the research and teaching of professors, but in the same spirit of controls and breakthroughs.

Organizational Controls of Students

Organizational controls that have been in place since the Jiang Zemin era are now strengthened. Organization and propaganda are the key to totalitarianism, as I quoted Arendt earlier. In fact, it has been true ever since Mao, and they are exemplified in colleges and universities. For example, there are four kinds of student organizations. At the highest level are Student Party Branches (SPB) composed of all the Party members in a student unit, like a class (班級), or a year cohort (年級), or a department, depending on the number of students involved. At Tsinghua University's Department of Mechanical Engineering, for example, 17% of undergraduate students and 63% of graduate students were Party members in 2018 (Ministry of Education, 2018b). A Party branch can be formed as long as there are at least three members. The SPB "is in charge of recruiting new Party members, conducting regular political reviews of ordinary students, recommending candidates for student cadre appointments, collecting information on students' 'trends of thoughts' (*sixiang dongtai* 思想動態), and making decisions on important matters related to the interests of the entire unit" (Yan Xiaojun, 2014: 500). Perry (2015: 18-19) also discusses peer surveillance and pressure, which we will further discuss below.

The second important level of student organization is the Communist Youth League (CYL) "staffed by full-time Communist Party cadres with the assistance of part-time student cadres" (Yan Xiaojun, 2014: 504). The role of the CYL is *to advise the student union [the next level organization], manage student groups/societies [the fourth level organization], and oversee all student activities held on campus…to educate and guide the youth…in the direction set by the Communist Party.* (*Ibidem*)

The SPB is more or less behind the scene, which is why the Party secretary of Tsinghua University's Department of Mechanical Engineering mentioned that they were working on "identifying Party members" (黨員亮身份) so that everybody would know who is a Party member, and non-members can easily connect with the Party (Ministry of Education, 2018b). In this case, the CYL and the SPB are interconnected, but it is the CYL that is doing the day to day ideological and political work with the next two levels of student organizations.

The student unions and other groups of recreational activities (like a climbing club) or of academic nature (like a reading club) are the third and fourth levels of student organization. These student groups are under the CYL's systematic and thorough political control. Their formation has to be approved by the faculty-level Party committee and the university-level CYL. The CYL also controls their activities by controlling their use of classrooms, meeting spaces, bulletin boards, and funding. The CYL also performs an annual review of these groups, and any group deemed politically sensitive will not be renewed. This way none of these student groups will be able to engage in any activity whose contents, format, or audience may be of a problematic nature in their eyes. No matter what, they are also banned from inter-university collaboration for student group activities (Yan Xiaojun, 2014: 504-505).

In addition to those four kinds of organizations, there are also student informants who report on student problems and professorial deviations from the Party line. They are directly controlled by university-level political cadres and will "monitor their classmates and report any 'radical remarks'" to political officials (Yan Xiaojun, 2014:509). The details of their reports can include whether particular students have difficulties in their studies, or mental irregularities, or online postings and chat-room contents that may be too radical or provocative. Mental illnesses can be "broadly construed to include ideas and inclinations that the state deems politically dangerous" (Perry, 2015:19). In the case of problematic online postings, student informants are supposed to write rebuttals to counter more "outrageous" remarks. More serious cases will be investigated. Informants do these things round-the-clock, and it is a 24-hour monitoring project (Yan Xiaojun, 2014:509).

Ideological Control of Students

By ideological control, I mean their educational contents. The Party-state makes sure that more students major in science and engineering than in humanities and social

sciences. This is important not only in that vocational training provides better job opportunities but in that fewer students in humanities and social sciences may mean fewer possible rebels that the Party-state has to deal with. For example, out of the more than 5.7 million university graduates in 2010, 71% majored in science, engineering, agriculture, medicine or managerial science (Yan Xiaojun, 2014: 505).

But the most important measure is ideological indoctrination. After the suppression of the democratic movement in 1989, Deng Xiaoping placed the blame on China's universities for their lack of Chinese Marxist education. Jiang Zemin, the then CCP general secretary, required that China's revolutionary history be taught from elementary school to university. Beginning in the late 1990s, university students in the arts and social sciences were required to complete 315 academic hours of political education courses and students in the physical sciences and engineering disciplines, 210 academic hours. The contents of that education included Marxism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, patriotism, collectivism, and socialism with Chinese characteristics. And they keep adding more contents as new theories are developed like Jiang Zemin's "three represents" (i.e., the CCP represents China's advanced productive forces, advanced culture, and people's basic interests) in the late 1990s, and Hu Jintao's "scientific development" in the early 2000s. (For the above discussion, see Yan Xiaojun, 2014:501). After Xi Jinping came to power, his "China dream" and a series of his important talks (*xilie zhongyao jianghua* 系列重要講話) are now a must, along with the so-called core values of socialism.

Such ideological indoctrination has to be couched in terms of the Chinese culture. So the Party-state also emphasizes "instruction in 'cultural proficiency' (*wenhua suzhi* 文化素質) and 'national character' (*guoqing* 國情), which presents Chinese history, art, philosophy and literature in ways that postulate an organic connection and essential compatibility between the splendors of China's ancient 'tradition' and its contemporary 'socialist' system" (Perry, 2015: 20). Classroom teaching is often supplemented by "theaters, museums, field trips to ancient and revolutionary historical sites, invited lectures by distinguished scholars and public intellectuals, research projects by renowned teams of social scientists and humanists, and so forth" (Perry, 2015:20). The CCP's legitimacy can thus be rationalized.

Some students find political education necessary for setting up their basic values and world outlook, and accept it as is as they have done since elementary school (Du Xiaoxin, 2018: 1002). They may have reservations about its quality and may not be interested in it, but they accept it.

Such ideological indoctrination is based on the prohibition of counter arguments in class or in research. The most famous prohibition, called the "Seven No's" that was promulgated in 2013, includes the following: civil society, civil rights, universal values, legal independence, press freedom, the bourgeois class with money and power, and the historical wrongs of the Party (Zhidong Hao, 2015: 116-117). Yuan Guiren, the Minister of Education (2009-2016), made several infamous requirements of colleges and

universities in China in 2015, including the one that no textbooks on Western values should be allowed. Among the speeches to be absolutely prohibited (*juebu yunxu*決不允許) in class are speech that attacks the Party's leadership and smears socialism, opinion that is against the constitution and the law, and complaints about one's own misfortunes (Ministry of Education, 2015).

The above organizational and ideological measures seem to make the CCP's political control quite total, hence totalitarianization. And surveys of university students found that they score fairly high on indicators of patriotism and national identity, and only 43% of them answered "yes" to the question "Is democracy good?" (Perry, 2015: 21). However, 43% represents a lot of people. So, the control is apparently not total. In the following pages, I will discuss democratic breakthroughs.

Democratic Breakthroughs among Students

As I discussed earlier, totalitarianization and democratization are two sides of the same coin. Democracy as an idea has never died in China since it was introduced more than a century ago, and democratization as a movement has persisted. As we will see below, despite the totalitarianization efforts in higher education we discussed above, efforts at democratization have also endured.

In the examples I give below, I view any dissent against the Party-state ideology as a democratic breakthrough. After all democracy is built on incremental steps that include freedom of speech, civil society, and democratic movements of all kinds. "A survey of university students conducted in 2003 found that 76% of these surveyed disagreed either generally or completely with the 'socialist principle of collectivism' as taught in political education classes" (Yan Xiaojun, 2014: 502). Another survey in 2009 found that "only 12.92% of student applicants for Party membership claim they actually 'believe in Communism,' while the rest all cite materialistic purposes" (Yan Xiaojun, 2014: 506). Such survey results call into question whether those CCP and CYL members, as well as their followers in universities, are actually as loyal to the Party-state and its political ideology as they appear to be, and whether the sophisticated and thorough schemes of political organization and indoctrination are really all that successful.

It is true that these survey results may be interpreted as some kind of "'fatiguing, depoliticizing, cynicism-producing effects' of the official political discourse", and such political indoctrination may actually "create a prevailing atmosphere of detachment from any form of political life on PRC university campuses" and a resultant docile student body (Yan Xiaojun, 2014: 503). But we can still view this as a silent defiance, or at least a lack of interest, and such a politically alienated or nonchalant student body as fertile ground for democratic consciousness raising. After all, if the regime is on constant watch for defiant and radical sociopolitical thoughts and behavior, as we discussed above, that means such thoughts and behavior exist, and they may very well be the democratic thoughts and behavior that existed in the 1980s.

Some students do criticize political education courses as being boring and not including critical thinking. They believe that "the training in critical thinking and freedom in expression through discussion should have been the major educational function of universities" (Du Xiaoxin, 2018: 1003). In the same research, more than half of the students the researcher interviewed reported they had little interest in political education courses, saying that they were dull and dry, boring, and uninteresting. They would ditch such classes, or just do their own stuff in class, or just take a nap in class. In one class the researcher observed, a course on Marxism, almost no students were listening. They were either sleeping or browsing web pages on their own computers (*Ibidem*, p. 1003). These students might be crying out for more critical and enlightened content.

Such silent defiance culminated in a protest gathering at this university on December 18, 2019. Several hundred students gathered at a dining hall in Fudan University singing their university anthem which contained words like "academic independence," "freedom of thought" and "freedom from political and religious controls" (*xueshu duli, sixiang ziyou, zheng luo jiao wang wu jiban*學術獨立、思想自由、政羅教網無羈絆). They were protesting a recent charter revision which deleted words such as shared governance between professors and students and democratic management (*shisheng zhixue, minzhu guanli*師生治學、民主管理). Most of the 43 changes in the charter dictate that the university adheres to the leadership of the CCP in every aspect of university life, follows the Party lines, and serves the CCP and socialism with Chinese characteristics. Similar revisions have been made in the charters of other universities, such as Nanjing University and Shaanxi Normal University (Redden, 2019; Wang Qi, 2019; Zhen Shuji, 2019).

A more recent protest movement is probably the most striking. In late November 2022, students over 100 university campuses took to the streets in many major cities in China to protest the overly strict COVID rules, like sealing off buildings and apartments, that had probably contributed to a deadly fire in an apartment building in Urumqi in Xinjiang. Protests continued into early December 2022 though on fewer campuses. In addition to the abolishment of the harsh COVID measures, they wanted democracy, the rule of law, and freedom of expression (Leung & Sharma 2022; Mimi Leung 2022). As a result, at least partly, the harsh measures were abolished but the democratic demands are again unfulfilled. Still the latter are apparently alive and well in university students' minds.

Such protests are rare indeed, but they nonetheless indicate that students have underlying feelings towards high-handed political suppression. It is probably not wrong to assume that more such breakthroughs may lead to real social and political change. They have the potential to become an organized threat to the Party's authoritarian and totalitarian rule.

The Totalitarianization and Democratization of the Faculty Under Xi

The totalitarianization and democratization of the faculty happen at the same time as students are put under all kinds of organizational and ideological controls while making

occasional democratic breakthroughs. Indeed, the control measures and oppositional breakthroughs of the faculty may be different, but they are similar in nature.

The Cooptation of Professors in Research and Teaching

We discussed earlier how imperial China and Mao coopted intellectuals to serve the state interests and make them organic to the state. The same has continued in the post-Tiananmen era since 1989 onwards to bring them under control by various means. One of the means is to make them into bourgeoisified and professionalized intellectuals so that they will, hopefully, disengage themselves from politics, and the other is to make them into organic intellectuals so that they will be part of the establishment in protecting the status quo (see Zhidong Hao, 2003, chapters 4 and 5). In the Hu and Xi eras, such measures to bring intellectuals under control have become more sophisticated, and authoritarianism has been moving toward totalitarianism. Acquiescent intellectuals play a pivotal role in sustaining autocratic rule, and the state seems to have won the allegiance of the intelligentsia and been able to prolong its reign (Perry, 2015: 2) to some extent.

Measures to coopt the intellectuals are many. "Among the most powerful instruments in the PRC's toolkit for taming the universities is the package of assessment measures" (Perry, 2015:26). Professors have to do research in certain topics and teach in certain ways in order to be rewarded with increased salaries and professional promotion or they will be punished, and even lose their jobs. It is also true that they have to fulfill productivity targets in order to be rewarded. And they have to publish in international venues to help their university to reach world-class university status. These are ways to take their time away so that they will be less engaged in politically subversive criticisms and activities, as Perry (2015: 26-27) observes.

As for what topics professors can and cannot research, an analysis of the state and provincial grant structures in 2014 finds that the kind of research professors could do

> *concentrate on the study of the Sinicization of Marxism – that is, socialism with Chinese characteristics, the China dream, the study of Xi Jinping's talks (especially in provincial grant topics); historical, cultural, and environmental studies; and various political, social and economic policy studies* (Hao and Guo, 2016: 1049).

None of the grant topics dealt with civil society, controversial CCP history, contemporary ethnic relations in Tibet and Xinjiang, or constitutionalism. The Seven No's are indeed untouchable. As one professor comments, "If you don't work for the government, your research won't be recognized" (Hao and Guo, 2016: 1049). Our analysis of professors' research topics in history, economics and business administration, philosophy and sociology, politics and public administration, and law, finds that 90% of them are organic and professional, i.e., supportive of the Party-state and non-sensitive (Hao & Guo, 2016: 1053).

Furthermore, all the academic lecture topics at seminars and symposiums have to be censored, and international scholars' topics have to be approved by the university level authorities based on regulations issued by the Ministry of Education (Du Xiaoxin, 2018: 1001). Social science scholars receive special attention.

Scholars based in the West who do academic investigations in China are also subject to various restrictions. One survey found that "Roughly 9% of China scholars report having been 'taken for tea' (to be interrogated and admonished) by authorities within the past ten years; 26% of scholars who conduct archival research report being denied access; and 5% of researchers report some difficulty obtaining a visa" (Greitens and Truex, 2018; Redden, 2018a). In addition, about two dozen of the 500 scholars who responded either had their computer or other materials confiscated, or experienced temporary detention by police or physical intimidation during field research, especially in Tibet and Xinjiang (see Zhidong Hao, 2020b). In other words, even foreign scholars have to cooperate or they cannot do research in China.

In teaching, professors are supposed to serve the key function to train students to be firm believers in and successors of socialism, and most of them do try to do just that (Hao and Guo, 2016:1048). Sun Yat-sen University (2017) in Guangzhou issued a notice to faculty members about ten things they cannot do in class. The top three are criticism of the Chinese Constitution, of the CCP's leadership in China, and spreading religious superstition (meaning any religion).

As one professor comments:

> *We live in a real society, which is ruled by the CCP. They have an ideology backed up by political power and a political structure. This is the foundation of the [socialist] identity. If we sabotage this identity, there may be more serious social problems. As university professors, we should respect this reality* (Hao & Guo, 2016:1048).

This professor believes that one role of education is to foster the Party-state ideology and propagate what he believes to be "positive energy" (正能量).

While this professor wants to play an active role in supporting the Party, other professors simply find that there is just no alternative. A social science professor observes that they must be the spokespersons of the dominant ideology. They cannot touch on sensitive issues such as civil society; otherwise, they would be punished (Hao and Guo, 2016: 1048-1049).

The situation is exacerbated when other control measures are put into place. It is reported that almost all the classrooms in colleges and universities throughout China have surveillance cameras installed (Huang Yuxin, 2018). National security agencies are directly involved in policing professors' classroom behavior and discourse, in addition to student informants we mentioned above, and they are also monitoring what is posted on the university's LAN (local area network) regarding their teaching materials. The violators of Party ideology would be invited to "have tea" or "coffee" with state security agents,

and required to write confession papers, if not directly fired (Du Xiaoxin, 2018:1001; for more violations of academic freedom in China, see also Zhidong Hao 2020b). Academics are "caught between serving governmental agendas and pursuing their own goals as an academic community" (Qiang Zha & Hayhoe, 2014: 42). And most of the time they have to do the former. University administrations are in full cooperation with the national security agencies in enforcing such kind of political controls.

Democratic Breakthroughs among Professors in Research and Teaching

Again, I am considering all dissent against the Party-state indoctrination and all advocacy for freedom of thought, speech and press as democratic breakthroughs. To be sure, there are no sustained organized democratic movements among professors. But their resistance to the Party-state suppression of academic freedom is also obvious. The *Liaoning Daily* (*Liaoning ribao*遼寧日報), a provincial newspaper, called people's attention to such resistance when it published an open letter to university professors of philosophy and social sciences on November 13, 2014. According to the newspaper report, some professors were not identifying with the CCP's theories on socialism and socialist politics. They lacked feeling for the Party-state. They compared Mao Zedong to ancient emperors, "cast doubt on important policies of the Party-state, and want China to follow the Western road of political development" (Hao & Guo, 2016: 1039).

In terms of research, just as students were alienated by political indoctrination, professors were also alienated by being required to do research that they do not want to do but they have to do, for purposes of salary increase and professional promotion. One professor comments that this way they were creating a lot of academic garbage (Hao & Guo, 2016: 1050). As we mentioned above, such an arrangement is intended to keep academics busy so that they will not be able to play more professional and critical roles (see also Hao & Guo, 2016: 1050, citing Robert Merton). One professor comments that the purpose of this is to give you some money so that you will shut up (Ibid.). Professors follow the Party line and do what they are told to do so as to maintain a good living. But that is politically alienating since they are becoming cogs in the machine with no free spirit, no creativity, no new thinking, and no respect for themselves.

To break out of this alienation, some professors try to compromise. One professor, for example, wrote on social media advocating the Party control of NGOs but still emphasizing the importance of them (Hao & Guo, 2016: 1050). Other professors try to do research on critical and politically sensitive topics although they are few, just 11% according to our tally of professors' actual research from five faculties and departments in one university (Hao & Guo, 2016: 1053). And they usually do it in a roundabout way. They approach problems like democratization, or the lives of children of peasant workers left behind with their grandparents, in such a way that they are helping the Party-state to solve practical problems by offering alternative solutions (*Ibidem*, p. 1054).

Still other professors are more direct, yet still roundabout in the criticism in their research. One professor in a provincial university

> *promotes the use of "citizen" when the term of "civil society" becomes sensitive. He claims that to deny universal values, as the dominant ideology does, is to deny Marxism. He calls on the Party-state to practice constitutionalism, saying that the constitution does not give state power to the governing party* (Hao and Guo, 2016:1054).

He has published over 100 articles advocating democracy in his own blogs and used his own money to publish a book on democratization. But this somewhat "deviant" behavior has become increasingly impossible.

In teaching, professors in natural sciences know that they need to teach students how to discover problems and to have a sense of the problem (問題意識) (Hao and Guo, 2016: 1052). That is being critical and democratic. This training of critical thinking must have been correlated with the emergence of natural scientists becoming democracy advocates, as in the case of Fang Lizhi in the 1980s. As Foucault (1980: 132) points out, a "specific" intellectual can also be a "universal" intellectual concerned about truth and justice possibly because of the nature of his or her scientific work (see also Zhidong Hao, 2003: 322-323).

Even though politically correct uniform textbooks are required, professors may use them only as references. They may use materials they themselves choose, or ask students to look for different information from the textbook on a topic, for example, the Boxers Rebellion, so that they will be aware of different viewpoints. They may introduce different points of view and let students judge for themselves. On sensitive topics, they do not challenge the official line but rather they put them on the table, like civil rights and equality issues, and ask students themselves to think how the Party-state should deal with them (Hao & Guo, 2016: 1052; Du Xiaoxin, 2018: 1007-1008). They think that the textbooks are doing too much preaching, always emphasizing the legitimacy and greatness of the Party, without talking about its mistakes in the past. They are too doctrinal and one-sided, lacking historical accuracy. They want to teach the students real history (Du Xiaoxin, 2018: 1007). Or they analyze the CCP cadre system and the relationship between the Party and the state from a totally academic point of view, without providing any value judgement (Du Xiaoxin, 2018: 1005).

Professors can also avoid direct mention of sensitive words but still get the meaning across by other means. For example, when teaching about nation-state building and democracy, one professor discussed the situation of a minority group. He did not name it but drew a map on the board and students immediately knew that he was referring to the Uygur in Xinjiang. And he spoke as if he was talking about Ukraine. Or they fake their point of view and let students know they do not really mean it by using facial expressions, etc. (Du Xiaoxin, 2018: 1004-1005).

Other professors, however, take a more direct and critical stance in teaching. One professor made a point of teaching students to think logically and scientifically. He explored topics such as land reform in the late-1940s and early 1950s, spoke on the media about the relationship between the government and the masses from the perspective of the latter, and wrote on social media about his critical ideas. Another professor directly challenged the Party jargon and advocated truth and sincerity (Hao & Guo, 2016: 1054). They discussed Western values in class in defiance of the Minister of Education warning that they were not allowed to do so. They discussed the advantages of Western political systems, introduced contents that challenged the legitimacy of the CCP, criticized CCP censorship, and pointed out the wrongs of the Party in the past like the Great Leap Forward and the three years of famine in the late-1950s and early 1960s. In interviews, some told the researcher that the country was built on lies and violence, and they were trying to tell the truth. And they also invited students to challenge the professors themselves (Du Xiaoxin, 2018: 1006-1008). But again, this is increasingly impossible now.

The fact that quite a number of professors got into trouble for their speech in class or on social media is an indication of how widespread the democratic breakthroughs were, even if they are less so now. Iliham Tohti of the Central Minzu (Ethnicities and Nationalities) University has been sentenced to life in prison for advocating in the classroom, and on social media, for the rights of the Uyghur minority. The following professors were fired because of their online and/or in-class speech, criticizing the CCP and its state:

Tan Song of Chongqing Normal University (Luo Siling, 2017);
Deng Xiangchao of Shangdong Jianzhu University (Lin Ping, 2017);
Shi Jiepeng of Beijing Normal University (Shi Tao, 2017);
Yang Shaozheng of Guizhou University (Ling Yun, 2018);
Wang Gang of Hebei Engineering University (Mingpo, 2018);
You Shengdong of Xiamen University (Mingpo, 2018);
Zhou Peiyi of the University of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Alice Su, 2020);
Liang Yanping of Hubei University (Alice Su, 2020);
Xu Zhangrun of Tsinghua University (Buckley, 2020; Alice Su, 2020);

More examples of faculty revolts and punishments are given in the Scholars at Risk's yearly report (e.g., in 2019), and the list keeps growing.

If they are not sacked, they receive warnings from their respective universities. Yu Jianrong, a researcher and professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, was called into the Party secretary's office and warned about his online and offline social activism (Hao & Guo, 2016:1045). Sun Peidong quit her job at Fudan University and left

China because she could not bear the sever restrictions on her teaching and speech (Alice Su, 2020).

Some who are retired keep speaking up, like Zhang Ming (a historian) of Renmin University in Beijing. But there can be consequences: Cai Xia of the Central Party School was expelled from the Party and lost her pension and other retirement benefits (Buckley 2020). Others have moved to foreign countries and escalated their criticism of the Party-state, like Zhou Xiaozheng (a sociologist).

Still others who currently work at universities try in various ways to have their voices heard, like He Weifang and Zhang Qianfan of Peking University, although they are often silenced. In March 2022, five prominent history professors from top Chinese universities signed a letter condemning the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and 121 alumni from several of China's top universities in and outside China signed a petition calling on "the Chinese government to honor commitments made to Ukraine under UN Security Council Resolution 984, which provides security assurances to countries without nuclear weapons" (Sharma, 2022). They were quickly censored.

Although it is a rare situation, some administrators do support critical thinking. Yang Yuliang, president of Fudan University (2009-2015), encouraged students to become critical thinkers in his commencement speeches and gave faculty space for unhindered academic research. He said that teachers should not be afraid of authority, or political leaders (Du Xiaoxin, 2018:1002). Two other famous examples of such administrators are Jiang Ping, former president of China University of Political Science and Law (1988-1990), and Liu Daoyu, former president of Wuhan University (1981-1988).

All of the above professors serve as a democratic counter force against the established intellectuals we discussed earlier. It is democratization against totalitarianization.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have analyzed the nature of the Chinese state from authoritarianism to totalitarianism, the role of higher education either in supporting the state as an organic and professional part of the establishment, or in revolting against the state as a democratic or revolutionary force. Mostly, I have discussed the totalitarianization and democratization of students, and co-optation or control of faculty and their democratic breakthroughs. I would like to draw several conclusions.

First, the organizational control and ideological indoctrination of students on the one hand and the co-optation of professors in research and teaching on the other seem to be fairly successful. After all large-scale student protest movements are very rare and they would be quickly put down. In a 2011 survey, when asked whether democracy is a good thing, 53.6% of those who had an undergraduate education and 45.0% of those who had a graduate education said that it all depends on whether it fits into the Chinese situation (Zhang Mingshu, 2013:16). That is precisely the Party line. Different countries follow different lines of development, and the CCP is leading the people of China in a democracy

with Chinese characteristics (*Ibidem*, 15-16). So, about a half of those with a college education support the Party line. We cannot be sure, however, that the respondents in such surveys will always tell the truth of what they really think especially in an authoritarian or dictatorial state where it is risky to tell the truth. The fact that many ardent patriots who were against Western values end up studying, living and/or working in the West may be a good indication of just that.

Another more recent survey is equally interesting (Chen Xinyu, 2020). A professor surveyed his class of 109 students, 25.69% of whom were from humanities, 19.27% from sciences, and 55.05% from engineering. This distribution of disciplines is close to the real distribution we discussed earlier. Students were asked how they viewed the diary of Fang Fang, which reflected what happened when the entire city of Wuhan was closed down during the coronavirus epidemic in February and March 2020. The diary is viewed as being fairly critical of the way the government handled the crisis.

This survey found that about 51% of the class were against the diary, and only 22% supported it. The remaining 27% did not have an opinion. Many of those who were against it thought that the diary helped overseas hostile forces attack China, and 60% of them thought that whatever one says, one should put the nation's interest in first place, or *guquan daju* (顧全大局, think about the big picture). Similar to the first survey we discussed above, the numbers indicate some success for the Party's organizational control and ideological indoctrination.

Second, at the same time, 79% of those surveyed also believe that everybody has the freedom to describe whatever they see, and express their viewpoints at any time. And there were still 22% who supported the diary. In terms of the first survey, 43.3% of the undergraduates and 50% of the graduate students surveyed thought that democracy was a good thing (Zhang Mingshu, 2012: 16). One can say that there still exists a tug-of-war between totalitarianization and democratization. The organizational control and ideological indoctrination of students are only partly successful, and one can still see many democratic breakthroughs.

Third, if the Party wants to go along the route towards totalitarianism, what we have discussed in this paper will continue in the future. Totalitarianization may not bring Mao-style totalitarianism, as in the past, although we cannot be totally sure. But if the Party wants to go in the direction of democracy, it would not be very difficult either, since it has the organizational capacity to do so. The only thing it needs is ideological transformation, and most of its fellow travelers will continue to follow the Party. Furthermore, democracy remains an enduring idea, as we discussed in the paper, and many students and professors are already its strong supporters. According to the 2011 survey, 58.5% of those who had a middle school education or lower, and 53.7% of those who had a high school or vocational school education thought that democracy is a good thing (Zhang Mingshu, 2013: 16). As I mentioned above, lower percentages of people among those who have a post-secondary education (43.3%) and those who have a post-graduate education (50%) thought the same, but they are still decent numbers.

Fourth, higher education played a key role in the political development of the country. The totalitarianization and democratization of students and faculty will spill over to the world outside the ivory tower. What happens in higher education happens outside it as well. The role of colleges and universities, and whatever happens there, will have serious implications for the whole country.

Fifth, a study of academic freedom, totalitarianization, and democratization of higher education is crucially important because of its importance in the political development of the county. More studies should be done on what happens there, the role of the educated elites in all walks of life, and how higher education should be improved as a result. Certainly, more studies should also be done on the social requisites for democracy, such as economic development, education, political culture, religion, political leaders, political legitimacy, urbanization, civil society, and how these factors function individually or interdependently, and effect democratization, etc. (Huntington, 1991: 37-38, 107; Lipset, 1993, 1994).

Perry (2015: 33) acknowledges that Western social scientists like John Dewey, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Edward Shils all believed in a direct relationship between higher education and democratization, i.e., the former has a positive influence on the latter. She says then that these days, however, "the most 'enlightened' autocrats are betting billions of dollars otherwise. The Chinese example suggests that their wager might not be misplaced."

But just as Hannah Arendt (1958: 489) commented, "enlightened totalitarianism" may be wishful thinking. The "enlightened" autocrats may find that their totalitarianization project is riddled with pitfalls, and their fortune can be reversed at an unexpected time. After all, education does have an important impact on democratization although, of course, it is not the only factor.

Minxin Pei (2013: 2020) points out that political suppression is not a sustainable measure for stability maintenance. The regime cannot rely on this and its economic performance for its legitimacy. Economic growth may be a recipe for autocratic success in the short term (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 2005), but in the long run, the regime has to find its legitimacy in democratization (see Zhidong Hao, 2017). Higher education does facilitate "the creation of a large pool of potential opposition leaders, thereby increasing the supply of rivals to the incumbent government" (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs, 2005:83; Perry, 2015: 33).

Like it or not, higher education will continue to supply not only the personnel but also the oppositional thoughts against totalitarianization and for democratization. Setting the rules of the game and rigging them to suit their interests, "autocratic states are not passive observers of political change" (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs, 2005: 80). But neither are democratization pursuers. At the very least, totalitarianization and democratization will continue to be engaged in a tug-of-war. Who eventually wins will depend on the political, social, and economic circumstances at the time. But the role of higher education can never be underestimated.

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