Göran Leijonhufvud: *Going Against the Tide: On Dissent and Big-Character Posters in China*. London: Curzon Press, 1990. 284 pp.

There are by now numerous studies on the topic of opposition and protest movements in China after 1949. The major waves of protest and dissidence activity include the Hundred Flowers Movement of 1957, the Cultural Revolution in 1966-1969, the Democracy Wall

Movement of 1978-1979 and of course the student demonstrations in the spring of 1989.[1] There are other incidents where opposition and protest were openly expressed, but they were limited in scale and duration and have therefore attracted less attention, although they cast illuminating light on the phenomenon of protest and dissidence in China.

One of these incidents, namely a wall poster campaign in the summer of 1974 in Beijing, is the subject of a new book by Göran Leijonhufvud. The book carries complete translations of 28 posters and excerpts from six more of the 1974 posters. A hundred page introduction attempts to write the history and background of wall posters, especially big character posters (*dazibao*), in China. The introduction is of particular importance since it is one of the few lengthier discussions available on this important medium for expressing and popularizing dissent and opposition.

Leijonhufvud argues that the big character poster is a modern successor to various forms of registering complaints against the emperor and the administration which are known from an early stage of Chinese history (p. 23). In ancient China there was a practice of placing boards on the side of the road on which the people could record their criticism of the administration. These public posters or commentary boards were called *feibangmu* or *bangmu*. Another early form of the big character poster was the *lubu*, which originally were official proclamations or imperial edicts written on a piece of cloth, but later also denoted an "unsealed letter" by a scholar or official raising opinions about public affairs (p. 33). The *lubu* sometimes took the form of an anonymous letter or poster (*niming jietie*).

Previous studies on the role and history of the *dazibao* do not all agree with Leijonhufvud's attempt to root the origin of the *dazibao* in imperial times. To be sure, Godwin Chu claims that posters of different kinds have been known in China for many hundred years.[2] The emperor's official edicts were, for example, often written and posted on the city wall. Similarly, Barry Broman asserts that *dazibao* date from imperial times.[3] But Poon convincingly argues that although the appearance of the *dazibao* can be traced back to the days when imperial edicts were posted on the city walls, it was the Chinese Communists who first began to use the *dazibao* as a major

communication medium, notably during the Hundred Flowers period and the subsequent anti-rightist campaign in 1957.[4] Frederick Yu goes a step further and unequivocally states that *dazibao* is a "new term coined by the Chinese Communists" and that it was first used on a large scale during the Hundred Flowers Movement in 1957.[5] In short, in viewing the *dazibao* as as phenomenon which originated in imperial times Leijonhufvud is not alone, although most studies appear to stress the socialist and contemporary context of the *dazibao*.

Leijonhufvud's emphasis on the past leads him to the argument that most of the participants in the democracy movement in China saw themselves as assuming the traditional role of remonstrators, not only loyal to the state but forming an integral part of it (p. 82).[6] They stopped short of attacking the socialist system and in fact many of them professed to support it, only wishing to perfect it. In the opinion of the present reviewer the argument seems to be overstated and it does not take into consideration that the democracy movement of 1978-1979 consisted of different groups with different perceptions of their role vis-à-vis the authorities and the system. One major group, the socialist democrats, formulated a critique which originally did not go beyond the present socialist system and in this sense could be perceived as loyal opposition from within the system. But another major group, the abolitionists, sought a a complete transformation of the existing order in China. In their opinion China was a class society ruled by a new class which had emerged rooted in the special privileges of the bureaucratic and technocratic strata. Thus, this group had a clear anti-state orientation and they wanted to abolish the dictatorship of the proletariat and called for a multiparty system.[7] The abolitionists were a minority in the initial phase of the democracy movement in 1978-79, but when the authorities in the spring of 1979 began to crackdown on the movement the loyal opposition increasingly turned abolitionist.

Furthermore, events surrounding the student demonstrations and their suppression in June 1989 also appear to contradict Leijonhufvud's claim that dissent in China is always loyal and within the confines of the system. Many students were not loyal to the regime as such, but rather enlisted on the side of one faction within the

leadership, namely the reform faction. Thus, they were loyal to certain leaders and certain policy positions and strongly disagreed with others. The confrontation between the non-reformist parts of the leadership and the students was clear for all to see when Premier Li Peng on May 18 met a group of student leaders among others Wu'er Kaixi, Wang Dan and Chai Ling. This was not a meeting between the ruler and his loyal remonstrators; it was a clear confrontation between unbridgeable attitudes and points of view.

Leijonhufvud claims that the Li Yi Zhe poster from November 1974 was the result of individual initiative whereas the 1974 Peking posters, studied in this book, probably were initiated by one of the competing factions in the leadership (p. 75). Here Leifonhufvud indicates that opposition movements and wall poster campaigns in China are closely related to power struggles. Thus, one could argue that the formulation of protest is a function, to a high degree, of vertical cleavages among the elite in the sense that if the interest of protest movements coincide with those of a definite faction in the party they will be tolerated, perhaps even encouraged. For example, in November 1978, Deng Xiaoping commented on the wall poster campaign in Peking at that time by saying: "The masses putting up big character posters is a normal thing, and shows the stable situation in our country" (p. 77). Leijonhufvud sees Deng's comments on the posters as an example of the emperor "widening the road for speech."

The present reviewer tends to agree that protest movements and factional struggle in China are related. But how? Merle Goldman has shown that the possibilities for intellectuals to express dissenting views or criticism are dependent on the support from a leader with high status/prestige or support from the military or bureaucratic apparatus.[8] In this sense criticism or protest is sponsored from the top of the system. Jeremy Paltiel disagrees with the implication that Chinese dissent is primarily factionally based. He argues that Chinese dissidents have often used the factional conflict to their own advantage by formulating ideas and demands, which surpass the limits set by elite factional conflict. Thus one could argue that the Chinese dissidents often have used "the mobilizing efforts of the party for their own instrumental purposes."[9] David Strand talks

about administered political participation claiming that it is in the interest of the party to secure administered or state authorized political protest and critique.[10]

Clearly the presence of protest movements indicates a horizontal cleavage (masses versus the leadership) rather than just a vertical cleavage (intra-party confrontations). In fact, recent protest movements in China appear to be part of a emerging civil society, which has created an area of independent activity outside the state and party in an increasing autonomous social sphere. If it is possible to associate post-1949 protest and opposition movements with the emergence of interests and activities outside the state and Party, it is even more problematic to argue that Chinese dissent is best understood from the perspective of loyal remonstrance.

Leijonhufvud largely ignores the issues sketched above. A regrettable consequence is that he never explains why he focusses on a relatively minor wall poster campaign from 1974 - is it because these wall posters have never been translated before or is it because they tell us something important about the political process in China? The reader is left in the dark.

In conclusion, Leijonhufvud deserves praise for a valuable addition to a limited but growing number of case studies on specific wall poster campaign in China.[11] His book and especially the many expert translations of wall posters covering the bulk of the volume will be of great value in the continuing debate on the nature and history of Chinese dissidence and protest movements. It is a debate which has become even more important after the tragic events in Tiananmen square in June 1989.

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NOTES

1 On the Hundred Flowers Movement, see Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *Hundred Flowers* (London, 1960); Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, Vol. 1: *Contradictions Among the People, 1956-1957* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974). On the Cultural Revolution, see Hong Yung Lee, *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Lynn White, *Policies of Chaos: The Or-*

ganizational Causes of Violence in China's Cultural Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); William A. Joseph, Christine P.W. Wong and David Zweig, eds., *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991). On the democracy movement 1978-1979, see Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard, "The Democracy Movement in China, 1978-1979: Opposition Movements, Wall Poster Campaigns, and Underground Journals," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXI, No. 7 (July 1981), pp. 747-774; James D. Seymour, *The Fifth Modernization: China's Democracy Movement, 1978-1979* (Stanfordville, New York: Human Rights Publishing Group, 1980); David Strand, "Political Participation and Political Reform in Post-Mao China," *Copenhagen Discussion Papers*, No. 6 (May 1989). On the student demonstrations of spring 1989, see Tony Saich, ed., *The Chinese People's Movement: Perspectives on Spring 1989* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990); Jonathan Unger, ed., The Democracy Movement in China: The View from the Provinces (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990). For a discussion on protest and opposition in China on a more general level, see Peter Moody, *Opposition and Dissent in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977) and in particular Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

2 See Godwin C. Chu, "The Current Structure and Function of China's Mass Media," in Godwin C. Chu and Francis L.K. Hsu, *Moving A Mountain: Cultural Change in China* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1979), pp. 57-75.

3 Barry M. Broman, "Tatzepao: Medium of Conflict in China's 'Cultural Revolution'," *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring 1969), pp. 101-104, 127.

4 David Jim-tat Poon, "Tatzepao: Its History and Significance as a Communication Medium," in Godwin C. Chu, ed., *Popular Media in China* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1978), pp. 184-221. James Seymour takes the same position and writes that although the wall poster predates socialist China, the medium developed into an important means of political communication only in 1957. See Seymour, *The Fifth Modernization*, pp. 5-6. Poon also points out that in the Soviet Union, in the 1920s and 1930s, posters in hand- or typewritten form were a fundamental feature of the Soviet press system and that Mao was strongly influenced by the Soviet experience in this area. James Markham concurs in the assumption that the emergence of wall poster in China is inspired by Soviet experiences. See James W. Markham, *Voices of the Red Giants* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1967).

5 Frederick T.C. Yu, *Mass Persuasion in Communist China* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), p. 137.

6 See also Nathan, *Chinese Democracy*, p. 24.

7 See Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard, "Civil Society and Democratization in China" (Paper prepared for the Conference "From Leninism to Freedom: The Challenge of Democratization," Marquette University, October 18-19, 1991).

8 Merle Goldman, *China's Intellec-*

tuals: Advise and Dissent (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

9 Jeremy Paltiel, "Recent Dissidence in China," *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. XVI, Nos 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 1983), pp. 121-137.

10 Strand, "Political Participation and Political Reform in Post-Mao China."

11 See also Ann McLaren, "The Educated Youth Return:The Poster Campaign in Shanghai from No-vember 1978 to March 1979," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* (July 1979) and Robin Munro, "Settling Accounts with the Cultural Revolution at Beijing University," *The China Quarterly*, No. 82 (June 1980), pp. 308-333.