

Pitfalls of Popularity: The Radicalization Dynamics of the 1989 Tiananmen Student Movement

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Pitfalls of Popularity: The Dynamic of the 1989 Tiananmen Student Movement

Abstract: In this article, I investigate the 1989 Tiananmen Student Movement, asking why the movement became radicalized after the regime offered concessions. I argue that radicalization was a temporary measure to sustain the movement's mobilization, but it created a symbiotic dynamic between radical activists and regime hard-liners, contributing to a tragic demise. When regime soft-liners offered concessions to the students, moderate students were willing to negotiate. The more radical students, however, rejected dialogue and staged dramatic actions that captured media attention, subsequently weakening the movement's ability to extract concession from the regime. Spectacular but nonviolent tactics of hunger strikes undermined the position of both the moderates and regime soft-liners. The hard-liners exploit this stand-off to marginalize those soft-liners and repress the movement. I show how this dynamic led to violent repressions and consolidations of authoritarian rule.

“Do I know my position in the movement? Practically, can I use rationality to control my behaviors? Do I know my role? It's too difficult. When I stood on the [Tiananmen] square and faced a cheering crowd, I felt I was the prophet of the nation (Gordon and Hinton 1995).”

--- Liu Xiaobo, the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

The Spring of 1989

In the late 20th century, the 1989 Tiananmen Student Movement (TSM) was one of the most ambitious democratic struggles worldwide. The death of a liberal political figure, Hu Yaobang, inspired millions of students and workers to march on the streets of Beijing, demanding political liberalization and democratic reform. Yet, after rounds of negotiations, students and the government failed to reach an agreement. Several student leaders mobilized a hunger strike to pressure the Chinese government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). However, radical tactics amid government-student negotiations conflicted with the ongoing negotiation and marginalized the position of the more moderate negotiators. Eventually, on the night of June 3, the government ordered its military to repress the movement and brought the process of Chinese democratic reform to a halt. This tragic outcome for what had been such a hopeful movement raised a question: Why did the students radicalize their tactics and demands sustainably when the government had offered to negotiate?

Viewing a movement with a radicalization lens is not novel, nor are the detailed studies of the 1989 movement. Existing accounts diverge by focusing on the initiation, strategies, and implications of radicalization within social movements. My answer to the radicalization question offers a theoretical synthesis. On the one hand, I highlight radicalization as a paradox of collective actions where a social movement seeks to maintain its mobilizational capacity at the expense of political gains. In 1989, students aimed to sustain their contention against the government without sufficient support from civil societies. Radical escalations with cultural and moral repertoire are effective tools to draw support domestically and internationally. On

the other hand, I argue that radicalization presents a symbiotic dynamic that shapes the regime's responses to the movement. Radical yet escalating mobilization undermined the movement's moderates and the government's reformers, facilitating an anti-movement coalition by the conservative elites. These two dynamics collectively contributed to the eventual demise of the TSM. Generally, my arguments speak to social movement studies, state-society relations, and elite politics with detailed historical investigations regarding both movement and elite interactions in 1989. In the following sections, I elaborate on these claims by offering: 1) reviews of existing theoretical approaches to radicalization with analytical articulation; 2) an explanation of process-training methods as empirical investigation strategies; and 3) a detailed exploration of movement and regime dynamics of the TSM. I conclude the paper with its prospects, limitations, and future research agenda.

The Concept of Radicalization

The primary debate over radicalization is about its effectiveness. Piven & Cloward (1979:15) argue that social movement organizations inevitably face co-optations if they fail to engage in institutional disruption. Radical escalation of protests can help protesters to avoid it and improve movements' outcomes. Yet, an oppositional view indicates that co-optations and movements' outcomes are two differentiated processes. McAdam (1982:56) emphasizes a balance between managing organizations and cultivating communities' support for independence to improve the movement's bargaining position. The "paradox" of collective action (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980:76), or struggles for social democracy (Brenner 1985), addresses a similar dilemma between organizations and mass mobilizations for political changes. As a result, discussions over radicalization seek to distinguish specific tactics for improving or damaging potential outcomes. Haines' "radical flank effect" (1988:4,176) suggests that the strategic evaluation of radicalization depends on assessing whether "[the] radicals enhance the position of moderates." An effective radical flank allows the moderate faction in the movement to receive concessions during the negotiation process because the sitting regime seeks to avoid a mass and radical uprising. In contrast, contemporary accounts examine Haine's notions and find radical militancy in social movements can be detrimental to successful reforms (Chenoweth and Schock 2015; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). These debates become synthesized in cycles of movement theories (Kriesi et al. 1992; Tarrow 2022:201–2): When a political opportunity facilitates the rise of contentious organizations, leaders' personal preferences, factions' ideological differences, and the disagreement over general movements' agenda stimulate competition among these organizations, bifurcating the movement into radical and moderate blocs. Regime concessions are likely to intensify their differences and radicalize factions.

However, an alternative conceptualization demonstrates causal mechanisms between initiating factors and subsequent outcomes of radicalization. Hirsch (1990) and Koopmans (1993) suggest repressions polarize movements, pushing organizations toward radical contentions. della Porta claims that "radicalization is a process of escalation from nonviolent to increasingly violent repertoires of action that develops through a complex set of interactions unfolding over

time” (2018:462). It can shift discourses and dynamics of contention with three primary factors. First, radicalization is a process that connects individual motivation, such as radical repertoires and ideologies, with environmental conditions, such as the state’s repression (della Porta 1995:136; della Porta and Haupt 2012:314). Second, radicalization can be peer-group-centered, where clandestine organizations seek protection or revenge for their prosecuted members (Bosi and della Porta 2012:363; Zwermer, Steinhoff, and Porta 2000:89). Third, the unevenly distributed effect of repression has “transformative power” to reinforce the existing sentiments of delegitimizing the state (Bosi and della Porta 2012:365). In return, radicalization has a structurally responsive characteristic in which the movement seeks to counteract its mobilizational or organizational obstacles.

Also, studying radicalization has an explanatory and interpretive approach. The structure of the movement, protesters’ emotions, and interactions with movements’ counterparts contribute to the radicalization dynamic (Goodwin, Jasper, and Khattra 1999; Jasper 2018; Santoro and Fitzpatrick 2015). Existing studies of TSM demonstrate a combination of those factors. The decline of the state’s political control and official ideologies within the universities contributed to the rise of student-based civil societies as a basic mobilizational organization (Zhao 1997). However, the influx of liberalism and Western cultures in Chinese universities positions students between the admiration of modernization and the commitment to local cultures (Zhao 2001:96–97). The proximity of university campuses across Beijing facilitates a speedy, weak organizational capacity that fragmentizes students, radicalizes their strategies, and makes them less willing to trust the government for negotiations. (Zhao 1998; D. Zhao 2009:82). Additionally, Calhoun (1997), Walder, and Gong (1993) suggest that both weaknesses of organizations and the absence of alliance with other civil societies prevent the movement from engaging in effective concession extractions when elites are divided. As a result, the relationship between radicalization and other mobilizational factors are also critical in shaping the radical dynamics that influence the social movements’ outcomes.

The Radicalness in Radicalization

However, I challenge those theoretical notions by highlighting the process of radicalization as a distinctive mechanism of “dialectical interconnection” (Krinsky and Mische 2013:20). Namely, radicalization can occur due to practical needs when a movement encounters repressions or intra-movement competition. But it does not mean radicalization is sheerly responsive. Instead, escalatory trends of tactics and demands reshape elites’ coalitions, activist interactions, and, eventually, the movement’s outcomes. Namely, radicalization can occur without being violent or under contexts of violent repression, but it also fosters a relatively independent mobilizational capacity by applying a set of repertoires, weakening the movement’s ability to extract concessions. This escalatory mobilization shifts the political structures of the movement, forcing associated actors in a contentious environment to interact alternatively. Hence, I seek an understanding of radicalization beyond the mechanism of responses or tactical innovations contributing to movements’ outcomes.

Focusing on commitment does not reject previously listed theories completely, especially over the initial stimulus of radicalization. On the contrary, I recognize the weak organizational structure is a critical precondition for radicalization in both historical and contemporary eras (Beissinger 2017; Enikolopov, Makarin, and Petrova 2020; Tufekci 2017; Weyland 2012, 2014). In a social movement, this can refer to inter-organizational competition for resources (Tarrow 2022:202), the presence of a “negative coalition” with “highly diverse preferences on most major politically salient issues” (Beissinger 2013:576), or the absence of political coalition (Calhoun 1997; Walder and Gong 1993). Unlike movements with years of organization and networks (Morris 1981a, 1986), radicalization is likely to break out in social movements without a cohesive organizational structure. As Zhao (1998, 2001) carefully notes, the geographic distribution and previously established associations of protesters provide a foundation for collective actions and a wide range of political demands. Especially when protests occur in the metropole of a country, protesters encounter the revolutionary dilemma (Beissinger 2022:253) in which they are threatening the regime but also highly vulnerable to repression. These conditions intensify the regime's and the movement's interaction, offering strong incentives to radicalize.

What I disagree with is the process of radicalization within the political structure of the movement. Radicalization is not necessarily just responsive to the changing political opportunities. Its processes correspond to the development of frames, identity, and network, shaping an inter-subject relationship with the regime with relative independence. Namely, when a risky movement occurs, threatening environments activate the boundary between the regime and contender on practical and identity-based levels, facilitating the dynamics of narrative construction, ideological formations, and tactics innovations (Tilly 2005:64). In contrary to Zhao (1998, 2001; 2009), radicalization is more than a product of the weakening of state ideology, the absence of strict political controls on civil society, and the geographic proximity of the mobilizing population. Instead, radical actions and narratives signify the ongoing meaning-making process beyond the collapse of official ideology and political control because they invest in “moral meaning” as the “basis of self-identity and action” (Polletta 1998:410). These associated dynamics and tactics in social movements can promote recruitment, alliance, and coordination (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow et al. 1986; Xu 2013) by modifying previously salient mobilizational structures.

Hence, my emphasis on the commitment to radicalization focuses on the mobilizational impacts of this meaning-making process. The escalation of tactics and demands not only represents the competition over resources but also reformulates the contentious context. When actors employ cultural, emotional, and ideological repertoires to form a contentious identity (Drago 2021; Polletta 1998), the movement generates sufficient threat toward the present political structure via mass mobilization, constituting “a revolutionary situation” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001:197). These escalating efforts radically change the “landscape” of the existing structure (Su 2023:20), forcing the elites, countermovement organizations, and intra-and-inter movement actors to react. This process is the movement gaining its “consciousness”

(Goodwin et al. 1999:43; Mansbridge and Morris 2001) to reshape state-society relations. Especially when a movement lacks a solid civil society foundation, actors compete over authority, mobilizational power, public support, and political alignments. The precise collective action paradox is situated within those competitions because these actors have “identical social positions” against the regime (Walder 2006:713–14). More specifically, this escalation process creates a power struggle between the radical and moderate leadership, undermining the capacity of the contention to extract concession from the state. Meanwhile, this shift in the movement dynamics further implicates the elites' response to them based on associated political power, interests, and networks. These mutually constitutive relationships are critical to understanding radicalization dynamics and corresponding outcomes.

Lastly, I also highlight a symbiotic dynamic between the regime and the movement due to those interactions. I argue that the fluidity of the elites' coalition becomes meaningful precisely because of the dilemma between organizational efforts for negotiations and radical mass mobilizations. Radicalization presents a symbiotic dynamic that undermines the position of moderate factions in the movement, subsequently weakening the soft-liners in the government. Meanwhile, radical solidarity presents a major threat to the political structure, allowing the hard-liners in the regime to justify repression. This procedural development is a temporal transition where elites' network and coalition dynamics can only be meaningful when the movement has become sufficiently powerful to be exploited. As a result, the commitment to radicalization is the critical driving force for elites' competition, shaping “oppositional alignment” (Zhang 2021:62; Zhang and Shi 2023) and allowing the elites to channel “the protest for their advantage” (Su 2023:21).

The Process-tracing of 1989

Studying the TSM is empirically troublesome. The case's historical nature and associated political controversies produce debates among scholars, former activists, and historians (Lim 2014:5). Thus, my methodological approach seek “to investigate and explain the decision process by which various initial conditions [are] translated into outcomes” (Coulam and Smith 1985:35) via process tracing. I survey events between April 15 and June 4, 1989, for interaction among student organizations, leaders, and the government.¹ This process involves archival data of speeches, announcements, personal correspondences, internal communications, interviews, memoirs, and official chronicles issue by the state. More specifically, my process-tracing design establish a “casual narrative” (Lange 2013:44) that establishes a relationship between empirical investigations and theoretical arguments based on three criteria.

First, getting the case accurate is paramount yet rudimentary aspect of my methodological design. Fortunately, contemporary publications and scholarly works on TSM have made more sources available and authentic (Su 2023:9), establishing basic empirical frameworks for the study. In this case, I divide all sources into four categories for cross-reference: published movement documents, participants' memoirs, witness testimonies, and aftermath recollections.

¹ For chronological clarity, appendix 1 lists all major events and incidents from April 15 to June 4, 1989.

I prioritize first-hand sources but cross-check them for factual accuracy without any over-reliance. The rule of thumb is that a historical incident must be corroborated by at least three sources, with inconsistent records analyzed in the footnotes and appendix. This triangulation of data results in what I believe is an accurate reflection of the movement's dynamics.

Second, determining casual narratives via process-tracing is controversial across different methodological traditions (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 2021; Mahoney and Goertz 2006; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003). The question orientation regarding the conditionality of radicalization and outcomes situates the empirical narrative within comparative-theoretical frameworks. In this case, my analysis focuses on how existing theoretical accounts highlight the critical component of radicalization influencing the movement's outcome in contrast against established historical narratives. Similar to Collier's emphasis upon "evaluating prior explanatory hypotheses" (2011:824), I use existing social movements theories to confine my casual narratives within a set of factors, such as prior mobilizing networks (Morris 1981b; Zhao 2001), leaders' ideological commitments (della Porta 1995), and organizational innovations (Davenport 2015). These theoretical contexts whether existing evidence requires any additional elaborations when they demonstrate contradictory tendency against theoretical predictions.

Third, constructing casual narratives relies on transformative contingency (Ermakoff 2015; Sewell 1996) and counterfactuals. On the one hand, I recognize the temporal sequences of a historical contingency for event causality (Mahoney 2000:531). Yet, the TSM case offer a distinctive advantage for articulating how contentious mobilizations "construct the unfolding play of temporality" (Hall 1999:164). More specifically, the interplay between the regime and the movement produces a series of tactical innovations, such as the hunger strike campaign, that have the potential to redefine and reshape the context of the mobilization. But, I also recognize that overfocusing on possible alternatives is problematic. Galvanizing upon them produces overdetermination, in which "an alternative sequence of possible events is proposed without considering the interdependence and feedback of other events" (Zhang 2019:e16). Thus, the casual narrative relies on whether identified alternatives or counterfactual has any meaningful implications in contrast to observed event sequences and theoretical predictions. I allocate the last part of examination within each discussion section of the empirical narratives.

The Context of Mobilization

In the 1980s, the CCP had largely loosened its control over Chinese society by moving away from Maoist socialist engineering (Mann 2012:225; Solinger 1993:95–96; Vogel 2013:362; Zhao 1997, 2001:41–45). The economic reform policies increased social mobilities, promoted private investments for businesses, and nurtured liberal political thoughts among citizens. However, these reforms came with costs of inflation, striking job markets, and corruption, making some party members believe that the state was under a siege of "bourgeois liberalization" (Wang 2012:159–60; Zhao 2001:88–89; Z. Zhao 2009:205–13). The conservatives blamed Hu Yaobang, a popular party veteran, and relieved him as the general party secretary of the CCP. Meanwhile, the government slowed down the reform by introducing

conservative agendas such as the “anti-bourgeois liberalization” and “four fundamental principles” to counter social instabilities (Deng 1994:158–84). These shifts avoided a sharp division between the conservatives and reformers in the regime, but the prospect of economic and political reforms remained uncertain. (Vogel 2013:591; Z. Zhao 2009:225–33).

Reform policies gave space to civil societies where universities’ informal associations formed a foundation for contention. In Beijing, because universities’ campuses were concentrated in the West part of the city, their proximity and dormitory arrangements guaranteed interpersonal connections among students, formulating networks for potential mobilizations (Wang 2012:123, 134; Zhao 1998:1510). Meanwhile, the intensity of political controls over the university system decreased significantly because “the ideological legitimatization of the communist state greatly declined” in the 1980s (Zhao 1997:159). As a result, campuses’ environments became reasonably liberal for political dissidents who had spoken critically against the government (Shen 1998:113; Wang 2012:89–92). However, when the economic reforms experienced backlashes, students’ economic well-being and career options suffered. These aspects shaped grievances against the government, and Hu Yaobang’s death triggered the contention.

The Mobilization of Ambivalence

The proximation of dormitories among Beijing universities enabled mass yet uncoordinated mobilization. Leaders had distinctively different motivations: Wang Dan (2012:162–63) launched a fund-raising campaign because he was the leader of a student club; Feng Congde (2013:80) shipped food and drink because he heard protesting students were starving; and Shen Tong (1998:166–67), who later became a leader of student organizations, hesitated to join in because he thought any involvement would ruin his future career. Meanwhile, student demands were also uncoordinated: some offered condolences; some made political innuendo blaming Deng Xiaoping’s ruling; and some students engaged in sit-ins in Tiananmen Square and Xinhua Gate.²

The lack of coordination did not mean the absence of collective actions. When the CCP held Hu’s state funeral in the Great Hall of People on April 22, students from dozens of universities turned out to pay their respects. Three student representatives wished to deliver a cross-universities-endorsed petition to Premier Li Peng during the event. After receiving no responses, they knelt for thirty-five minutes (Gordon and Hinton 1995). Culturally, because kneeling represented subordinate and unequal relations between emperors and their subjects, students believed that the government had insulted their patriotism by displaying no interest in their appeals. Immediately after the funeral, boycotting classes became a consensus. These actions united memorial-orientated student networks, creating the Beijing Provincial Federation of

² Archives were inconsistent on the event of April 20, or “the Bloodshed of April 20.” Official records suggested that students were mobilized due to rumors and attacked the Xinhua Gate, where the CCP central office was located. In contrast, student leaders indicated that their protests were peaceful and nonviolent. They did refuse to comply with police orders, but they did not attack the government office. Video footage showed students wishing to enter Xinhua Gate and being confronted by the police and security guards. For details, see (Feng 2013:77–85; Gordon and Hinton 1995; National Educational Committee 1989:25–36; Shen 1998:176; The Communist Youth League of Beijing 1990:6–7; Thomas 1991:135–37; Vogel 2013:602; Wang 2012:170; Zhang 2009:34–35).

Autonomous Student Association (BPFASA) (Vogel 2013:604). Records showed that students no longer believed in the legitimacy of the government.

A student wrote on a poster: “*The national emblem on the front gate of the Great Hall of the People must have now seen how the ‘masters’ of the ‘republic’ were petitioning like slaves, and how the dignified emperor-like officials were treating them with indifference!* (Calhoun 1997:43)”

A former party official recalled: “*Many of us [CCP officials] in the Great Hall of People, frankly, experienced student movements. Why are we treating students like this? ... What we were protesting back then is what students are protesting now. Why have we become a party that is anti-people and anti-students? This is not the party that I once joined* (Gordon and Hinton 1995).”

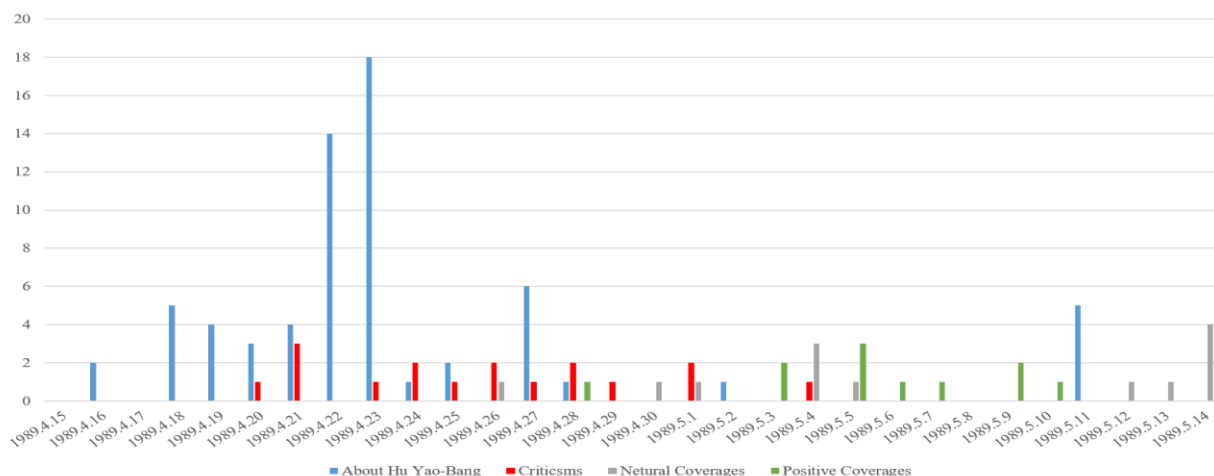
A student wrote in a letter: “*People on the street clapped for students. Some offered money for them to buy drinks, and street vendors gave them fruits. A middle-aged woman held a student’s hand, crying out loud. I still think the movement won’t have any outcome because things in China don’t work that way, but I can’t help but be emotional. At that moment, I hated my mind of soberness: I would definitely join the next parade. Even at the expense of my life, I have to defend their honor.*” (The Institute for the Study of Chinese Communist Problems 1989:4—73)

When the TSM started, the CCP politburo became divided. The incumbent party secretary, Zhao Ziyang, believed in a peaceful resolution, but Premier Li Peng believed the movement was an organized challenge against the regime.³ The party-funded news outlet, *People’s Daily*, published an aggressive editorial on April 26 accusing the movement of an anti-revolutionary conspiracy. Yet, the overall news coverage showed an implicit contradiction, as demonstrated in Figure 1. The regime might want to prevent students from mobilizing by issuing intimidating narratives. But it also issued articles honoring Hu Yaobang, adding memorial sentiments to the public discourse alongside some favorable coverages. They might not represent an approval of student actions, but they created a sense of security that the government was not entirely against the movement.

Figure 1: People Daily’s Reports on the TSM from April 15 to May 14⁴

³ For the discussion over inconsistency of elites’ responses and its context, see appendix 2.

⁴ I hand-coded all news reports from the *People’s Daily* Database (1946-2020). The chart only selected direct coverages and commentaries on the movement to avoid over-interpretation. Unrelated content, such as on local governments, domestic news, and international news, were not included. I categorize positive and negative coverage by filtering new articles with keywords such as “chaos,” “riot,” “counterrevolutions,” “anti-revolutions,” and other clear-cut differentiations that are openly in opposition to the movement. Also, I allocated statements honoring Hu Yaobang and letters from readers who expressed their condolences in the category of “About Hu Yaobang” because they represent a possible position for the government that would be open for interpretation. For verification, see <http://data.people.com.cn/rmrb/20200706/1?code=2>, and (Zhao 2001:307).



Student mobilizations took place alongside these mixed responses.⁵ However, the movement did not have a sophisticated strategy to engage in concession extractions. Instead, it became increasingly divided because the government was neither forsaking its power to repress nor fully committing to a peaceful settlement (Calhoun 1997:59–64; Chai 2011a:131). The moderate position indicated that the movement had successfully forced the government to negotiate (Gordon and Hinton 1995; Shen 1998:229–30). Overwhelming social support made the movement legitimate. The BPFASA had to strengthen its coalition on campuses and push political reforms through negotiations. However, the radical position indicated that the current student-government negotiations yielded no concrete result (Calhoun 1997:60–62; Feng 2013:269–70). The government would purposefully stall negotiations and prepare for repression if students were not to escalate. Returning to campuses would give away the biggest leverage for students, making the movement vulnerable. Alongside these debates, verbal concessions from Zhao Ziyang further intensified these divisions (The Institute for the Study of Chinese Communist Problems 1989:4—234-4—239).

During the seventieth anniversary of the May 4 Movement, Zhao said: “*Students and citizens wish to democratize, punish corrupted officials, develop education and science. These are CCP’s agenda. The CCP is united with the people and the youth. Let us communicate. Let us reach an agreement. In the spirit of the union, let us be more productive.*”

During the meeting with the Asian Development Bank representatives, Zhao said, “*When you come to China, you see students are parading. Does this mean instability in China? I want to point out that students’ slogans are, supporting CCP, supporting socialism... I believe these*

⁵ The protest on April 27, with over 100,000 participations, experienced major internal division among the leadership. The BPFASA first canceled a scheduled protest on April 27 due to repression concerns. Yet strong dissenting voices from Wang Dan, Feng Congde, and other university students forced the BPFASA to invalidate its previous decision. General consensuses among students believed that a large-scale collective action could justify their legitimacy. On April 27, over a hundred thousand students breached multiple police barricades and marched toward Tiananmen Square with few casualties. This protest forced the government to start the negotiation on April 29. But it became immediately controversial: Yuan Mu, the spokesman from the State Council, met with official student unions’ representatives who did not necessarily participate in protests, instead of representatives from BPFASA. For details, see (Feng 2013:192; Gordon and Hinton 1995; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001:217; The Office of Chinese Communist Party in Beijing City 1989:54; Vogel 2013:606; Wang 2012:196; Zhang 2009:90–92).

entail students' attitudes toward the CCP and the government: they are satisfied and unsatisfied. They are definitively not against our political establishment. Instead, they wish to correct our politics."

For the outbreak of the movement, the overall division between reformers and conservatives in the government constituted a basic criterion of political opportunity for mobilization. The decline of the state's ideological legitimacy and elite division allowed students to leverage their collective actions for political reforms. Campus ecologies were sufficient to promote protest activities. Yet, student associations were not the battle-harden activist networks as Morris (1981a) depicted. Instead, they were loosely connected, interpersonal relationships based on the geographic distribution of campuses with "commonly identified objectives" of disapproving the Chinese government and CCP (Beissinger 2013:576). As a result, student mobilizations invoke legitimacy via a cultural and moral symbol of the state funeral, "in service of the movement" and restraining the CCP's counter-mobilizational tactics.⁶ The lack of responses by the CCP, especially when three students kneeled, became a stimulating circumstance, promoting a typical "anger" of "moral commitment of indignation (Jasper 2018:42)," as the CCP behaved worse than a feudal emperor. Meanwhile, the change in governmental responses before and after the April 26 Editorial marked the movement's transition toward threat. The division at the Politburo, the ambiguity from official news agencies, and the seemingly self-contradicting statements by Zhao Ziyang highlighted the inconsistency and fluidity of the elites' coalition during this period in contrast to the interpretation by Zhang and Shi (2023). Even if Zhao were to be overconfident regarding his alliance with Deng Xiaoping, the origin of this judgment was that Zhao misunderstood the subversive capacity of the student mobilization.

The Commitment to Hunger Strike

In early May, students were competing against each other. On May 11, Wang Dan and Chai Ling met with a few representatives from BPFASA in a small diner (Feng 2013:269; Wang 2012:204–6). They supported the hunger strike because they believed it would expedite the negotiation. Yet the BPFASA's members overwhelmingly opposed their notions, especially one of the moderate leaders, Wang Chaohua, who had frequently been in touch with the government officials (Feng 2013:290–91; Long Bow Group, Inc 1995b). However, this division among leaders occurred at a critical juncture. On the one hand, the welcoming ceremony for Gorbachev's Sino-Soviet Summit, scheduled for May 15, would likely be at Tiananmen Square. It was the first state visit to China by the Soviet head of state since the Sino-Soviet Spilt in 1960s. Students anticipated imminent repression if there were no agreement before May 15 as the government was unlikely to expose their domestic political instability to the international community during such a major diplomatic event.

⁶ To be precise, McAdam's explanation (1994:38) contained factual errors: Hu Yaobang was mistyped as "Yu Yaobang," and his title mistakenly became "premier." Also, the April 27 march was not a mourning event. It was a response to the April 26 editorial. Furthermore, records indicated that the April 22 march for Hu's funeral was indeed a coordinated event by student leaders from Qinghua University, Beijing University, Reming University, Political Science and Law University, and Normal University. But no evidence showed that they orchestrated the keening. For details, see (Feng 2013:112–25; Long Bow Group, Inc 1995a; Wang 2012:175–77; Zhao 1998)

On the other hand, the speeches by Zhao Ziyang demobilized the students (Dai 2019:106–8). According to Chai Ling's recollections, the movement's decline was alarming, and debates over escalation were non-stop among the students (2011a:132). The BPFASA could not convince radical students that their negotiating platforms were legitimate or effective, incentivizing the BPFASA to change its positions. Its leaders, after deliberations, decided to "understand and support" the hunger strike (Feng 2013:274). They believed that the movement could gain leverage by allying with radical leaders. At the same time, the moderates could put radical leaders in check via personal and informal connections. The BPFASA was confident it could be a broker between the government and radical leaders.

Generally, the hunger strike achieved phenomenal success despite being "a strange mixture of discipline and anarchy, innocence and calculation" (Dobbs 1989:A23). Its first round had 300 volunteers on May 13, but the number quickly rose to 3,000. Intellectuals, workers, and students in other cities traveled to Beijing to support these hunger-striking students. Foreign journalists in Beijing covering Gorbachev's visit ended up "[walking] into a revolution" (Gordon and Hinton 1995). This escalation facilitated strong solidarity due to the ubiquitous application of cultural and emotional norms. According to records, the hunger strike declaration invoked students' loyalty to the nation to show their patriotism and spirit of sacrifice (Han and Hua 1990:201). In Weberian terms (1978:241), these students demonstrated "extraordinary" virtues because they were willing to die for their right to protest. Most importantly, overt expressions of morality forced the state to temporarily relinquish its repression power by increasing its cost, especially when their protests appeared in a nonviolent, orderly, and spectacular fashion. In return, it nullified the government's intimidation of the April 26 editorial with a well-bounded legitimacy to sustain the protesting activities. As a result, the CCP leaders were caught "completely by surprise" and had to meet with student representatives to seek agreements (Vogel 2013:611).

But these successes disguised the pitfall of radicalization. According to Feng Congde and Wang Chaohua, the dialog delegations from BPFASA never trusted the hunger strikers (Feng 2013:306; Long Bow Group, Inc 1995b). They were confident that, because of their prior engagements with the officials, the reformers in CCP would be able to offer a peaceful solution if the students were to withhold large-scale escalating protests. The hunger strike could expedite this process but did not guarantee a successful negotiation. As a result, the hunger-striking leaders, such as Wang Dan, Chai Ling, and Wuer Kaixi, were not aware of negotiating agenda previously (D. Zhao 2009:75). The moderates were in a race against hunger strikers. If they could reach an agreement with the government before consolidating the radical agenda, they would have a better chance to strengthen their organizational capacity.

But this plan failed because the dialog group kept the negotiation details from hunger strikers. On May 14, the dialog group scheduled a meeting with governmental representatives at 4:00 pm in the United Front Work Department. Both parties agreed that the negotiation would be taped and aired during the state's evening news program as a monumental step toward a

peaceful resolution. Yet hunger strikers thought the dialog delegation would surrender to the government because they were unaware of any prior engagements with the government. As a result, they argued that the dialog delegations did not represent the movement. Shen Tong and Xiang Xiaoji, leaders of student representatives, wished to calm these hunger strikers by promising the delegation would convey their voices. But, hunger-striking students managed to enter the meeting room and disrupt the negotiation. Yan Mingfu, the head of the government delegation, was shocked by the disruption and adjourned the negotiation. Thus, the meeting on May 14 yielded no results.⁷

Consequentially, the movement splintered as hunger strikers were not negotiating. Instead, they established their legitimacy based on exclusive moral appeals. Further negotiations became irreverent because hunger-striking students viewed all opposition against the hunger strike as challenging their moral exclusiveness. They formed the Hunger Strike Headquarters and refused to leave the Square even when Yan pledged in person: “I can promise, on behalf of the government, we will not retaliate; if you don’t believe me, you can take me back to Beijing University as a hostage and release me when things are settled (Wang 2012:222).” Meanwhile, over a hundred thousand students, scholars, medical staff, and Beijing residents also joined the protest (Chai 2011b:150; Feng 2013:334–35). Continued social support for the hunger strikers further intensified the effectiveness of radical sentiments, even pushing some moderate leaders away from negotiation (Calhoun 1997:70). On May 18, Premier Li Peng met with student leaders, but the conversation had no outcomes (The Communist Youth League of Beijing 1990:33–44).

Li Peng: “As a Primer of the government and a CCP member, I should not hide my opinions. But I chose not to talk about it. If we keep badgering on these matters, I think it’s not appropriate..... If students here do not believe they can command students on the Square, then I want to send a message through you, asking them to stop the hunger strike.”

Wuer Kaixi: “We are not ones who are badgering, and I don’t think I should repeat what I have been saying..... The point is not about conniving student representatives here. It’s about convening students on the Square. If there is one student on the Square who keeps hunger striking, I can’t promise the rest of them will leave.”

Wang Dan: “If Primer Li believes there will be riots disrupting social orders, then I can claim, on behalf of students, that the government should take full responsibility.”

Furthermore, external support made the radical mobilization sustainable. The hunger strike campaign created a narrative of unity and attracted a large money flow from donors. News

⁷ Close records examinations showed that when hunger-striking students protested, Wang Chaohua tried to make the broadcast available. Yet hunger-striking students did not believe her. These students forced her into the room to confront Yan Mingfu. Meanwhile, the state media was preparing recorded tapes for broadcasting, but hunger-striking students blocked the exit of the United Front Work Department. Media staffers were unable to either enter or exit the department building. Eventually, the state media did not air those tapes, and the meeting did not produce any outcome. For details, see (Calhoun 1997:67; Chai 2011b:141–44; Chen 2019a:143–49; Feng 2013:303–6; Gordon and Hinton 1995; Han and Hua 1990:204–6; Shen 1998:243–54; Wang 2012:212).

agencies in Beijing, especially the American-based ones, saw the movement as a united front. Only the *Los Angeles Times* and *South China Morning Post* noted student divisions when Hong Kong supporters did not know who and where their donations should go (Cheng 1989; Joan Shorenstein Barone Center 1992; Lau 1989; Yeung and Tang 1989). But when they raised their concerns, millions of donations had already made their way to the Square and saved the radicals from bankruptcy, making the hunger strikers genuinely independent from the BPFASA.

Also, hunger-striking students attracted attention from all sectors in China. Beijing workers were striking; students from other provinces were coming to Beijing; scholars were mobilizing; even journalists from state media defied the CCP by publishing articles praising students.⁸ With their spectacular speeches and actions, radical protesters, no matter their ranks, found themselves in a vicious loop of outbidding to maintain the flow of resources to the radicals exclusively. Even when students left the movement due to failed negotiations, radical leaders could quickly recruit new students to maintain their dominance on the Square. Preserving the radical agenda became the only priority, and negotiations became increasingly trivial. Feng Congde characterized it in an interview (Gordon and Hinton 1995).

“People on the Square could go to the train stations, telling those newly arrived students: ‘I am the movement leader, come with me, the Square needs you.’ They made these new students their own group. They besieged the radio station and command center, kicked others out, and took over. I had to suppress this kind of “coups” three or four times a day.”

The dynamic of the hunger strike highlighted a competition among students in the form of a collective actions paradox that shaped regime-repertoire interactions. On the one hand, Zhao’s concessionary speeches, regardless of his intention, provided critical leverage for the moderates in the movement to legitimize their negotiation agenda. The moderates had sufficient public support and associated organizational power to counter their intra-movement counterparts. Their delegations and BPFASA’s leadership structure also represented the changing networks of association, from interpersonal relationships based on geographic distribution to a regulated institution with specific principles of operations. On the other hand, precisely because of the changes in the movements’ mobilizational structure, the radicals were in “identical social positions” with the moderates as challengers against the regime (Walder 2006:713–14). Mass mobilizations also altered dormitory-based interpersonal ties, allowing the radicals to mobilize cultural repertoire. In return, the exclusive moral claim became a much more effective mobilizational tool than the moderates’ efforts to promote meaningful negotiations. Especially as the TSM broke out without the involvement of highly cohesive organizations or civil society

⁸ The number of participants was unspecified across all records for three reasons. First, students made Tiananmen Square a central protesting spot. Members from the BPFASA constantly traveled back and forth between the square and campuses. By May 14, over 100,000 protesters were on the square, but the number fluctuated daily. When the government declared martial law on May 20, the number of protesters spiked to 400,000. Second, since the hunger strike, activists from other provinces have started to travel to Beijing. Daily records were around 20,000 on average, with substantial fluctuations. By May 25, the net flow of students to Beijing was around 50,000. Third, all sources noted the participation of Beijing residents and workers. But their mobilities were unclear. Between May 20 and June 4, students launched multiple demonstrations against martial law. Some were with a few thousand protesters, and some involved millions. For details, see (Cai 2009:90–93; Chen 2019c:70–84; Gordon and Hinton 1995; National Educational Committee 1989:132–37, 177; The Office of Chinese Communist Party in Beijing City 1989:75–123; Zhang 2009:158).

support, the conflict between the moderates and radicals became a competition over participants and resources. The lack of repression on May 15 during Gorbachev's visit further strengthened the position of radical leaders as international media brought focus upon the radicals. These interactions contributed to the radicals' uncompromising claim when the CCP's elites had not decided on repression or negotiation. It disrupted the previously stabilized political structures based on Zhao's speeches. As a result, the state became compelled to respond to those dynamics.

The Radicalization of Symbiotic Relations

The regime's hard-liners reaped from radicalization. When Yan Mingfu failed to convince students, the Politburo split intensified.⁹ On May 17, Deng summoned politburo members to his residence to discuss the government's actions. Zhao indicated that if the government were to soften its position, he would be confident in persuading the students to stop the hunger strike and end the movement. But, Li and Yao believed that Zhao's concessive posture encouraged further mobilization, and the party had to take a "clear-cut stand against turmoil" (Leng et al. 2004:1276; Li 2010:168). In this case, Deng Xiaoping became the tiebreaker because his influence on the military was the last resort to ensure the regime's stability. Nevertheless, the debate on May 17 convinced Deng that further concessions would bring the end of the regime, and military involvement would be necessary since Beijing's police forces were insufficient (Vogel 2013:617). Zhao was disappointed by Deng's decision and refused to cooperate. Li, in return, summoned senior party cadres on May 19 and declared martial law. Li's speeches directly referred to comments from Wuer Kaixi, suggesting that "the hunger strike leaders had lost control over the movement" (The Institute for the Study of Chinese Communist Problems 1989:4—243).

Radical protesters were aware of repression, but they did not align with potential supporters within the regime because their outsider support gave them confidence: after the declaration of martial law, millions of Beijing residents, workers, and students swarmed the streets to block troops from entering the city, and senior military leaders expressed concerns by promising that the military would not engage in violent repression against students (National Educational Committee 1989:153; The Communist Youth League of Beijing 1990:53). Zhao saw these as an opportunity to intervene via the National People's Congress. He coordinated with congressional representatives and moderate activists for an emergency session to resume negotiation (Wang 2012:322; Z. Zhao 2009:65–66). He convinced the speaker of the National Congress, Wan Li, who was on a scheduled state visit overseas, to immediately return to Beijing so that Congress could apply its constitutional authority to avoid repression (Chen 2019b:151; Vogel 2013:621–22). Yet Zhao's plan eventually failed because of the unity across the conservative leadership. On the one hand, Deng and Li had already reached out to the senior party members and local leaders immediately after May 17 to secure their support. They silenced Wan Li by forcing him back to Shanghai instead of Beijing so that he would not be in the position to initiate an emergency session (Calhoun 1997:105). Although over 40

⁹ For elites' division on May 17, see appendix 3.

congressional representatives showed supports to the proposal, the party had decided to remove Zhao's power and marginalize all moderate stakeholders in the government (Dai 2019:199; The Institute for the Study of Chinese Communist Problems 1989:4—101).

On the other hand, the movement bifurcation continued when the hard-liners exploited student radicalizations to eliminate soft-liners. Radical students refused to leave or negotiate with the government, claiming that cooperation with elites would ruin the movement (Chai 2011b:186–87; Gordon and Hinton 1995). Zhao's efforts in pacifying the radicals received no positive feedback: 1) on May 17, Zhao issued a joint statement on behalf of Politburo, approving student patriotism and calling for a peaceful resolution; 2) on May 19, Zhao visited students in Tiananmen Square personally and called for ending the hunger strike by apologizing (The Institute for the Study of Chinese Communist Problems 1989:4—241–4—242). The radicals still refused to cooperate, as they were too confident to see a potential alliance with regime soft-liners. As a result, soft-liners presented no solution to the movement, whereas radical students continuously occupied the Square and drew support from home and abroad. The radicals believed that public support --- including money from donors, students from other provinces, and Beijing residents blocking the military on the streets --- was powerful enough to prevent the regime from repressing the movement. They overestimated their ability to confront the regime and underestimated the hard-liners' ability to implement violent repression, constituting a stand-off between radical students and the government. A recollection of May 27 by Feng Congde (2013:432) showed confidence in nonviolent struggle.

A young student made a speech at the radio station in the Hunger Strike Headquarters: "*This afternoon, I will order all my dare-to-die-corps members to lie right under the wheels of those army trucks. The tank will not run me over as long as I am there!*"

Meanwhile, all attempts to restore negotiations were far from actualization. The BPFASA tried to avoid repression by reestablishing its control over the movement and proposing plans to resolve differences among students (Chai 2011b:162; Feng 2013:416–17). A coordinating agency, known as the "Capital Joint Conference," created by a group of intellectuals and representatives from BPFASA, also offered plans to resume negotiations by urging students to withdraw from the Square. But the radical leaders refused to cooperate and insisted upon a confrontation with the state (Chai 2011b:168; Feng 2013:418; Wang 2012:238–39). By the end of May, Liu Xiaobo, a moderate university professor, realized the danger of these unending struggles. He tried to convince students to restart negotiations by launching a new round of hunger strikes (Gordon and Hinton 1995; Wang 2012:240). His efforts, however, backfired because his actions reinvigorated students. Liu was overwhelmed by his popularities and was no longer advocating a peaceful settlement. He reflected on his decisions during an aftermath interview.

"I think I had a particular personality split during the movement. For example, I was talking about eliminating hostility in my hunger strike declaration. But when I stood by the monument

and saw people cheering, hoping to defeat the martial law, there was no rationality. Practically, can I use rationality to control my behaviors? Do I know my role? It's too difficult.... When I stood on the [Tiananmen] square and faced a cheering crowd, I felt I was the prophet of the nation” (Gordon and Hinton 1995).

Two days after Liu's campaign, TSM ended with bloody repression. The official communique from the State Council (1989:474–75) suggested over 3,000 civilians and over 6,000 armed forces/police individuals were injured, with around 100 deaths. Records investigations indicated rough estimations ranging from two to ten thousand deaths, varying by different sources (BBC 2017; Gordon and Hinton 1995; Li 2002; Shen 1998:327; Wang 2012:242; Zhang 2009:241–42, 340–41).

The precise pitfall of radicalization was two-folded. On the one hand, the radicals' uncompromising position against the regime maintained a strong mobilizational capacity for sustaining the movement when the threat of repression became increasingly imminent. Student cultural and moral commitments presented powerful narratives to draw consistent support from Beijing residents. However, these efforts also severely undermined the moderates' efforts to negotiate with the regime. The dialectics of collective actions was a dilemma between the sustainability of on-street mobilization and the capacity to translate those mobilizations for political gain. The radicals almost paralyzed the moderates by taking advantage of the movement's weak yet unsophisticated organizational structure, contributing to the collapse of the negotiation process. On the other hand, this tension between the moderates and the radicals facilitated the elites' divisions in a symbiotic fashion. Strong opposition from the conservatives undermined Zhao's capacity to forge a soft-liner coalition. But, as a strong advocate for peaceful solutions, Zhao could not find any meaningful leverage against the conservative coalition because the radicals refused to cooperate. Meanwhile, the movement's moderates, trapped in their struggle to regain control over Tiananmen Square, offered no substantial support to Zhao even when students saw him as a critical ally. In contrast, the conservative leaders, especially Li Peng, took advantage of the radicals to claim that the movement had gone beyond student control. As a result, the movement missed a political opportunity to exploit the division between the soft-liners and hard-liners in the government. Due to the intra-movement conflicts, the stagnating political process allowed the elites to eliminate those divisions and kill the movement eventually.

The Pitfall of Popularity

Collectively, my research seeks to convey two messages to further studies centering on social movements. I emphasize the interactive relationship between public mobilizations focusing on radicalization and the elites' coalition responses. Considering the student mobilization in 1989, China can be a deviant case. As a powerful authoritarian state is experiencing political retreat regarding its control over subordinate society, the structure of TSM is vastly different from classical case studies in contentious politics (Koopmans 1993; Morris 1986; Tilly 2004). However, the TSM dynamic offers a distinctive platform to examine how movements, without

a cohesive organizational foundation, can effectively shape the state-society relationship with powerful narratives based on cultures and morality. My analysis grounds the abstract structure-agency debate on two analytical concepts: the commitment to radicalization and symbiotic relations. Process tracing TSM shows radicalization is a distinctive mobilizational tool to salvage a declining social movement. When students in Beijing find themselves without a cohesive civil society, they mobilize with cultural and moral repertoire to maintain their activities, presenting a fundamental threat to the regime that forces the elites to engage with the movement. But precisely because of their weak organizational foundation, radicalization hinges on student capacity to translate their activism into concrete political leverages for substantiating their claims. Alternatively, the symbiotic relation highlights the effect of the paradox of collective actions. Threats imposed by the radicals strengthen the conservatives in the government by undermining the moderates in the movement to align with soft-liners in the regime. As a well-known reform leader, Zhao Ziyang cannot present meaningful resolutions to students or form an effective coalition with elites to prevent repression. These relational dynamics represent interconnectivity between movement and regime, shaping the outcome of social movements.

Meanwhile, I hope the discussion on TSM also speaks to a wide range of literature regarding elite politics (Su 2023; Zhang and Shi 2023), state-society relations (Chang 2015; Schneider 1995; Slater 2010), and movement-counter-movement interactions (Andrews 2004; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). I make no effort to reject those mechanisms nor seek to revisit the old debate between political processes and culture (Goodwin et al. 1999; McAdam 1982). Instead, I recognize the changing process of social movements by examining how social movements can employ existing repertoire to influence, undermine, and radically change the given political context, producing an alternative mechanism of interactions. I invite scholars to consider these dynamic relationships as a critical explanation to both “intra-movement” and extra-movement” outcomes (Earl 2000:4). Although the detailed explanation of dynamics in TSM forces the paper to focus on movement, I want to end the paper with an open-ended claim on longevity of repression, of which this paper has not yet addressed. Events on June 4 marked a beginning of a long-lasting work for the CCP to develop an infrastructure to eliminate a generation of liberal establishments. In post-Tiananmen eras, the CCP purges reformers, silences sympathizers and strengthens the leadership of conservative members. Universities and intellectual communities suffer from political prosecutions, mandatory military training, and rigid political indoctrination. When a movement helps the state to strengthen authoritarian state by obliterating an entire generation of democratic force, explaining the mechanisms of the failure of the TSM may, hopefully, provide a detailed beginning for further investigation on authoritarian state-building.

Appendix 1: Timeline of the TSM

Date	Main Events
April 15	The Announcement of Hu Yaobang's Death
April 20	The Xinhua Gate Incident
April 22	Hu Yaobang's State Funeral
April 23	Zhao Ziyang's State Visit to North Korea
April 26	The Release of the April 26 Editorial
April 27	The April 27 Demonstration
April 29	The Dialog between State Council Representatives and Students
April 30	Zhao Ziyang's Returning to Beijing
May 4	Zhao Ziyang's Concession Speeches
May 13	The Initiation of Hunger Strike
May 15	Gorbachev's State Visit
May 17	The Meeting of CCP Politburo Members
May 18	The Dialog between Li Peng and Students
May 19	Zhao Ziyang Meeting Students on Tiananmen Square
May 20	The Announcement of Martial Law
May 24	The Temporary Retreat of the Military
May 27	Hong Kong Fund-raising Events
June 2	Liu Xiaobo's Hunger Strike
June 3 and 4	Repression

Appendix 2: Narrative Table on Zhao's Departure to North Korea

Zhao's state visit to North Korea had a distinctive effect on the elites' understanding of the movement that initiated the consecutive development of the elites' coalition. Primary evidence remained inconsistent across sources regarding two aspects of inference: 1) did Zhao believe in the threatening nature of student mobilization; and 2) did the conservative leaders actively marginalize Zhao? If the answer to both questions was no, the movement played no critical role in shaping the elites' interactions. If any of those answers were to be yes, this would indicate that the elites were responding to the dynamics of the movement for coalition building. I developed the following table to demonstrate how different sources approached these two questions with their reasoning.

Why did Zhao Ziyang go to North Korea for a state visit?	
Sub-Question One: Did Zhao believe in the threatening nature of student mobilization?	Sub-Question Two: Did the conservative leaders take the opportunity to marginalize Zhao actively?
Answer by Zhao Ziyang (2007:9, 50; 2009:42–45), concerning Su (2023:80) and Calhoun (1997:47)	
No	Yes
Reason: Zhao emphasized that, prior to the April 26 Editorial, student mobilizations were not a serious threat, as he received reports from Beijing CCP's municipal committee indicating student divisions among mobilization. Zhao also demanded that all governmental and party agencies respond with moderate approaches except when dealing with violent incidents. Alternatively, canceling it invited speculation over the elites' division. Zhao blames Li Peng and Yang Shangkun for misleading Deng Xiaoping, causing the aggressive editorial on April 26.	
Answer by Li Peng (2010:66–83) concerning Su (2023:89), Vogel (2013:603–4), and Dai (2019:60–63)	
Yes	Yes
Reason: Li Peng accused Zhao of exploiting the movement to undermine Li as premier by being negligent. Su's analysis endorsed such a view because Zhao was "weighing his decision." Vogel, however, added additional credibility to this analysis because Deng promised Zhao's promotion to the head of the Central Military Commission. Dai authenticated Vogel's views but highlighted that the trip to North Korea was under Deng's direct yet firm mandate in exchange for the post of Central Military Commission.	
Answer by Chen Xitong (Yao, Wu, and Chen 2012:34–35, 122–25), concerning Deng's Chronicle (Leng et al. 2004:1272–73)	
Not Clear	No
Reason: As mayor of Beijing, Chen was unaware of the debates at Politburo as he attended no meeting. However, Chen asserted that the conservative leaders were not likely to shift Deng's mind because Deng had a clear mind and good information sources regarding student mobilization. However, Chen emphasized that his interventions prevented high schools and elementary schools from participating in the movement. In Deng's chronicle, Deng claimed the movement was an organized threat against socialism. Such a statement	

suggest that the conservatives carried out Deng's decisions.	
Answer by Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam (2001:217–21), concerning Black and Munro (1993:146–49), Lu (2006:20–21), Chen (Yao et al. 2012:34–35, 122–25), and Zhao (2001:210)	
No	Not Clear
<p>Reason: Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam highlighted “official constraint” as the party’s factionalism was critical regarding the general responses to the movement. However, the sources that they cited clearly indicated an alternative. Li Ximing, Beijing Party Secretary, was mainly responsible for convening the conservative elites in the Politburo that the student movement was a threat on April 24. Meanwhile, the party issued contradictory instructions to party-own news agencies on April 19 and prior: before April 19, agencies could publish articles on memorial events for Hu Yaobang as long as they did not mention student mobilizations. But after the 19, all memorial events coverages were banned until April 22.</p>	
Answer by Official Discourses (National Educational Committee 1989:31–34; The Communist Youth League of Beijing 1990:14; The Institute for the Study of Chinese Communist Problems 1989:4—327-4—328), concerning Chai (2011b:121), Zhang (2009:35–37, 52–59), and Feng (2013:117)	
Not Clear	Partially
<p>Reason: Official discourses did not refer to Zhao’s consideration, but they had authenticated the claim by Black and Munro (1993:146–49), where Beijing municipal government and other provincial/ municipal institutions had been actively intervening in the movement by highlighting its threat. Meanwhile, both official and student accounts authenticated Zhao’s moderate principles of managing student mobilization. However, Chai mentioned Deng’s associates had approached the student leadership to convey Deng’s personal messages regarding the need for moderate student mobilization. This account, however, was not necessarily verifiable. Alternatively, Feng mentioned the fact that student organizations engaged in preliminary negotiations with the officials regarding student mobilizations during the state’s funeral.</p>	

Appendix 3: Narrative Table on Decision to Repress

Sources remained relatively consistent regarding the general dynamic of the elites' politics against the movement before the declaration of martial law. But to determine whether radicals played a role in shaping these actions, empirical sources needed to articulate a clear inference by answering three different questions: 1) did Deng have a clear mind to repress regardless of opinions from hard or soft-liners; 2) did Zhao Ziyang tried his best to pacify the radicals to prevent repression; and 3) were the conservative cohesively against the movement because of the hunger strike? I developed the following table to demonstrate how different sources respond to identified issues.

Why did Deng Xiaoping decide to repress the movement eventually?		
Sub-Question One: Did Deng have a clear mind to repress regardless of opinions from hard or soft-liners?	Sub-Question Two: Did Zhao try to pacify the radicals to prevent repression?	Sub-Question Three: Were the conservatives cohesively against the peaceful solution?
Answer by Deng's Chronicle (Leng et al. 2004:1272–73), concerning Chen's Chronicle (Zhu and Liu 2000:423–25), Chen (Yao et al. 2012:63–65, 79–86), and official discourses (National Educational Committee 1989:130; The Communist Youth League of Beijing 1990:40)		
No	Partially	Yes
Reason: Among the official records, most of the politburo members voted to take a firm position against the movement as they recognized the movement presented a fundamental threat to the regime. Deng decided to support the majority decisions and argued against Zhao's recommendation to revise the April 26 Editorial. Sources accused Zhao of collaborating with the movement by offering his resignation and leaking information about martial law. Narratives by Chen Xitong extended the involvement of the conservative faction further by suggesting he had almost no influence over the decision-making process and the subsequent violent repression.		
Answer by Li Peng (Li 2010:168–77), concerning Wu (2009:10–16), Vogel (2013:617)		
Yes	Partially	Yes
Reason: Li's records of the decision-making process were similar to the official records except for Deng's position. Li highlighted that the decision to repress was based on Deng's analysis of the movement as a threat against the regime after the discussion of politburo members. Vogel also took this position because Deng praised Jiang Zeming, who prevented mobilization in Shanghai from escalating with swift responses. These sources also authenticated that Zhao offered with resignation to voice his opposition after the party rejected his suggestions to revise the April 26 Editorial.		
Answer by Zhao (2007:12–13, 52–55; 2009:60–64), concerning Black and Munro (1993:184–85)		
Partially	Yes	Yes
Reason: Zhao's recollection and his own defense after the movement showed slight		

differences. Zhao recalled Deng was irritated by the peaceful solutions, but Zhao's own defense document suggested Deng's decision to repress was based on majority opinion. However, Zhao's memoir also clearly indicated Zhao had no contact with students, placing him in a difficult position to advocate for a peaceful approach. Instead, he highlighted the argument that the revision of the April 26 Editorial remained critical to pacify the movement.

Answer by Zhang and Shi (2023) and Su (Su 2023:177–84) concerning Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam (2001:221–22), Calhoun (1997:81–85), and (Chen 2019c:112–14)

Not Clear

No

Yes

Reason: Scholarly narratives shared a common understanding that elite defection remained critical to the decision-making process of repression. Yang Shangkun's shift from Zhao's ally to the conservative leaders signified the collapse of Zhao's reformers coalition. Because of such a collapse, Zhao did not and could not actively reach out to students for coordination, even though most students considered Zhao an ally. These accounts also recognize the conservative unity regarding repression. However, Deng's own position was not particularly clear because there was circumstantial evidence for and against Deng's unilateral decision-making.

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