

Between “May Fourth” and “June Fourth”:

“April Fifth” as a Forgotten Revolutionary Tradition at Tiananmen Square and Its Political Use

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Abstract

Between the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the June Fourth Movement of 1989, there was the forgotten April Fifth Movement of 1976. The three large-scale unofficial protests not only constitute three defining moments in the Chinese pursuit of political modernity in the twentieth century, but also represent three turning points in the on-going changing meaning of Tiananmen (Gate of Heavenly) Square, the symbolic center of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which materialized the Chinese cultural memory of the communist-sanctioned revolutionary traditions. The magic numbers of “May Fourth,” “April Fifth,” and “June Fourth” not only signify three prominent watersheds in the history of twentieth-century China but also constitute three decoding codes, or “keywords,” to examine the changing meaning of Tiananmen Square and political culture of the

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This article is the first comprehensive inquiry into the significance of the April Fifth Movement from the perspectives of the politics of memory making and social production of space at Tiananmen Square. Through a close reading of the protest literature, such as the *Tiananmen Poems* and big- and small-character posters, as well as the historical documents of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and newspapers, this article intends to analyze both the popular and official uses of “May Fourth” and/or “April Fifth” during and after the April Fifth Movement. Especially, the *Tiananmen Poems* allow us to see how the commemorative monuments and official ritual practices at Tiananmen Square have become the material and spatial foundation to recall and appropriate the past of the communist-sanctioned revolutionary tradition. It is in this way that the dissident protesters during the April Fifth Movement were able to justify their struggle against the Gang of Four in a short-lived public sphere that was created at the state disciplinary space of the PRC. This in turn illuminates the fluidity and constructed nature of the symbolism of Tiananmen Square.

In addition to offering a present perspective to observe the genesis and development of the first unofficial social movement since the founding of the PRC, the *Tiananmen Poems* open a window to look into the dynamics of memory making in which the people from below have conceptualized and endowed alternative meanings with Zhou Enlai, “April Fifth,” and Tiananmen Square in their popular discourse. They explain why the popular mourners came to the particular site of the Monument to the People’s Heroes at the center of Tiananmen Square to commemorate Zhou Enlai. Moreover, the *Tiananmen Poems* also demonstrate how the dissident protesters during and after the April Fifth Movement legitimized their prospective envision of Chinese modernity,

the Four Modernizations, by appropriating the past of the communist-sanctioned revolutionary tradition such as “May Fourth” while attaching their recollection of Zhou Enlai’s career to the Monument. Furthermore, this article examines how the CCP had redefined and used “April Fifth” as a revolutionary tradition in order to endow Deng Xiaoping’s rise to power and his discourses on the Four Modernizations and the Four Cardinals with social and historical legitimacy in the post-Mao China. This eventually shows how CCP and PRC kept silent about “April Fifth” and turned it into a forgotten revolutionary tradition after the mid-1980s. The official political use of “April Fifth” exemplifies constructed nature of historical memory as well as the power at work in the making of official discourse on the past and the power of discourse making at the present. This process witnessed the changing meaning of “April Fifth” in the popular and official discourse as a keyword to examine the history of the PRC and its relevance with other keywords such as “May Fourth” and “June Fourth.”

Keywords: April Fifth Movement, May Fourth Movement, Tiananmen Poem, Tiananmen Square, historical memory

「五四」與「六四」之間：

「四五」作為一個被遺忘的革命傳統及其政治使用

潘宗億

摘要

在1919年五四運動和1989年六四運動之間，還有一個被遺忘的1976年四五運動。這三次非官方大規模群眾運動，不僅標誌二十世紀中國的三個關鍵歷史時刻，同時也象徵北京天安門廣場的三個生命史轉折點。「五四」、「四五」與「六四」三組數字，乃解讀二十世紀中國歷史、政治文化與天安門廣場生命史的符碼或「關鍵詞」(keywords)。

本文從天安門廣場記憶政治與空間之社會生產的分析視角，探究四五運動的歷史意義，以及「四五」作為一個論述性「關鍵詞」意義之建構與變遷的脈絡。當學者集中檢視「五四」與「六四」之認同與記憶政治關係，本文在「天安門詩抄」等抗爭文學、中共官方歷史文本與報刊之詮釋基礎上，探析四五運動及其後政治變局中，群眾與中共如何不斷召喚或利用「五四」與「四五」符碼或「關鍵詞」。尤其，作為「四五」的文化記憶媒介，「天安門詩抄」讓我們得以剖析中共建政以來所建構的紀念性、儀式性與紀律性空間，如何被轉化成群眾挪用官定革命傳統，以合理化其悼念周恩來與批判「四人幫」的

物質與文化基礎。亦即，天安門廣場此一官方紀律空間，在「四五」期間被建構為一個批判當權者的公共領域，再再呈現廣場意義的可變性與建構性。

「天安門詩抄」提供一個「當下」視角觀察中共建政以來天安門廣場首次大規模非官方群眾運動之源起與發展，更可藉以細究「四五」記憶政治。它們呈現群眾如何賦與周恩來、「四五」與天安門廣場之另類新義；解釋何以群眾會在人民英雄紀念碑此一特定地點悼念周恩來；展示群眾如何利用人民紀念碑細數周恩來革命生涯的同時，挪用官定革命傳統或論述性關鍵詞「五四」來合法化對中國現代性的未來想像。再者，本文最後進一步爬梳中共官方「四五」論述及其意義之變遷，具體分析中共在「四五」之後如何透過「四五」之紀念，合法化鄧小平的重返權力核心及其「四個現代化」與「四項基本原則」論述，但卻突然在1980年中以後不再紀念「四五」，使之逐漸成爲一個被官方遺忘的革命傳統。中共對「四五」的政治使用，不但說明歷史記憶的建構性，也展示官方歷史論述形構的權力因素，以及主宰性歷史論述在權力競逐上的作用。此一歷程，讓我們得以窺見「四五」作爲檢視中華人民共和國歷史之「關鍵詞」的歷史化，亦即其民間與官方論述建構之源起與變遷，以及其與象徵過去歷史之「五四」關鍵詞間的關係，並作爲未來進一步探究「四五」、「五四」與「六四」關鍵詞之間關聯性的基礎。

關鍵詞：四五運動、五四運動、天安門詩抄、天安門廣場、歷史記憶

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The people’s Premier is dead 人民的總理死了，

Why aren’t they allowed to mourn him? 為什麼不讓悼念？

Why are the memorial poems ripped away? 為什麼撕掉詩文？

Why are the flower wreaths all removed? 為什麼撤走花圈？

...

“The Tiananmen Incident” 「天安門事件」

Saw a conflict pitting brightness against darkness, 是光明與黑暗

Democracy against autocracy, 民主與專制

Where bayonets were crossed between Revolution and Counter-revolution;

革命與反革命的白刃戰

...

“The Tiananmen Incident” 「天安門事件」，

Tolled the death knell of the Gang of Four, 敲響了「四人幫」的喪鐘，

It hastened the downfall of the Gang of Four—加速了「四人幫」的滅亡

It brightened the eyes of the people; 把人民的眼睛擦亮。

“The Tiananmen Incident”「天安門事件」

Is the most brilliant sheaf of poems; 是最輝煌的詩篇

It's the river-fork, where revolution and counter-revolution divide; 是革命
與反革命的分水嶺

It is the turning point in Chinese history 是中國歷史的轉折點！¹

Written by Ai Qing (1910-1996), known as the Poet of the People, “On the Crest of a Wave” constitutes a poetic manifestation of the Tiananmen Incident on 5 April 1976. The Incident, or the April Fifth Movement (or “April Fifth”) as it later became known, was the first large-scale unofficial social movement at Tiananmen Square since the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).² Between late March and early April of 1976, millions of Chinese people in Beijing and from the provinces had been gathering in Tiananmen Square to mourn the late Premier Zhou

¹ Ai Qing 艾青, “Zai langjian shang [On the crest of a wave 在浪尖上],” *Shikan* [Poetry journal 詩刊] 12 (1978): 14-19, 60; *People’s Daily*, December 10, 1978, 6; Eugene Chen Eoyang, ed., *Ai Qing: Selected Poems* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1982), 158-159.

² Roger Garside, *Coming Alive: China after Mao* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981), 110-141; Yan Jiaqi and Gao Gao, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*, trans. D. W. Y. Kwok (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996), 482-503; Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, “The First Tiananmen Incident Revisited: Elite Politics and Crisis Management at the End of the Maoist Era,” *Pacific Affairs* 77.2 (2004): 211-235; Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *The End of the Maoist Era: Chinese Politics During the Twilight of the Cultural Revolution, 1972-1976* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 462-535; Yan Jiaqi 嚴家其 and Gao Gao 高舉, *Zhongguo shinian wengeshi* [A history of the decade of the Chinese Cultural Revolution 中國十年文革史] (Hong Kong: Dagongbao, 1986); Yan Jiaqi and Gao Gao, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*, trans. D. W. Y. Kwok (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press); Yan Jiaqi 嚴家其, et al., *Siwu yundong jishi* [Factual record of the April Fifth Movement 四五運動紀實] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1979); Tong Huaizhou 童懷周, *Weida de siwu yundong* [The great April Fifth Movement 偉大的四五運動] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1979).

Enlai (周恩來), who died on 8 January of the same year. Appropriating the official practice in commemorating the revolutionary martyrs on the Qingming Festival at Tiananmen Square, the mourners from all walks of life laid wreaths and posted poems at the base of the Monument to the People’s Heroes (hereafter the Monument) to memorialize Zhou and protest against the Gang of Four (*Siren bang* 四人幫).³ Those wreaths and poems, as Ai Qing’s poem indicates, were stealthily “removed (*chezou* 撤走)” and “ripped away (*sidiao* 撕掉)” by the authorities at night. In an effort to retrieve the “removed” poems and wreaths, on 5 April, the movement escalated into an ardent protest against the authorities. Ultimately, the Beijing Workers Militia (*Beijing gongren minbing* 北京工人民兵) that was controlled by the Gang of Four was ordered to quell the movement that night. Two days later, the movement was denounced by the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a “counterrevolutionary political incident in Tiananmen Square.”⁴ Nonetheless, two years later on 14 November 1978, the Beijing Party Committee reversed the verdict and redefined the incident as a “revolutionary action.”⁵ One month later, the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP

³ The Gang of Four is a designation given by Mao Zedong to refer to a radical leftist faction composed of Jiang Qing 江青, Zhang Chunqiao 張春橋, Yao Wen Yuan 姚文元, and Wang Hongwen 王洪文, who became prominence during the Cultural Revolution. On 17 July 1974, Mao had warned them against becoming “a small faction of four.” At a Politburo meeting on 3 May 1975, Mao plainly warned them: “Do not function as a gang of four.” Nevertheless, the term Gang of Four was used publicly only after they had fallen in October 1976. In this article, I also use the phrase to name the political faction before its downfall. Yan and Gao, *Turbulent Decade*, 443, 464; Colin Mackerras, Donald Hugh McMillen and Andrew Watson, ed., *Dictionary of the Politics of the People’s Republic of China* (London: Routledge, 1998), 97.

⁴ *People’s Daily*, April 18, 1976, 1.

⁵ *People’s Daily*, November 16, 1978, 1.

(hereafter Third Plenum) endorsed the reversal by declaring the incident a “revolutionary mass movement” that constituted “the mass bases” for the CCP’s “success in smashing the Gang of Four.”⁶ As a consequence, like the May Fourth Movement, the April Fifth Movement was officially sanctioned as part of the communist revolutionary tradition at Tiananmen Square.⁷

As “On the Crest of a Wave” suggests, “April Fifth” constituted a “turning point” in the history of twentieth-century China. Whereas the May Fourth Movement has been officially conceptualized as the defining moment in the Chinese revolution leading to the new democratic revolution, “April Fifth” symbolizes a critical juncture when the socialist revolution reached a crossroad between “the road of light” and “the road of darkness” at the end of the Maoist era.⁸ As the poem implies, “April Fifth” had manifested China’s struggle between “darkness” and “brightness” which were represented respectively by the radical

⁶ *People’s Daily*, December 24, 1978, 1; My English translation of the text is based on CCP Central Committee, “Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of The Communist Party of China,” *Peking Review* 52 (1978): 13-14. The Third Plenum was held from 18 to 22 December 1978. It is generally considered an important meeting which indicated the commencement of Deng Xiaoping’s reform.

⁷ “Weida de Siwu Yundong 偉大的四五運動 [The great April Fifth Movement],” *People’s Daily*, November 22, 1978, 3.

⁸ Yan Jiaqi, *Siwu yundong jishi*, 150-155; For PRC’s official discourse on the May Fourth Movement since the founding of the CCP, see Tsung-Yi Pan 潘宗億, “Fuxiang Beijing cheng de shijian zhongzhou xian: Zhongguo soudu guozu jiyi kongjian zhi jiangou ji qi yiyi bianqian [Emerging the Temporal Axis of Beijing City: The Making of National Memorial Space in China’s Capital and its Changing Meanings 浮現北京城的時間中軸線：中國首都國族記憶空間之建構及其意義變遷],” *jindai wuzhi wenhua yanjiu: Diyi jie lishi yu wenwu yantao hui* [*Modern Material Culture Studies: The First Conference on History and Historical Artifacts 近代物質文化研究：第一屆歷史與文物研討會*] (Taichung: Institute of History and Historical Artifacts, 2014), 362-371.

Maoists’ line of the Cultural Revolution and Zhou Enlai’s line of the Four Modernizations. Eventually, “April Fifth” had “cleared the ground for the Four Modernizations” by ringing the “death knell of the Gang of Four.”⁹ As both a “counter-movement against the nihilism and violence of the Cultural Revolution” and a “symbol of the spirit of popular resistance to a despotic state,”¹⁰ “April Fifth” not only anticipated the closure of the Maoist era but also paved the way for the advent of socialist modernization in China.¹¹

The April Fifth Movement constituted a “turning point” in the symbolism of Tiananmen Square in the history of the PRC as well. Since the founding of the PRC, Tiananmen Square had been constructed as a performance stage to display state disciplinary power and a memorial space to embody the Maoist “May Fourth” revolutionary discourse.¹²

⁹ Ai Qing, “Zai langjian shang,” 19, 60.

¹⁰ Garside, *Coming Alive*, 116; Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 404.

¹¹ Yan, *Siwu yundong jishi*, 1, 142-155; Renmin de daonian lianhe bianjizu [Edition Team of the people’s grief 人民的悼念聯合編輯組], “Qianyan [Preface 前言],” *Renming de daonian* [The people’s grief 人民的悼念] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1979), iii; Chen Ziming 陳子民, “Lishi da shiye zhong de siwu yundong [The April Fifth Movement in a Great Historical Perspective 歷史大視野中的四五運動],” in Chen Ziming 陳子民, et al., *Siwu yundong: Zhongguo ershi shiji de zhuanze dian—sanshi nian hou de huiyi yu sikao* [The April Fifth Movement: The turning point of twentieth-century China 四五運動：中國二十世紀的轉折點——三十年後的回憶與思考] (Hong Kong: Bozhi chubanshe, 2006), 3.

¹² For the symbolism of Tiananmen Square and the materialization of the Maoist “May Fourth” revolutionary discourse at Tiananmen Square, see Tsung-Yi Pan, “Fuxiang Beijing cheng de shijian zhongzhou xian: Zhongguo soudu guozu jiyi kongjian zhi jiangou ji qi yiyi bianqian,” 345-399; Linda Hershkovitz, “Tiananmen Square and the Politics of Place,” *Political Geography* 12:5 (1993), 395-420; Mary G. Mazur, “Public Space for Memory in Contemporary Civil Society: Freedom to Learn from the Mirror of the Past?,” *China Quarterly* 160 (1999), 1019-1035; Wu Hung, “Tiananmen Square: A Political

Nonetheless, during the movement, Tiananmen Square was converted into a short-lived public sphere in which the dissidents found an outlet to voice their protest against state power by posting memorial poems in addition to bodily practices such as mass demonstrations, public speeches and ritual ceremonies. Moreover, the Tiananmen Poems constitute a mnemonic vehicle to embody the popular memory of Zhou Enlai and the movement. During the April Fifth Movement, Tiananmen Square had been turned into a public sphere and a memorial space to store the popular memory of the movement. Thus, the magic dates, or “keywords,” of “May Fourth (*wusi* 五四)” and “April Fifth (*siwu* 四五)” signify two of the most prominent watersheds in the history of twentieth-century China and the socio-political life of Tiananmen Square.

This article aims to reconsider the changing meaning of “April Fifth” by a close reading of the Tiananmen Poems from the perspectives of the politics of memory making and social production of space at the symbolic center of the PRC. In doing so, first of all, it defines “April Fifth” as a discursive “keyword” to decipher and interpret the political change before and after the end of the Maoist era by using the theoretical

History of Monuments,” *Representation* 35 (1991), 84-117. Chang-tai Hung, “Revolutionary History in Stone: The Making of a Chinese National Monument,” *China Quarterly* 166 (2001), 457-473; Chang-Tai Hung, “The Read Line: Creating a Museum of the Chinese Revolution,” *China Quarterly* 184 (2005), 914-933; Chang-tai Hung, “Tiananmen Square: Space and Politics,” in *Mao’s New World: Political Culture in the Early People’s Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 25-50; Hou Renxhi 侯仁之 and Wu Liangyong 吳良鏞, “Tiananmen guangchang: cong gongtang guangchong dao remin guangchang de yanbian he gaizao (Tiananmen Square: From Palace Square to People’s Square: Development and Transformation 天安門廣場：從宮廷廣場到人民廣場的演變與改造).” in *Lishi Dilixue de Liluan yu Shijian* [Theory and Practice in Historical Geography 歷史地理學的理論與實踐], ed. Hou Renzhi 侯仁之 (Shanghai: Remin chubanshe, 1979), 227-250.

explanation of the concept by Raymond Williams (1921-1988). In his introduction to *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), Raymond Williams defines “keywords” in two connected senses. On the one hand, “they are significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation,” and on the other hand, “they are significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought.”¹³ Thus, as Williams argues, looking into certain uses of keywords under certain contexts provides “certain ways of seeing culture and society” in which the changing meanings of those keywords are formatted or constructed for certain moments. Moreover, in his theoretical discussion of exploring the formation of keywords and their changing meanings with the approach of historical semantics, Williams emphasizes that the study of keywords is “not only on the historical origins and developments but also on the present—present meanings, implications and relationships—as history.”¹⁴ In other words, the study of the formation process of keywords provides certain ways of looking into the “real circumstances” in which those keywords are “shaping and reshaping.”¹⁵ It is in this sense that the changing meaning of a keyword, or an “active vocabulary,” becomes the epitome of sociopolitical changes under certain historical contexts in which that keyword shapes and reshapes its significance. Following Raymond Williams’ approach of studying ideas as keywords, the “Foreword” of the *Journal of the History of Ideas in East Asia* (Dongya guangnianshi jukan 東亞觀念史集刊) encourages the study of ideas from the perspective of discursive formation of new words and standardization of keywords

¹³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

and emphasizes its significance in examining the agency and function of keywords in dominating social system and cultural practices, mobilizing social groups, and constructing collective identity.¹⁶ Kwang-che Pan also has convincingly argued that the approach of studying “keywords” is helpful in historicizing the making and changing meaning of an idea, or a new symbolic framework, and its political uses in certain historical contexts.¹⁷

It is in this sense that the article define “April Fifth” as a keyword, or defines a new symbolic framework to read and interpret the April Fifth movement in the larger context of the political change before and after the end of the Maoist era. In particular, it on the one hand shows how “May Fourth” as a “keyword” had played critical role in participants’ mobilizing strategy and “their interpretation” in the commemorative practices as well as memory and identity making during the April Fifth Movement, and, on the other hand, illustrates the “shaping and reshaping” of the meaning of “April Fifth” in the popular and official discourse as a discursive keyword to interpret the movement and to trace the changing significance of Tiananmen Square. In other words, as Jui-Sung Yang has provocatively demonstrated with his case studies of “Sick Man of East Asia (*Dongya bingfu* 東亞病夫)” and “Four Hundred Millions (*Si wanwan* 四萬萬)” as significant “keywords” in the construction of national discourse in modern China,¹⁸ this article intends to historicize the construction, standardization,

¹⁶ Cheng Wen-hui 鄭文惠, “Fakan ci 發刊詞 [Foreword],” *Dongya guangnianshi jukan* 東亞觀念史集刊 [*Journal of the History of Ideas in East Asia*] 1 (2011): XIII-XIV.

¹⁷ Pan Kwang-Che 潘光哲, “Cong ‘xinmingci’ dao ‘guanjianci’ zhuanti yinyan 從「新名詞」到「關鍵詞」專題引言 [Preface to the Special Issue ‘From New Words to Keywords’],” *Dongya guangnianshi jukan* 東亞觀念史集刊 [*Journal of the History of Ideas in East Asia*] 2 (2012): 81-90.

¹⁸ Yang Jui-Sung 楊瑞松, “Xiangxiang minzu chiju: jindai zhongguo sixiang wenhuashih

and re-construction of the discursive keyword of “April Fifth” and the unofficial political use of “May Fourth” during the April Fifth Movement and official political use of “April Fifth” after the April Fifth Movement. In doing so, the present-oriented constructed and ever-changing feature of ideas or keywords show its affinity with the nature of memory making as this article will demonstrate.

In examining the historical context in which the significance of the keyword “April Fifth” was constructed and reconstructed and used politically in the popular and official discourses during and after the April Fifth Movement, this article intends to demonstrate its relevance with the changing meaning of the spatial imagination of Tiananmen Square. In particular, this article will apply Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) and Karen Till’s analytical concepts in analyzing the April Fifth Movement and the interpretation of the protest literature that was created during the movement. According to Henri Lefebvre, social production of space is an on-going process in which different social groups can endow that space with different meanings by installing social practices or material culture that reproduces their own political and historical discourse, or in Raymond Williams’ words, keywords. As a result of this on-going process of social production, social groups can create or consolidate their collective identity by attaching with the political or historical discourse that has been embodied in the social practice or material culture at the space they have

shang de ‘dongya bingfu’ 想像民族恥辱：近代中國思想文化史上的“東亞病夫” [Imaging National Humiliation: ‘Sick Man of East Asia’ in the Modern Chinese Intellectual and Cultural History],” *Guoli Zhengzhi daxue lishi xuebao* 國立政治大學歷史學報 23 (2005): 1-44; Yang Jui-Sung 楊瑞松, “Jindai zhongguo de ‘si wanwan’ huozulunshu xiangxiang 近代中國的「四萬萬」國族論述想像 [The ‘Four Hundred Millions’ of Discourse/Imagination of the Nation in Modern China],” *Dongya guangnianshi jukan* 東亞觀念史集刊 [Journal of the History of Ideas in East Asia] 2 (2012): 283-335.

occupied.¹⁹ This shows the spatial foundation in the meaning making and remaking of “April Fifth” and “May Fourth” as keywords in understanding and interpreting the movement.

Likewise, Karen Till defines social memory as an “ongoing” process in which different social groups struggle with one another to gain authority to represent their own versions of the past for justifying their different political goals and identities in the present for the future.²⁰ By creating a sense of continuity between the past and the present in a geographical space, political elites or interest groups could find ways to “claim territory” and “justify political action.”²¹ Moreover, the studies of spaces, or “theaters,” of social memory, such as statuary, memorial, museum, grand boulevard, public square, and so forth, can illuminate the “the complex ways that nationalist imagination, political powers, and social identities are spatially produced.”²² Thus, given that the spatial construction of memory is an “ongoing” process, the significance and function of Tiananmen Square is always changing with different social groups’ reception and redefinition of “April Fifth” and “May Fourth” over time.

Based on the theoretical framework above, the first part of this article will show that, as the memory media of the April Fifth Movement, the Tiananmen Poems offer a present perspective to observe the genesis and development of the first unofficial social movement, or social practice, since the founding of the PRC. They display the war over memory

¹⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991).

²⁰ Karen Till, “Places of Memory,” in *A Companion to Political Geography*, ed. John A. Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell and Gerard Toal (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 290.

²¹ Till, “Places of Memory,” 289.

²² *Ibid.*, 290.

between the state and the people, in which the mourners broke through the state discipline and official blackout to mourn Zhou. In this process, Tiananmen Square as a space of state discipline was turned into a public sphere, or a social space that was invested with alternative discourse, to memorialize Zhou while expressing the prevalent animosity to the Gang of Four and incipient disillusionment with Mao in the larger context of the succession crisis in the waning years of the Maoist era. This shows that various social groups can change or redefine the meaning of a public space at certain historical context while making sense of their social practice. As a result, the keyword of “April Fifth” was created in the popular imagination and political use of “May Fourth.”

As the carrier of popular reminiscences of the “April Fifth” past, the second part of this article will demonstrate that the *Tiananmen Poems* also constitute valuable materials to examine the dynamics of memory making evolved in the mourning activities for Zhou Enlai. Especially, they open a window to look at the spatial and physical foundation of memory making implicated in the political drama of the April Fifth Movement when the Monument that was built to commemorate collective Chinese revolutionary was socially reproduced as an individual altar. The Tiananmen Poems allow us to explain why the mourners went to the specific spot around the Monument to memorialize Zhou Enlai rather than the collective revolutionary martyrs. Reflecting the anxiety of succession crisis after the death of Zhou, the mourners were devoted to be the late premier’s revolutionary successors in their commemoration for him. Likewise, the poems display the mourners’ determination to erect an imaginative monument to the memory of Zhou in their hearts as a living memorial in addition to preserving various memory media of “April Fifth”. Eventually, the Monument was even imagined as the personal

incarnation of Zhou. This shows a process in which the material culture that was officially established at Tiananmen Square was endowed different meaning.

More interestingly, the poems disclose how the mourners occupied and appropriated the Monument to conceptualize Tiananmen Square as the sacred site of the Chinese communist revolutionary tradition at the past during the movement. While previous scholarship has disclosed the relationship between the May Fourth and June Fourth Movements in terms of cultural repertoire, ritual symbolism, and identity politics,²³ this article intends to demonstrate how those Chinese people tended to associate their activities at Tiananmen Square with “May Fourth” and rendered it in their bodily practices and memorial poems by attaching to the reliefs on the Monument, such as that of the May Fourth Movement and Nanchang Uprising, in order to legitimize their dissident discourse. As the popular recollection of the communist sanctioned revolutionary tradition at Tiananmen Square, “May Fourth” constituted, in Richard Madsen’s words, the “moral resources,” or the “keyword,” for the mourners to

²³ Craig Calhoun, “Science, Democracy, and the Politics of Identity,” in *Popular Protest and Political Culture*, 93-124; Vera Schwarcz, “Memory and Commemoration: The Chinese Search for a Livable Past,” in *Popular Protest and Political Culture*, 170-183; Joseph W. Esherick and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, “Acting Out Democracy: Political Theatre in Modern China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 49.4 (1990): 835-865; Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, “Student Protests and the Chinese Tradition,” in *The Chinese People’s Movement: Perspectives on Spring 1989*, ed. Tony Saich (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990), 3-24; Rubie S. Watson, “Making Secret Histories: Memory and Mourning in Post-Mao China,” in *Memory, History, and Opposition under State Socialism*, Roubie S. Watson (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1994), 65-85; Xiaomei Chen, “Performing Tiananmen: From Street Theater to Theater of the Street,” *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 195-233.

mobilize popular support and to foster the public sphere created during “April Fifth.”²⁴ In this way, when the unauthorized mourners “occupied “the space of state discipline to challenge the authorities, the popular commemoration for Zhou in the spring of 1976 was turned into a contested space, or “political theater,”²⁵ of alternative voices.

Other than recollecting the past of modern China, the Tiananmen Poems illuminate how the mourners attached Zhou’s career to the communist revolutionary tradition at Tiananmen Square while projecting a prospective vision for China in the language of the Maoist revolutionary discourse. The third part of this article shows that it is in this way that the Chinese cultural memory of revolutionary tradition has been transmitted from generation to generation.

Finally, a study of the Tiananmen Poems and the official discourse on “April Fifth” after the rehabilitation of the movement shows the dynamics of the CCP’s political use of the past before and after the Third Plenum of the Tenth Central Committee in July 1977. The fourth part of this article will explore, along with the power struggles within the CCP, how the popular discourse on the movement that was embodied in the Tiananmen Poems was eventually sanctioned into the official discourse used by the Party to serve its political demands, such as the Four Modernizations and the Four Cardinal Principles, but was officially forgotten by the PRC in post-Mao China. The CCP’s political use of “April Fifth” in the late 1970s and early 1980s exemplifies constructed nature of historical memory as

²⁴ Richard Madsen, “The Public Sphere, Civil Society and Moral Community: A Research Agenda for Contemporary China Studies.” *Modern China* 19.2 (1993): 190.

²⁵ Joseph W. Esherick and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, “Acting Out Democracy: Political Theatre in Modern China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 49.4 (1990): 844-848.

well as the power at work in the making of official discourse on the past and the power of discourse making at the present. It is in this process we witness the “shaping” and “reshaping” of “April Fifth” as a discursive keyword.

The Present: The Tiananmen Poems and the Poetic Representation of “April Fifth”

The creation of the Tiananmen Poems marked the beginning of a new era of political lyric (zhengzhi shuqingshi 政治抒情詩) in the history of the PRC in terms of its poetic manifestation of popular protest against the authorities. Literary historians have recognized “April Fifth” as the most spectacular manifestation of the political use of poetry in twentieth-century China.²⁶ In the first three decades of the PRC, the political lyric was mostly written to eulogize national leaders and political campaigns and generate popular support for them. This kind of poems dominated poetry writing during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. After the April Fifth Movement, Chinese political poetry underwent a substantial change. Instead of acclaiming the socialist revolution and national leaders, poems voiced popular protest and criticism against the authorities.²⁷ Many Chinese literary historians even suggest that the creation of the Tiananmen

²⁶ Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 424.

²⁷ Shiao-ling Yu, “Voice of Protest: Political Poetry in the Post-Mao Era,” *China Quarterly* 96 (1983): 703; David S. G. Goodman, *Beijing Street Voices: The Poetry and Politics of China’s Democracy Movement* (Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981), 18, 136, 151, 159; Hong Zicheng, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 254; For the genesis and development of the Democracy Wall Movement, see Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1985).

Poems represented the beginning of a new literature in communist China.²⁸

Despite their novel spirit of protest, the Tiananmen Poems reveals traces of the Cultural Revolution literary practice. Their most prominent feature of expressing the people’s grief over the death of Zhou Enlai while criticizing the injustice perpetrated by the Gang of Four displays the influence of the Cultural Revolution literature, especially the principle of “a combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism.”²⁹ Under the canon of socialist realism, three distinguishing features of the Cultural Revolution literature and art can be discerned. First, under the principle of the “Three Emphases,” the works of literature and art must emphasize positive characters over all other characters;

²⁸ Guo Zhigang 郭志剛, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi chugao* [The draft of the literary history of contemporary China 中國當代文學史初稿], vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1981), 335-336; Ershier xiao bianxiezu 二十四校編寫組, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi* [The literary history of contemporary China 中國當代文學史] (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1985), 28-29; Zhu Zai 朱棻, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue sichaoshi* [The intellectual history of contemporary Chinese literature 中國當代文學思潮史] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1987), 520-521; Kong Fanjin 孔範今, *Ershi shiji zhongguo wenxueshi* [The literary history of twentieth-century China 二十世紀中國文學史] (Jinan: Shandong wenyi, 1997), 1247; Zhu Donglin 朱棟霖, et al., *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue shi* [The literary history of modern China 中國現代文學史] (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu, 1999), 16.

²⁹ Foreshadowing in the “Yan’an Talk on Literature and Art,” during the Great Leap Forward in 1942, Mao proposed the idea of “a combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism” to generalize the essence of socialist realist literature and art. The principle was further amplified in the “Summary of the Symposium on Armed Forces Cultural Workers,” promulgated as an official document in March 1966 with Mao’s personal revisions, and became the canon of socialist literature and art. About the theory of a combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism, see Su Wei, “The School and the Hospital: On the Logics of Socialist Realism,” in *Chinese Literature in the Second Half of A Modern Century*, ed. Pang-yuan Chi and David Der-wei Wang (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 65-75; Hong, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, 203-221.

must emphasize heroes over positive characters; and must emphasize central heroes over minor heroes. Second, they must express the people's love of revolutionary heroes and hatred of counterrevolutionaries at the same time. Third, in addition to representing popular reminiscence of the communist revolutionary tradition in the past, such as "May Fourth," they must display utopian vision of Communism in the future.³⁰ The three prominent features have been reflected in the Tiananmen Poems that were created to express the people's love of Zhou Enlai as a revolutionary hero and convey popular resentment of the Gang of Four as counterrevolutionaries.³¹ This poetic manifestation of "a combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism" allows us to consider the Tiananmen Poems as firsthand materials to examine the April Fifth Movement from the perspective of memory making and to trace the discursive construction of "April Fifth" as a keyword to interpret the movement.

The Tiananmen Poems examined in this article are mostly drawn from the official collection of the memorial poems created during the April Fifth Movement. Given the official prohibition of the public commemoration for Zhou Enlai, once the hand-written poems were posted around the Monument, they were labeled as "reactionary verse (fandong

³⁰ Su, "The School and the Hospital," 70; Hong, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, 219-220; Wu Shanzeng, "Zailun siwu tiananmen shige zai wenxueshi zhong de dingwei [Reconsidering the significance of the April Fifth Tiananmen Poems in the history of literature 再論四五天安門詩歌在文學史中的定位]," *Nanjing shehui kexue* [Social Sciences in Nanjing 南京社會科學] 10 (2004), 67-68.

³¹ Wu, "Zailun siwu tiananmen shige zai wenxueshi zhong de dingwei," 68-70; Cheng Guangwei 程光燁, *Zhongguo dangdai shigeshi* [The history of the poetry in contemporary China 中國當代詩歌史] (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2003), 173.

shici 反動詩詞)” by the CCP’s Politburo under the whims of the Gang of Four. This only drove more people to come to Tiananmen Square to read and transcribe those “reactionary poems” and circulate them privately to their relatives and friends. Various collections of the poems were distributed underground all over the nation.³² In an interview, the editor of those clandestine, or samizdat, collections, Tong Huaizhou, a pseudonym that literally means, “remembering Zhou together,” said that over two million copies were reprinted.³³

As soon as “April Fifth” was officially rehabilitated, the People’s Literature Publishing House published the official one-volume

³² The best known appeared in mimeographed form by the first anniversary of Zhou’s death and was printed later the same month for limited circulation. An expanded and revised edition came out in February 1978 under the title *Geming shichao* [Transcriptions of Revolutionary Poems 革命詩抄] and a new edition, *Tiananmen geming shiwen xuan* [Collection of Revolutionary Poems and Essays from Tiananmen 天安門革命詩文選] was printed, which was followed by a sequel collection in April 1978. Tong Huaizhou 童懷周, ed., *Geming shichao* [Transcriptions of revolutionary poems 革命詩抄], vol. 1 (Beijing: Beijing dier waiguoyu xueyuan hanyu jiyanshi, 1977); Tong Huaizhou, ed., *Tiananmen geming shiwenxuan* [Collection of revolutionary poems and essays from Tiananmen 天安門革命詩文選] (Beijing: Beijing dier waiguoyu xueyuan hanyu jiyanshi, 1977); Institute of Automation of Academia Sinica, ed., *Geming shichao* [Transcription of revolutionary poems 革命詩抄] (Beijing: Institute of Automation of Academia Sinica, 1977); Tong Huaizhou, ed., *Tiananmen geming shiwenxuan: Xubian* [Sequel collection of revolutionary poems and essays from Tiananmen 天安門革命詩文選：續編] (Beijing: Beijing dier waiguoyu xueyuan hanyu jiyanshi, 1978).

³³ Xu Heming 徐民和, “Xiangei zhonghua minzu de zizi sunsun: Fangwen *Tiananmen shichao* bianze Tong Huaizhou [To the descendants of the Chinese nation—An interview with the editors of *Transcriptions of the Poems from Tiananmen* Tong Huaizhou 獻給中華民族的子子孫孫：訪問《天安門詩抄》編者童懷周],” in *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue yanjiu ziliao: Tiananmen shichao zhuanji* [Research Materials on the contemporary Chinese literature: Special issue of *Tiananmen Poetry Transcriptions* 中國當代文學研究資料：天安門詩抄專輯], ed. Liaoning daxue zhongwenxi [Department of Chinese, Liaoning University] (Shenyang: Liaoning daxue zhongwenxi, 1979), 1.

collection of the Tiananmen Poems under the title of *Tiananmen shichao* (*Transcriptions of the Poems from Tiananmen*) before the third anniversary of the death of Zhou Enlai.³⁴ The collection, consisting of more than fifteen hundred poems, was authorized by state power with the golden cover title handwritten by the successor of Chairman Mao, Hua Guofeng. Those “reactionary poems” were redefined as “revolutionary poems” created during a “revolutionary movement” that made up the mass foundation for the downfall of the Gang of Four.³⁵ In addition to the official collection, a memorial album of photographs taken by the mourners during the movement, entitled *The People's Grief*, was published in 1979.³⁶ Like the Tiananmen Poems, the album constitutes a carrier of the state-sanctioned popular memory of the movement. From reactionary to revolutionary objects, the changing significance of those poems and photographs witnessed the power struggles within the CCP before and after the rehabilitation of the April Fifth Movement. The collection of the Tiananmen Poem also provides us perspectives to trace the making of “April Fifth” as a keyword in the popular discourse during the movement. In this article, a close allegorical reading of the Tiananmen Poems is based on the official collection while a few exceptions are drawn from those of underground versions. The photographs in *The People's Grief* are referenced to serve as the visual manifestation of the Tiananmen Poems and the movement.

³⁴ Tong Huaizhou 童懷周, ed., *Tiananmen shichao* [Transcriptions of the poems from Tiananmen 天安門詩抄] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1978).

³⁵ “Weida de siwu yundong,” *People's Daily*, November 22, 1978, 3.

³⁶ Renmin de daonian bianxiezu, ed., *Renming de daonian*.

A Memory War

The creation of the Tiananmen Poems was an integral part of the April Fifth Movement. Besides being the poetic manifestation of the popular commemoration for Zhou Enlai and the widespread resentment against the Gang of Four, these poems written by the mourners from all sections of society reveal plentiful information about the genesis and development of the movement and the power struggles within the CCP at the end of the Maoist era.

The Tiananmen Poems demonstrate that the popular commitment to memorialize Zhou Enlai was a grassroots resistance to the official suppression of the public mourning activities for the late premier by the party propaganda machine. As made clearly by one poem, “upon the Qingming Festival when we are especially thinking of our close relatives, we do not see any newspapers and journals memorializing you,” and, therefore, “with the unbounded emotion of sorrow that could not be suppressed, myriad people congregate in front of the Monument.”³⁷ Many of the Tiananmen Poems reveal how the Gang of Four engaged in suppressing the mourning activities by every possible means. They had laid down many restrictions over the public commemoration for Zhou. They even utilized the official news media to diminish the impetus of the mourning activities. Terms like “beloved Premier Zhou” were not allowed to appear in the newspapers. Photographing the mourning activities was forbidden.³⁸

³⁷ Tong, ed, *Tiananmen shichao*, 56.

³⁸ On 14 January, one day before the memorial ceremony for Zhou, in order to divert public attention, Yao Wenyuan, one the Gang of Four, ordered *People's Daily* to reprint an article published by Qinghua University, entitled “A Big Debate Brought About a Big Change,” on the front page. The article begins by falsely claiming that, “[r]ecently, the people throughout the country are

As the Tiananmen Poems manifest, the Gang of Four also endeavored to defame Zhou Enlai by using official newspapers. This general atmosphere was epitomized in one of the poems, which reads: “[There is] no propaganda for the Premier’s glory, but only false slander and accusations.”³⁹ At first, the official vilification targeted Zhou in a roundabout way. The Gang of Four believed that they could reduce public influence of Zhou’s death by furthering the campaign of “Criticizing Deng and Counterattacking the Right-Deviationist Wind to Reverse Correct Verdicts.”⁴⁰ As part of the campaign, on 10 March 1976, *People’s Daily* printed a front-page editorial, “It is against the People’s Will to Reverse Verdicts,” which, in line with Mao’s words, labels Deng as “the

concerned about the big debate on the educational revolution held in Qinghua University.” It was part of the political campaign meant to advance the Maoist line of “criticizing Deng and counterattacking the right-deviationist wind of reversing correct verdicts.” This aroused popular resentment and many readers tore that issue to shreds and mailed them to the offices of *People’s Daily*. Garside, *Coming Alive*, 7-13; Yan and Gao, *Turbulent Decade*, 484-485; Yan, *Siwu yundong jishi*, 7; Tong, *Weida de siwu yundong*, 29-30; “Da bianlun dailai da bianhua [A big debate brought about a big change 大辯論帶來大變化],” *People’s Daily*, January 14, 1976, 1; Cheng Zhongyuan 程中原, “Liangge zhongguo zhi mingyun de juezhuan—1976: Cong Tiananmen shijian dao fensui Sirenbang [A decisive battle over China’s two possible destinies—1976: From the Tiananmen Incident to Crushing the Gang of Four 兩個中國之命運的抉擇——一九七六：從天安門事件到粉碎四人幫],” *Dangdai zhongguo yanjiu* [Contemporary China history studies 當代中國研究] 12.1 (2005), 68.

³⁹ Tong, ed, *Tiananmen shichao*, 84.

⁴⁰ After the Fourth National People’s Congress in July 1975, under the supreme cause of the Four Modernizations proposed by Zhou, the first vice-premier Deng started a rectification program in various fields for improving the national economy. This pro-economy line threatened the power base of the Gang of Four, who insisted on upholding Mao’s line of class struggle. Under the situation, Mao suspected that Deng intended to jeopardize the Cultural Revolution by reversing the verdicts determined by the CCP under his leadership. In late 1975, the Gang of Four launched the campaign of criticizing Deng with Mao’s approval. Yan and Gao, *Turbulent Decade*, 463-481.

unrepentant capitalist roader wielding power” and “the one who initiated the trend of reversing verdicts.” Then, on March 25, *Wenhui Daily* published a front-page article implying that “the capitalist roader inside the Party wanted to help the unrepentant capitalist roader regain his power.” whereas Deng was known as “the unrepentant capitalist roader,” “the capitalist roader inside the Party” refers to Zhou.

Behind the official suppression of the public commemoration for Zhou was Mao’s suspicion of Zhou’s intention to reverse the verdicts determined by the CCP during the Cultural Revolution. The Gang of Four’s suppression of the mourning activities can be considered as the extension of the campaign of “Criticizing Lin [Biao], Criticizing Confucius (Pi Lin, Pi Kong 批林批孔)” under the context of the succession crisis at the end of the Maoist era.⁴¹ However, the Gang of Four was simply Mao’s puppet speaking out the master’s mind. Mao believed that Zhou’s death would be utilized by the veteran cadres, such as Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun, as a pretext to turn the political line from class struggle to pro-economy development of the Four Modernizations. As the chairman of Zhou’s funeral committee, Mao attended neither the cremation nor the memorial ceremony. He offered no condolences for Zhou other than a perfunctory wreath.⁴² In this sense, controlling the popular memory of Zhou’s death was a cunning way to defend Mao’s political line. This shows the politics

⁴¹ Gao Wenqian, *Zhou Enlai: The Last Perfect Revolutionary*, trans. Peter Rand and Lawrence R. Sullivan (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), 249-262; 305-310; Gao Wenqian 高文謙, *Wannian Zhou Enlai 晚年周恩來* (Honk Kong: Mingjing chubanshe, 2003), 479-545; 601-607; Roderck MacFarquhar, et al., *The Politics of China, 1949-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 286-288; Teiwes and Sun, *The End of the Maoist Era*, 158-164; Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, 392-394; Tong, *Weida de siwu yundong*, 17-19, 29.

⁴² A. P. Cheater, “Death Ritual as Political Trickster in the People’s Republic of China,” *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 26 (1991), 74.

of commemoration and death.

Against the official vilification of Zhou, the popular anger was ready to explode. As one of the poems implies: “A mad dog barking at the sun cannot cover the sky; the *Wenhui Daily* shows its true color. Appearing to criticize the capitalist-roaders, but actually humiliating Premier Zhou. For the good Chinese sons and daughters, who would not become angry upon learning of it?”⁴³ The injustice of slandering Zhou was so unforgivable that many people were eager to “seize the black behind-the-scenes backers” and “execute them in the public on the streets” and “cook them in boiled water.”⁴⁴ In the mind of the mourners, the official newspapers functions just like the centers of “spreading rumors, making false accusation, and faking news.”⁴⁵ They were thus determined to defend Zhou’s reputation by writing “a truthful history” with their own memorial poems and wreaths.⁴⁶

As a consequence, from mid March onward, upon the coming of the Qingming Festival, residents of Beijing and people from the provinces began to commemorate Zhou Enlai around the Monument. On 19 March, the Niufang Elementary School from Chaoyang District laid the first wreath at the base of the Monument. By March 30-31, infuriated by *Wenhui Daily*’s March 25 article, the white wreaths began to proliferate, the prevalent resentment was written into the memorial poems, and the number of mourners started to increase significantly.⁴⁷ During the

⁴³ Tong, ed, *Tiananmen shichao*, 118.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 98, 270.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁷ In addition to the April Fifth Movement, on March 28, Nanjing residents demonstrated in the streets to mourn Zhou and protest against the Gang of Four. A large number of posters targeting at the radical leftist faction appeared in public. The Nanjing Incident can be considered as the prelude of the April Fifth Movement. Garside, *Coming Alive*, 111-115; Yan, *Siwu yundong jishi*, 15-24.

movement, the Monument attracted one million people and numberless wreaths and poems “like a giant magnet.”⁴⁸ Given the situation, the Beijing Security Bureau had to order the policemen to monitor Tiananmen Square and clear the wreaths and poems around the Monument at night. Early one morning, one poem was posted to satirize the situation: “I came to make trouble on Qingming; plainclothesman is my name. I destroyed all the wreaths when it was dark; I am a ghost stealing the flowers.” While many poems compare the authorities to a “ghost stealing the flowers,” some characterize the mourners as “the Goddess guarding flowers.”⁴⁹ During the April Fifth Movement, Tiananmen Square was turned into a battleground in which the people’s power was in contest with state discipline. Tiananmen Square was thus socially produced and transformed into an alternative space by the mourners.

Creating a Short-Lived Public Sphere at Tiananmen Square

In order to manage the crisis at Tiananmen Square, the municipal authorities under the whims of the radical leftist faction put forward several measures. In particular, the notices from the Beijing Party Committee were over and over again relayed to the public on next two days announcing that work units should prevent their workers from going to Tiananmen Square and that “Qingming was a festival for ghosts (guijie 鬼節)” and “laying wreaths was the Four Olds (sijiu 四舊).”⁵⁰ These

⁴⁸ Zhou Xiaodong 周曉東, “Zai Renmin dahuitang jiandao de [What I have seen in the Great Hall of the People 在人民大會堂見到的],” in *Bingchen qingming jishi* [A documentation of Qingming 1976 丙辰清明紀實], ed. *People’s Daily* (Beijing: *People’s Daily*, 1980), 82.

⁴⁹ Tong, ed, *Tiananmen shichao*, 116, 117.

⁵⁰ Yan, Siwu yundong, 34; Tong, *Weida de siwu yundong*, 63, 86, 89; Teiwes and Sun, “The First Tiananmen Incident Revisited,” 217; Garside, *Coming Alive*,

notices further enraged the public, and, as a response, on the Qingming Festival, almost two million people marched to Tiananmen Square to mourn Zhou despite the official bans. “Mourning the Premier publicly,” as one poem puts it, “not fearing the repeated orders and notices.”⁵¹ Many other poems further explicitly vented the popular fury against the notices, as one of them reads:

Says who, the Qingming Festival is a Four Olds.
Says who, the custom of Qingming is bad?
We have been commemorating our martyrs from year to year,
Why do you publish the official ban this year?⁵²

As this poem suggests, it has been an established convention to lay wreaths around the Monument to honor the revolutionary martyrs on the Qingming Festival since 1958, and this practice has been already deeply rooted in the people’s memory.⁵³ Hence, upon learning of the notices, the mourners only questioned why in 1976 the “revolutionary” Qingming Festival would suddenly become “a Four Olds” and why the people were not allowed to offer wreaths at the base of the Monument on that day. Placing “reactionary” poems and “Four-Olds” wreaths at the Monument thus

115; Yan and Gao, *Turbulent Decade*, 494.

⁵¹ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 39, 40; Xiao Lan, *Tiananmen Poems* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1979), 25.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵³ As one of the mourners clearly points out in his recollection: “[We] sweep the graves and offer wreaths to commemorate the revolutionary martyrs on the Qingming Festival every year, how could the Qingming Festival become a festival for the ghosts and the Four Olds this year?” Cheng Jinhai, “Minxin buke qi [The people’s hearts cannot be deceived 民心不可欺],” in *Bingchen qingming jishi*, 110-112. Many participants recollected their suspicions of those notices, see *Bingchen qingming jishi*, 25, 37, 52, 74, 79, 82, 107, 110, 137, 173, 178, 202, 219, 278.

became the only way to make the voice of protest heard when the official authorities controlled the mass media. Manipulating the official ritual practice at the space of state discipline, they turned the mourning activities into a “political theater” to protest against the authorities. It was in this way that the mourners created a short-lived public sphere at Tiananmen Square to shape and circulate dissident discourse during the April Fifth Movement.

In his study of the streets in Manhattan as a public space in antebellum New York, David Henkin calls attention to the spatial dimension of public sphere. He articulates the spatiality of the public sphere by creatively combining the insights of Jurgen Habermas and Benedict Anderson. In his view, the public sphere is “a network of institutions and sites of rational discussion and a critical ideal through which public interest can in principle be ‘identified’ and ‘enforced’.” In this network, the “world of letters” constitutes the public sphere in the open public space. Whereas Habermas has based “publicity” and “public opinion” on an audience-oriented subjectivity inside the close space, Henkin suggests that this subjectivity can be shaped in the open public space. As an effect, the subjectivity that “entailed a sense among participants in the public sphere” in which the ordinary people “implicated in public affairs, addressed by their discussion, and engaged in thought that could be communicated to an impersonal and dispersed group of interested others.”⁵⁴ Henkin’s insights can be used to interpret what occurred in Tiananmen Square during the April Fifth Movement.

The participants of the April Fifth Movement created a short-lived public sphere at Tiananmen Square by posting, transcribing and

⁵⁴ David M Henkin, *City Reading: Written Words and Public Space in Antebellum New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 8, 9.

circulating memorial poems to present their dissident voices, in which the popular discourse of “April Fifth” was created. As the Tiananmen Poems make clear, the authorities attempted to undermine the popular impetus to honor Zhou Enlai by blocking the news of the mourning activities and by defaming Zhou with official newspapers. When the news media was strictly in the hands of the Gang of Four, the sole way to make the popular voices “identified” was to create their own network to circulate the information of what really happened by posting poems in the “world of letters” invented at Tiananmen Square. The network was extended when many more people went to Tiananmen Square to copy and circulate those poems to a larger scope. As one poem puts it:

To spread poems and flowers at the base of the Monument,
For the Journal of Poetry (Shikan) and newspapers are not allowed
to publish them···
Having not seen any newspapers and journals commemorating you,
We dedicate poems in front of Tiananmen.⁵⁵

With poetry and wreaths, the mourners created a public sphere to form and circulate a dissident discourse beyond the discipline of state power. As a result, as the disciplinary space to represent state power and the official revolutionary discourse, Tiananmen Square was constructed into a public sphere in which a network of creating and circulating popular discourse of the event was made possible. One protester even described Tiananmen Square as a “liberated area under the Gang of Four’s white terror.”⁵⁶ Thus, Tiananmen Square was turned into a “battleground” of memory war over remembering and forgetting Zhou between the state and the people.

⁵⁵ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 44.

⁵⁶ *People’s Daily*, ed., *Bingchen qingming jishi*, 67.

Hatred Behind Love: Incipient Disillusionment with Chairman Mao?

It was in this short-lived public sphere at Tiananmen Square that the people from all walks of life found an outlet to express the prevalent antipathy to the Gang of Four while showing their respect to Zhou Enlai. It was in such a space that the authors of the Tiananmen Poems addressed the common dual topics of the socialist realist literature: proletarian people’s love and hate. As one of the most widely circulated poems exemplifies, on the one hand, the mourners used their poems to express their love to Zhou: “The people’s Premier is loved by the people. The people’s Premier in turn loves the people. The Premier and the people share bitterness and sweetness. The people and the Premier are linked heart to heart.”⁵⁷ On the other hand, the furious protesters display their hatred to the Gang of Four:

In our grief we hear demons shriek;
We weep while jackals and wolves laugh.
Though tears we shed to mourn a hero;
With heads raised high, we draw our swords.⁵⁸

This message was so rebellious that the authorities condemned the poem as the number one counterrevolutionary case.⁵⁹ The poem explains why the mourners initiated a war with the Gang of Four by drawing their “swords”: the “demons” and “jackals and wolves” only “shrieked” and “laughed” when the people were in deep grief of mourning the “hero.” The

⁵⁷ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 159; Xiao, *Tiananmen Poems*, 14.

⁵⁸ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 11; The English translation is mine. For an official version see Xiao, *Tiananmen Poems*, 24; Another version can be seen in Garside, *Coming Alive*, 120.

⁵⁹ Yan, *Siwu yundong jishi*, 53-54.

“swords” were nothing but the poems they posted, as one poem puts it: “Mourning the Premier at the moment of turbulent situation, all the people write poems as weapons.”⁶⁰ And, by using poetry as a weapon, they were optimistic to predict the “collapse” of the Gang of Four:

The Huangpu River is spanned by a bridge (qiao).

Rotten, the river bridge already totters.

The river bridge totters (jiang qiao yao),

We see it is about to collapse.

Tell us do: Shall it be smashed or burned?⁶¹

Implicitly, the author uses “The Huangpu River” to imply the power base of the Gang of Four, Shanghai, for they were also known as the “Shanghai Clique (Shanghai bang).” Whereas the Chinese expression used for “river bridge totters” are “jiang yao qiao” that refer to Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyan, the last line metaphorically anticipates the result of the people’s power at work.

During the April Fifth Movement, when the mourners explicitly expressed their hatred to the Gang of Four, they implicitly revealed incipient disillusionment with, if not distrust of, Mao. Mao’s sublime image as the reddest red sun and his prestige as an infallible helmsman had rather dwindled after the excesses of the Cultural Revolution.⁶² An

⁶⁰ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 42.

⁶¹ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 262; Xiao, *Tiananmen Poems*, 27.

⁶² Mao’s image as the reddest red sun in the red hearts of the Chinese people and his prestige as an infallible helmsman of communist China had somewhat dwindled after the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. Especially the Lin Biao affair of 1971, when an attempt to topple the sacrosanct Chairman was attributed to Mao’s chosen successor, constituted a striking blow to Mao’s authority. At the beginning of 1976, some people took it amiss that Mao dropped the late Zhou Enlai and exposed Zhou’s legacy to the denigration

incipient, if not widespread, disillusionment with Mao was mirrored in one of the Tiananmen Poems from the underground collection that praises Zhou Enlai as the “Father of the Nation.”⁶³ Moreover, as compared to Zhou, Mao was hardly admired in the Tiananmen Poems. The exclusive homage paid to Zhou at Tiananmen Square implied the deviation from the cult of Mao. In most cases, Mao’s name was mentioned only when the authors stressed Zhou’s loyalty to the Chairman and the cause of Communism. Yet, it would be an overstatement to say that the disillusionment with Mao already constituted a powerful or apparent mainstream among the Chinese people at that time. A careful examination of the Tiananmen Poems shows that very few authors conveyed their criticism of Mao in a straightforward way. As Andrew Nathan has demonstrated, this tendency of criticizing Mao without mentioning his name was still reflected in the wall posters produced during the Democracy Wall Movement.⁶⁴

While most Tiananmen Poems are intended to satirize the Gang of Four, only one lengthy poem targets at Chairman Mao. In the poem, the author reveals his disillusionment with Mao by claiming: “Gone for good is Qin Shihuang’s feudal society.”⁶⁵ Whereas Qin Shihuang (the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty) had constantly served as a secret code

of the radical Maoists. They felt betrayed and were not willing to accept this anymore. Garside, *Coming Alive*, 123; Sebastian Heilmann, *Turning Away from the Cultural Revolution: Political Grass-Roots Activism in the Mid-Seventies* (Stockholm: Center for Pacific Asia Studies at Stockholm University, 1996), 29-31; MacFarquhar, *The Politics of China*, 277-278.

⁶³ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen geming shiwenxuan: Xubian*, 235.

⁶⁴ Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 7, 92, 102.

⁶⁵ China is no longer the China of the past, And the people are no longer wrapped in utter ignorance, Gone for good is Qin Shihuang’s feudal society, We believe in Marxism-Leninism, To hell with scholars who emasculate Marxism-Leninism! Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, p. 282; Garside, *Coming Alive*, 127.

alluding to Mao since the 1950s, the allegorical use of Qin Shihuang alone could not really be an insult to Mao.⁶⁶ The point here is that the author's suggestion that the era of Qin Shihuang is "gone for good" metaphorically announces the end of Mao's rule while he was still in power. This can be viewed as a poetic manifestation of the incipient disillusionment with Mao.

This incipient disillusionment with Mao was further visually displayed in the pictorial confrontation between Mao's portrait and the giant pictures of Zhou Enlai at Tiananmen Square. During the April Fifth Movement, many pictures of Zhou were set up at Tiananmen Square, and many of them were placed right on the façade of the Monument, directly opposing Mao's portrait hung on Tiananmen. The people-produced pictures of Zhou produced by the people were thus placed to confront the state-sponsored portrait of Mao.⁶⁷ This pictorial confrontation not only revealed the contest between grassroots and state power at Tiananmen Square but also manifested the incipient disillusionment with Mao. Tiananmen Square was no longer an altar of personal cult exclusive to

⁶⁶ During the 1950s, Mao had compared the Chinese communist regime with the reign of Qin Shihuang in its determined suppression of dissidents: "We have surpassed Qin Shihuang a hundred-fold." Before and during the campaign of "Pi Lin, Pi Kong," Qin Shihuang was praised for having followed "progressive" ways by means of "revolutionary violence." As a result, every statement on Qin Shihuang tended to be understood as a statement on Mao in the 1970s. Heilmann, *Turning Away from the Cultural Revolution*, 30.

⁶⁷ As Garside vividly described: "Row upon row of wreaths dedicated to Zhou, many bearing his portraits, were arrayed on their stands, facing the Gate of Heavenly Peace. They advanced northward from the Monument to the very edge of the square, so that an army of Zhou Enlai confronted the portrait of Mao... . As men they had never clashed in public, but here the images of the dead Zhou and the dying Mao were arrayed against each other." Garside, *Coming Alive*, 128.

Mao.⁶⁸ During the April Fifth Movement, the symbolism of Mao’s portrait underwent a decisive change and its sacred aura had faded somewhat as Mao himself.

The Past: Memory Making of “May Fourth” and “April Fifth” at Tiananmen Square

In addition to serving as historical markers of the April Fifth Movement, the Tiananmen Poems contain valuable knowledge to look into the dynamics of memory making, or the political use of “May Fourth,” as they evolved in the public commemoration for Zhou Enlai at Tiananmen Square. First, the poems reveal how the Monument constituted the material foundation on which the mourners paid respect to Zhou while recalling and conceptualizing Tiananmen Square as the most sacred site of the communist revolutionary tradition. They especially demonstrate how the mourners rendered “May Fourth” in their bodily practices and used “May Fourth” as a keyword in their memorial poems and essays attached to the relief of the May Fourth Movement on the Monument. Second, the poems explain why the mourners came to the particular spot around the Monument to memorialize Zhou as an individual revolutionary and how

⁶⁸ Along with Zhu De, Nie Rongzhen and Ye Jianying, the giant portrait of Mao was first time hung on Tiananmen at the ceremony of the peaceful liberation of Beijing in February 1949. The giant portrait, together with Mao himself, witnessed the founding of the PRC on Tiananmen on October 1, 1949. During the Cultural Revolution, along with the big pictures of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin on the two sides of Tiananmen Square, Mao and the portrait reviewed the mass congregations of the Red Guard for eight times. About the history of the portraits of Mao, see *People’s Daily*, February 18, 1949, 1; *Shu Jun, Tiananmen guangchang lishi dangan* [Historical archive on Tiananmen Square 天安門廣場歷史檔案] (Beijing: College of CCP, 1998), 43–46; Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 68–84.

Chang'an Avenue became a place to the memory of his death. Third, the Tiananmen Poems illustrate the ways in which the mourners engaged in war over memory in opposition to the official suppression of the public commemoration for Zhou.

An Altar for Personal Worship of Zhou Enlai

As the spatial framework of the popular commemoration for Zhou Enlai, Tiananmen Square was articulated in the popular discourse on “April Fifth.” By attaching the mourning activities to Tiananmen Square and the Monument, the authors of the Tiananmen Poems meant to make the movement important and meaningful. More significantly, the Monument that was built to honor the collective revolutionary martyrs was never used to memorialize an individual person. Before 1976, no wreaths for any individual person had ever been presented to the base of the Monument in the history of the PRC.⁶⁹ In the spring of 1976, the Monument for the first time became an altar for an individual revolutionary.

In addition to representing Tiananmen Square as a memorial space to express the popular enthusiasm to remember Zhou Enlai as an individual revolutionary, the Tiananmen poems reveal that Chang'an Avenue was turned into a place of memory attached to his death. The boulevard is the east-west central axis of Beijing that passes through the Tiananmen gate and to the north of Tiananmen Square. The creation of Chang'an Avenue as a memorial place to remember Zhou was an unexpected outcome of the official repression of the mourning activities for him. Only three days

⁶⁹ Cheater, “Death Ritual as Political Trickster in the People’s Republic of China,” 75-76.

after his death, the CCP decided that Zhou’s body would be cremated at the Babaoshan Revolutionary Cemetery. Although the date of cremation was not announced to the public, the mourners learned by word of mouth when Zhou’s body was on the way to Babaoshan, and almost two million people lined up Chang’an Avenue to mourn him silently under the temperatures of twelve degree below zero Celsius as the hearse passed. As if it were Zhou’s last visit to Tiananmen Square, the hearse circled around the square before moving to its destination. At that symbolic moment, it was blocked by the masses of mourners, who did not want to see the late premier be cremated. Deng Yingchao, Zhou’s wife, had to assure the crowd that the Premier had ordered his own cremation.⁷⁰ The scene was translated into a brief essay, “Condolence for the Premier Alongside the Ten-Mile Long Avenue (shili changjie song zongli),” which has been studied in classrooms of the PRC since the early 1980s. The same scene was recorded in the Tiananmen Poems and in the photographs of *The People’s Grief* as well.

The Tiananmen Poems describes the unforgettable scenario on Chang’an Avenue vividly. Many people’s hearts were broken when they learned that Zhou’s body was to be cremated only three days after his death. The mourners were so inconsolable that they could only stand silently alongside the Chang’an Avenue to bid farewell to their late premier “without feeling the chill of the northern wind.” They were so sad that they “could not bear to see the hearse pass by” for it was to “crash our hearts.” Thus, many of them came to stop the hearse from moving,

⁷⁰ Frederic E. Wakeman, “Mao’s Remains,” in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial China and in Modern China*, ed. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 260; Cheater, “Death Ritual as Political Trickster,” 73-74.

but only ended up with “the hate for the Babaoshan” when they “fail to stop it.”⁷¹ Chang’an Avenue and Tiananmen Square thus constituted the ultimate destinations for the people to memorialize Zhou. Because this was the last time for Zhou to be “in amidst of the people,” the crowd was so reluctant to leave their premier that they wished the time could “halt a little while” for them to remember the scene in their hearts. One poem describes the sentiment clearly: “Beloved Premier, you are not dead. You are still alive in our hearts. We will never forget, the motorcade of the hearse on Chang Avenue, accompanied by the crowd for a hundred kilometers.”⁷² Along with the mnemonic vehicle of bodily practice in the streets, the memory was deeply rooted in the people’s hearts. Chang’an Avenue and Tiananmen Square thus shaped the spatial framework of the popular memory of “April Fifth.”

Rendering “May Fourth” Past at the Sacred Site of Revolutionary Tradition

While functioning like a memorial space to mourn Zhou Enlai, Tiananmen Square was also a symbolic place to recall the communist revolutionary tradition. During the April Fifth Movement, the authors of the Tiananmen Poems remembered and conceptualized the space as the sacred site of the revolutionary past. As one poem puts it: “Walking around in front of Tiananmen, how many past events would jump to your mind.”⁷³ Tiananmen Square was thus conceptualized as a memorial space to stimulate the popular reminiscences of the past.

⁷¹ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 134.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 178, also 166, 180, 189, 196.

⁷³ Tong Huizhou, ed., *Tiananmen shiwenji* 天安門詩文集, vol. 2 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1979), 309.

What kind of revolutionary past did those mourners bring to mind at Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1976? Most of them came to think about the officially sanctioned communist revolutionary tradition embodied in the place. As one poem illustrates: “Alas! The Monument! In the Square before your eyes, an expansive and mega square, numerous revolutionary martyrs had shed their blood, the troops of the May Fourth Movement had been crossing, and the slogans of the December Ninth Movement had been posted.”⁷⁴ Thus, recollecting the communist revolutionary tradition in the larger context of the Chinese national salvation movement constituted a typical mentality as Tong Huaizhou’s conceptualization of “April Fifth” shows:

It is true that Tiananmen Square is a historical witness to the Chinese people’s brave struggle. It was in front of the square that the Eight-Nation Alliance bombarded the red walls of the square, recording the Chinese people’s humiliation and sufferings. It was in this square that the youth of the May Fourth Movement first called for science and democracy to rescue our ill and weak motherland. It was in this square that the students of the December Ninth Movement ... held up the banner of resistance against Japan and national salvation for the survival of the Chinese nation. It was in this square that Chairman Mao hoisted the first red flag of five stars and solemnly announced the birth of New China. The movement at Tiananmen Square on the Qingming Festival of 1976 precisely was a development of the revolutionary spirit of the Chinese people from generation to generation.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shiwenji*, vol. 2, 420.

⁷⁵ Xu, “Xiangei zhonghua minzu de zizi sunsun,” 1-2.

By juxtaposing the popular protest against the Gang of Four with the May Fourth Movement, the December Ninth Movement, and the founding of the PRC, they meant to define “April Fifth” as “another” revolutionary tradition at Tiananmen Square.

Given the significance of the May Fourth Movement in the Maoist revolutionary discourse, it is not surprising that “May Fourth” as a keyword in understanding the history of Chinese revolution was the most frequently rendered communist revolutionary tradition in the popular discourse during the April Fifth Movement.⁷⁶ In the memorial poems and essays, many authors underscore that the site they went to honor Zhou Enlai was Tiananmen Square where “there is the glorious tradition of the May Fourth Movement.”⁷⁷ In an attempt to legitimize the protest against the Gang of Four, many of them compared “April Fifth” to “May Fourth” in their memorial poems. For instance, in emphasizing the considerable significance of the protest, one poem indicates: “[Whereas] you imitate the method of Yuan [Shikai], I will send you to the grave with the spirit of May Fourth.”⁷⁸ Here, the author on the one hand connects the Gang of Four to Yuan Shikai, a feudal ruler in the early Republican era, and, on the other, implies that the protesters were upholding the spirit of “May Fourth” to fight against the feudal ruler of their time, the Gang of Four. Besides, whereas many protesters associated “April Fifth” with “May Fourth,” some even went so far as to identify the two movements. In considering the significance of “April Fifth,” one memorial essay concludes, “I realize

⁷⁶ Mao defined “May Fourth” as the turning point from the old democratic revolution led by the bourgeoisie to the new democratic revolution under the leadership of the CCP. For Mao’s master discourse on “May Fourth,” see Tsung-Yi Pan, “Fuxiang Beijing cheng de shijian zhongzhou xian,” 362-371.

⁷⁷ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 296, also 235-326.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 286.

a simple fact that although May Fourth and April Fifth are different numbers, they have precisely the same connotation.”⁷⁹ One even called the April Fifth Movement “the May Fourth Movement in the seventies of the twentieth century.”⁸⁰ In the popular discourse during the movement, the officially sanctioned “May Fourth” was used to endow “April Fifth” with the sense of revolutionary tradition to serve as a keyword to imagine the history of communist revolution.

In addition to the juxtaposition of “April Fifth” and “May Fourth,” the mourners consciously related their activities to what had happened during the May Fourth Movement. For example, on April Fifth of 1976, as soon as the protesters saw that the official command post was on fire, they right away connected the scene to burning Cao Rulin’s house during the May Fourth Movement. We do not know if the person who set the fire on the command post ever thought about this past, but many eyewitnesses did recall it when they saw the scene.⁸¹ By identifying the violence of “May Fourth” as revolutionary tradition, they intended to justify their action by relating the Gang of Four to the traitor Cao Ruling.

Furthermore, some protesters even attempted to recreate the circumstances of “May Fourth” in their bodily practices during the April Fifth Movement. Garside’s eyewitness account provides an example of reenacting “May Fourth” during “April Fifth”:

A young man taught several thousand people to sing a slow lament he had written for Zhou... I noticed he was wearing a jacket, not in

⁷⁹ Wang Dawei 王大衛, “Fasheng zai siyue liuri shangwu [What happened in the morning of April Sixth 發生在四月六日上午],” in *Bingchen qingming jishi*, 205.

⁸⁰ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen siwenji*, vol. 2, 472.

⁸¹ Yan, *Siwu yundong jishi*, 93-94.

the Mao style with turned-down collar and plastic buttons, but in the pre-1949 style with a stand-up collar and cloth buttons. Under his arm on the gray, drizzling afternoon was an umbrella: not one of the plastic one now sold in Peking but one made in the old way, of oiled paper. He surely intended his archaic dress to recall that of the young men who had come to the original Tiananmen Square, a smaller place, on 4 May 1919 and, by their demonstration against the feudal rulers of their time, had launched the great movement of national renewal that came to be known as the May Fourth Movement.⁸²

Clothing constitutes a way to represent socio-political identity. Garside's account illustrates how the young man endeavored to make sense of the movement by "dressing" and "acting" "May Fourth" with his body. With an old-fashioned appearance, he intended to mobilize public support by connecting the protest against the Gang of Four to the May Fourth Movement. Whereas their revolutionary pioneers struggled against the domestic feudalism at Tiananmen Square in 1919, the young man and his comrade-in-arms were fighting with contemporary "feudal rulers," the Gang of Four, when China was again in the critical moment of national crisis in 1976. The case of Garside's young man is significant in terms of the transmission of Chinese cultural memory of national salvation and revolutionary tradition. On the one hand, it demonstrates the impact of Mao's revolutionary discourse on the historical consciousness of the Chinese people. As a young man who grew up in New China, he must have learned Mao's particular discourse on the keyword "May Fourth" from the textbooks in schools, the official propaganda on news media,

⁸² Garside, *Coming Alive*, 124-125.

and the commemorative architecture at Tiananmen Square. On the other hand, his bodily practice in turn constituted a mnemonic medium to transmit the cultural memory of the May Fourth Movement as the “great movement of national renewal” while embodying the past of “April Fifth.” It is in this sense that we can consider the bodily practices at Tiananmen Square a physical foundation to transmit the Chinese cultural memory of revolutionary tradition, or the keyword, of “May Fourth.”

Many mourners also attached their bodily practices to the Monument that symbolizes the defining moments of the Chinese revolution.⁸³ On 30 March 1976, one lament dedicated to Zhou Enlai was posted on the relief of the May Fourth Movement on the Monument.⁸⁴ This scene can be seen in many photographs collected in *The People's Grief* as well. As the first lament posted on the Monument during the movement, the essay on the one hand expresses the workers' homage to Zhou, and, on the other, in the language of radical leftists, displays their determination to launch “the bloody fight against the bourgeoisie inside and outside the Party.”⁸⁵ The subversive lament received much attention from both the people and authorities. Posted on the relief of “May Fourth,” it was a posture targeted at the political faction of radical leftists as “the bourgeoisie inside the Party” without mentioning their names. Given the general atmosphere

⁸³ The defining moments represented on the reliefs of the Monument include the Opium War, the Taiping Uprising, the Wuchang Uprising, the May Fourth Movement, the May Thirtieth Movement, the Nanchang Uprising, the War of Resistance against Japan, and the Successful Crossing the Yangtze River.

⁸⁴ Cao Zhijie 曹志杰, “Wo weishemo zouxiang Tiananmen—Siwu yundong huiyi [Why would I walk toward Tiananmen 我為什麼走向天安門——四五運動回憶],” in *Siwu yundong*, 247-248; “Diyi pian daoci [The first mourning lament 第一篇悼詞],” in *Bingcheng Qingming jianwen lu* [Eyewitness account of the Qingming Festival 1976 丙辰清明見聞錄], ed. Tong Huaizhou (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1979), 4-5; Yan, *Siwu yundong jishi*, 29.

⁸⁵ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 310.

since Zhou's death, the mourners standing before the relief of "May Fourth" understood very well that the lament was targeted at Jiang Qing and her clique.⁸⁶ The material manifestation of "May Fourth" on the Monument thus functions like a mnemonic medium to memorialize the defining moments in the Chinese revolutionary history while being used by the protesters as a discursive keyword of Chinese communist revolutionary tradition to serve their political demands.

Indeed, the reliefs on the Monument had constituted the material foundation for the mourners to make sense of the movement by associating with the revolutionary keyword "May Fourth." During the April Fifth Movement, numerous young students went to the Monument to pay homage to Zhou Enlai, and many of them were inclined to identify with "May Fourth" by attaching themselves with the relief of the May Fourth Movement in an imaginative way, as one memorial essay portrays:

By the Qingming Festival of 1976, we [...] decided to produce a wreath and deliver it to the base of the Monument to the People's Heroes to pay tribute to the respectful and beloved Premier Zhou... . In front of the Monument, we lifted up our right hands and seriously took an oath... . At that very moment, we seemed have merged into the relief of the May Fourth Movement... .⁸⁷

Becoming a part of the relief imaginatively, it appeared as if the students were committed to be the revolutionary youth of new generation by

⁸⁶ Tong Huaizhou, "Qingming nahan 清明吶喊," in *Bingchen qingming jishi*, 1; Cao, "Wo weishemo zouxiang Tiananmen," 247-248; "Diyi pian daoci," in *Bingcheng Qingming jianwen lu*, 4-5.

⁸⁷ Wang Ming, "Qingming ciri de diyige huaquan [The first wreath on the morning after Qingming 清明次日的第一個花環]," in *Bingchen qingming jishi*, 190-191.

identifying with their May Fourth forerunners. To sum up, as the memorial poems and essays and those bodily practices discussed above illustrate, the communist sanctioned revolutionary keyword like “May Fourth” constituted the “moral resources” for the mourners to make sense and legitimate the April Fifth Movement and to construct the significance of “April Fifth.”

Some symbols of the May Fourth Movement had been used by the mourners at Tiananmen Square during and after “April Fifth.” In particular, the best-known symbolic icon to signify the revolution and the May Fourth Movement is the torch that was displayed on the Monument on April 6, 1976. A witness provides his interpretation of the icon:

Around ten in the morning, a realistic torch suddenly appeared before people’s eyes on the relief inscribed on the west side of the Monument... . The torch that represents brightness and revolution has always been the pride of the Chinese revolutionary youth and the symbol of the spirit of May Fourth. At this moment, in the hearts of the people who came to the square under the circumstance of the white terror, the torch lit up on April Fifth of 1976 to welcome the advent of new age is flaming in the spring wind... .⁸⁸

Placed on April 6, the torch constitutes a visual manifestation of the popular conceptualization of “April Fifth.” First, displaying the torch icon that symbolizes “brightness and revolution” on the Monument meant to define the movement as a revolutionary event. Second, by installing a material object in the shape of torch representing “the spirit of May Fourth,” it was intended to identify the April Fifth Movement with the

⁸⁸ Wang, “Fasheng zai siyue liuri shangwu,” 205.

May Fourth Movement in an effort to legitimize the popular protest against the Gang of Four. Third, it shows that, like “the torch of May Fourth,” the April Fifth Movement had lit up its own torch to be handed down from generation to generation at Tiananmen Square.⁸⁹ As one poem indicates, “May the revolutionary torch, lighted by the heroes, and now in our hands, be carried forward from generation to generation.”⁹⁰ Although the icon was quickly removed, its existence as the symbol of “April Fifth” has already been ingrained in the popular memory and was to be transmitted inter-generationally as the transmission of the revolutionary torch.

Zhou Enlai’s Inscription and the Personalization of the Monument

The Tiananmen Poems not only tell us how the mourners conceptualized Tiananmen Square as the sacred site of the communist revolutionary tradition like “April Fifth” but also reveal how the Monument installed at the space constituted the material basis to recall Zhou Enlai’s revolutionary career. First of all, the mourners offered wreaths at the base of the Monument because they remembered that it was a conventional revolutionary practice to be done every year on the Qingming Festival. Moreover, the poems explain why people came to Tiananmen Square to mourn Zhou at the specific spot around the Monument. It was because that the gold-gilded inscription on the south face of the Monument was handwritten by Zhou. In other words, the

⁸⁹ Lu Jisheng, “Wusi de huoju wansui [Long live the torch of May Fourth 五四的火炬萬歲],” in *Beijing daxue youpai fenzi fandong yanlun huiji* [Collection of speeches and writings by Peking University rightist reactionary elements 北京大學右派份子反動言論彙集] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1957), 163.

⁹⁰ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 230; Xiao, *Tiananmen Poems*, 55.

Monument became the material relic left behind by a dead person that could incite the mourners’ memory of him. In the spring of 1976, the state-sponsored Monument constituted a “vital monument that coalesces communal memories” and a “mechanism for the projection of personal values and desires” in the words of Robert Nelson and Margaret Olin articulating the relation between socio-cultural memory and historical monuments.⁹¹

Many memorial essays underscore the relationship between the public commemoration for Zhou and his hand-written inscription on the Monument. Most of the mourners would stand at the south of the Monument to memorialize Zhou: “Here the people look upward to the shining inscription handwritten by the Premier. Watching the object while missing him, they no longer could keep down their deep grief.”⁹² This scene was even composed into a popular song sung at Tiananmen Square, as one mourner recollects:

There, I saw a man, who stood on the step in the southwest of the Monument in the drizzle, teaching the song he had composed by himself: “Whenever I come to Tiananmen Square and stand by the grand Monument, the excited thought makes me drift along the long river of memory. Alas, beloved Premier Zhou, how could people not miss and admire your life? Looking upward to your inscription, how could the people’s eyes not glisten with hot tears?”… Whenever the people sang the part of “looking up to your inscription,” they could not help but look upward to the grand Monument and watch the

⁹¹ Nelson, Robert S. and Margaret Olin Prost, ed. *Monuments and Memory: Made and Unmade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 6.

⁹² Wei Wei 魏魏, “Zai hongliu zhong [In the great current 在洪流中],” in *Bingchen qingming jishi*, 221.

Premier's inscription with profound love...⁹³

Eventually, in the imagination of the mourners, the Monument was turned into a site where Zhou Enlai's spirit resides. As an effect, some of them even envisioned the Monument as Zhou himself. This personalization of the Monument was described in one poem:

Today we sincerely dedicate [wreaths and flowers] to you!
 The Monument to the People's Heroes,
 For you are the great incarnation of the beloved Premier,
 Supporting both heaven and earth.
 I silently stand under your foot,
 Looking upward to your whole body for a long while.
 Yesterday I have said good-bye to your remains,
 Could it be that you come back to life from death.⁹⁴

More than simply a material monument, the Monument is imagined as the “incarnation of the beloved Premier.” In another poem from an unofficial collection, Zhou is even conceptualized as the embodiment of Tiananmen Square.⁹⁵ This personalization of the Monument converted the material manifestation of the Maoist revolutionary discourse into an imagined monument for an individual person. It is in this way that the Monument was converted into a mnemonic medium to embody the popular memory of Zhou and “April Fifth.” This process of symbolism transformation provides an instance to show the contested nature of socially produced space in which different social groups can invest a material object with alternative meaning.

⁹³ Liu Yin, “Aige,” in *Bingchen qingming jishi*, 133.

⁹⁴ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen geming shiwenxuan*, 326.

⁹⁵ Tong, ed., *Geming shichao*, 27.

Establishing the Living Monument and “Memorial” to Zhou Enlai

Many other memory media were invented at Tiananmen Square to embody and transmit the popular memory of “April Fifth.” The most important of them were the Tiananmen Poems and the photographs taken during the movement. The preservation of those “reactionary” poems and photographs from official confiscation displayed how the mourners had engaged in the war over memory between remembering and forgetting Zhou Enlai before the rehabilitation of the movement. The Tiananmen Poems constitute one of the most important mnemonic media to carry the popular memory and discourse on “April Fifth.” While many people posted their memorial poems and essays at the base of the Monument, more people went to Tiananmen Square to read and transcribe those memorial poems and essays. This was one of the reasons why the Tiananmen Poems were largely preserved and widely circulated. Nevertheless, after the suppression of the April Fifth Movement, the Beijing Public Security launched a large-scale campaign to confiscate the poems and photographs produced at Tiananmen Square during the movement. Many of the Tiananmen Poems and photographs had survived from the official confiscation for us to trace the construction of “April Fifth” as a keyword and its material manifestation.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ After the suppression of the movement, the Public Security apparatus launched a large-scale “double-pursuit” campaign (shuangzhui yundong 雙追運動) to inspect “the behind-the-scenes schemer and director of the counterrevolutionary incident in Tiananmen Square” and “the sources of those reactionary rumors, poems, and leaflets.” As a result, the Beijing Public Security Bureau confiscated five hundred and eighty-three original handwritten poems from Tiananmen Square, sixty thousand pieces of transcriptions of the Tiananmen Poems from the ordinary people, and one hundred and eight thousand pieces of pictures taken at Tiananmen Square from the photographic studios in Beijing. Yan, *Siwu*

Many memorial essays about “April Fifth” allow us to know how the transcribers and collectors had tried every possible means to hide those reactionary poems and photographs from the official confiscation. They hid the poems that they copied at Tiananmen Square or collected from their close relatives and friends in unexpected objects or places. Some copied them on small pieces of paper and put them into the middle of hollowed candles; some put the poems and photographs into plastic bags and buried them in the flowerpots or in the earth of mountainous areas; some concealed them beneath the walls covered by yellow clay. Many people preserved the poems in creative ways. Some rewrote them with code systems that no one could understand but them. Some simply kept them in their memories.⁹⁷ In doing so, these fighters of memory had preserved the popular discourse on the movement. One can compare the Tiananmen Poems to the *samizdat* literature of the former Soviet Union in the late 1960s and the early 1970s in terms of the creation and transmission of dissident discourse.⁹⁸

yundong jishi, 120.

⁹⁷ See Tong, ed., *Bingchen qingming jianwen lu*, 157-169; Tong Huaizhou, “Ziyou renmin xie chungju,” 19-23; *People’s Daily*, ed., *Bingchen qingming jishi*, 29, 50, 96-98, 108, 181.

⁹⁸ *Samizdat* is a Soviet term coined by post-Stalin dissidents for the old Russian revolutionary practice of circulating uncensored dissident material privately, usually in manuscript form, such as nonconformist poetry and fiction, memoirs, historical documents, protest statements, and so on. The term *samizdat* is modeled on the shortened form—*gosizdat*—of State Publishing House (*Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo*). In a general sense any copy of a document that has been produced in the Soviet Union outside the chain of state publishing house may be referred to as *samizdat*. The production and circulation of *samizdat* documents increased dramatically in the wake of the fall of Khrushchev in November 1964, especially after the trial of Siniavski and Daniel in February 1966. The most prominent figures among the oppositionists had relied on the production and circulation of *samizdat* documents in their battle for free speech, freedom of the press, and basic democratic rights. For

The mourners not only created memory media to preserve the popular reminiscences of "April Fifth," they themselves formed the most important memory vehicle of the movement by erecting an imaginative monument to the memory of Zhou Enlai in their hearts. Throughout history, the erection of historical monuments is an essential means of shaping memory attached to significant events and individuals.⁹⁹ However, after Zhou's death, the CCP showed no intention to erect any monument to remember him. Even Zhou himself, on his deathbed, ordered that his remains be cremated and scattered all over China and that no memorial should ever be erected to his memory.¹⁰⁰ Given the succession crisis in the end of the Maoist era, the CCP's indifference and Zhou's last will are comprehensible. It was unsurprising that for the CCP's party apparatus under the control of Jiang Qing and her clique had no motivation to build a memorial for their opponents to manipulate the dead Zhou in the name of commemoration when the suppression on the popular mourning activities for Zhou was on its way. For Zhou, it was probably because he feared the possible desecration of his grave and memorial, and even his body.¹⁰¹ Against the circumstances, the popular protesters revealed their anxiety regarding erecting a special monument to Zhou, as one Tiananmen Poems

the genesis and development of samizdat literature, see F. J. M. Feldbrugge, *Samizdat and Political Dissent in the Soviet Union* (Leyden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1975); George Saunders, *Samizdat: Voices of the Soviet Opposition* (New York: Monad Press, 1974).

⁹⁹ Jonathan Boyarin, "Space, Time and the Politics of Memory," in *Remapping Memory: The Politics of TimeSpace*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 20; Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin," *Oppositions* 25 (1982): 21-51.

¹⁰⁰ Wakeman, "Mao's Remains," 260; Cheater, "Death Ritual as Political Trickster in the People's Republic of China," 72-73.

¹⁰¹ Wakeman, "Mao's Remains," 260; Cheater, "Death Ritual as Political Trickster in the People's Republic of China," 73.

epitomizes:

Fresh flowers bedeck the Monument; sad strains sweep the land.

We come at the Qingming Festival to pay mournful tribute as one
to the Premier who lives forever in our hearts.

The people's emotions cannot be suppressed; verses of passion
dismay the foe.

Though sullen clouds pall the sky, we fear naught. Traitors!

Think not you can wantonly flaunt your power... .

Mourning the Premier at the Qingming Festival, Erecting the Great
Monument in the bottom of the people's hearts.¹⁰²

The origins of the popular eagerness to create a monument to Zhou are amplified in other poems. Because Zhou's ashes were scattered over the rivers and mountains of China, the mourners could not find grave to pay tribute to him, but only erect a monument of their own, as one poem states: "His ashes now scattered in rivers and streams. His monument erected in the people's hearts."¹⁰³ This eagerness to establish an imaginative monument is clearly indicated by another poem:

For you no monument is raised; for you no plinth for statue laid.

Yet the monuments to you are legion, deeply rooted in the people's
hearts.

Nine thousand strokes of lightning cannot strike them down, nor a
twelve-force typhoon topple.

Deeply rooted in the people's hearts, your monument, more
enduring than any one man-made!¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 128-129.

¹⁰³ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shi chao*, 13; Xiao, *Tiananmen Poems*, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 214; Xiao, *Tiananmen Poems*, 34.

In this way, the Chinese people constituted the living monuments to Zhou. As one poem claims, “Eight hundred million people constitute eight hundred million monuments to him.”¹⁰⁵ More importantly, the second half of the poem reveals the mourners’ determination to erect an indestructible monument to the memory of Zhou. Because the living monuments were “deeply rooted in the people’s hearts,” they were more imperishable than any physical one.¹⁰⁶

The Tiananmen Poems reveal that the protesters had projected their opposition to the official vilification of Zhou in their imagination of erecting a formless monument in their hearts. They believed that the living monuments embedded in their hearts are imperishable from evil forces. As one poem emphasizes: “The monument cannot be damaged by the dogs and crows, because it is buried in the hearts of the people.”¹⁰⁷ Appearing as if they appreciated Zhou’s anxiety that his grave might be desecrated, the protesters considered that the monument in their memory constitutes an eternal memorial to the memory of Zhou. As one poem claims, “It is ridiculous to think that anyone can move the monument in the hearts of eight hundred million people because its base is made of our blood and its body our flesh.”¹⁰⁸ It was in this way that the “blood and flesh” of the

¹⁰⁵ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 150; Xiao, *Tiananmen Poems*, 38.

¹⁰⁶ Another poem makes this determination clear, “Although there is no grave to be specially constructed for you; the Baoshan has not preserved your ashes either; there is no monument to be erected in the land of nine million and six hundred thousand square kilometers. However, [...] in the hearts of the Chinese and their offspring from generation to generation, we install a monument that will never be erased forever.” Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 313-314; also Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shiwenji*, 423-425.

¹⁰⁷ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 56.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 221. As a result, as one poem concludes, “[i]t is impossible for them to strike down and destroy the monument in our minds.” Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 239.

mourners formed the living monuments to remember Zhou.

It is worthwhile noting that the protesters began to use the phrase “memorial hall” to refer to the living monuments in their hearts after the CCP decided to build the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall at Tiananmen Square in late 1976. For example, on the second anniversary of “April Fifth,” in stressing that only the people could appreciate Zhou’s contribution to China, one poem claims, “All the people’s hearts are memorial halls.”¹⁰⁹ In recalling the scattering of Zhou’s ashes, another poem describes the land of China as “the memorial hall.” (Tong, 1979b: 365, 395). Some poems directly convey the common aspiration to build a memorial hall for Zhou in a plain language.¹¹⁰ Moreover, on the third anniversary of Zhou’s death, various protests called for a monument to be built for Zhou.¹¹¹ The posters and protests illustrate the political circumstances after “April Fifth” while expressing the prevalent aspiration to build a monument to the memory of Zhou.

The Future: Projecting the Prospective Vision of China

In the short-lived public sphere created during the April Fifth Movement, the mourners not only attempted to justify their protest against the Gang of Four by using the communist revolutionary keyword such as “May Fourth” but also project a prospective vision of China. In recalling a late leader’s influential career with the communist revolutionary past,

¹⁰⁹ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shiwenji*, vol. 2, 365.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 395.

¹¹¹ Helmut Martin, *Cult and Canon: The Origins and Development of State Maoism* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharper, 1982), 111-112; Wakeman, “Mao’s Remains,” 284.

they reveal their devotion to be the revolutionary successors of Zhou Enlai. Along with the popular reminiscences of the late premier, moreover, they projected a new political vision for China based on the program of the Four Modernizations. The future prospect was thus entrusted into the recollection of the communist revolutionary tradition of “April Fifth.”

Recalling Zhou Enlai with the CCP’s Revolutionary Past

During the April Fifth Movement, the popular commemoration of Zhou was coupled with the nostalgia of his revolutionary career at Tiananmen Square. This comprises a spectacular scene in which Zhou’s lifetime achievements were recalled “next to” the Monument constructed to memorialize the Chinese revolutionary past. The zeniths of his career from the May Fourth Movement through the Nanchang Uprising to the founding of the PRC correspond to those defining moments materialized on the reliefs of the Monument. It is in this sense that to recall Zhou’s lifetime merits is to render the communist revolution past at Tiananmen Square.

Many Tiananmen Poems recollect the most vital accomplishments in the lifetime of Zhou.¹¹² The popular reminiscence usually begins with the May Fourth Movement. In recalling his career, one poem begins with what he had done for China in the early twentieth century: “Scribbling fast with pen during the period of the May Fourth Movement, [he] spread the idea of revolution to the people.”¹¹³ It appears that Zhou had played an important role in the most prominent revolutionary tradition. In the popular discourse on “April Fifth,” the May Fourth Movement representing the

¹¹² Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 23, 63, 65, 96, 100, 103, 104, 145, 162, 163, 186, 208, 234, 249, 296-305.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 296.

turning point to the new-democratic revolution constitutes the sacred start of Zhou's revolutionary career.

The most-often recalled revolutionary achievement of Zhou Enlai before the founding of the PRC in the Tiananmen Poems is the Nanchang Uprising. The Nanchang Uprising has been considered as a turning point in the communist history because it marked the founding of the Red Army in which Zhou played a critical role. Thus, it does not surprise us why many authors who recalled Zhou's career emphasized the Nanchang Uprising so much in their poems posted around the relief describing the event on the Monument. For example, in stressing the considerable significance of the event, one poem reads, "[After] the sound of gunshot heard at Nanchang on 1 August, the revolution spread several hundred and thousand li like an iron stream."¹¹⁴ Another poem further specifies Zhou's critical role: "[He] displayed the army flag in the city of Nanchang, uncovering the new chapter of the Chinese revolution."¹¹⁵ Likewise, while one poem portrays the event in the phrase "Holding up the military flag in the city of Nanchang," another one explicitly states that Zhou had "launched the revolt and established the Red Army in Nanchang."¹¹⁶ Therefore, many people came to the Monument to honor Zhou for his "merit of establishing the [Red] Army is extremely significant."¹¹⁷ Recalling Zhou's career beside the relief of the Nanchang Uprising provides an interesting scenario to show how the popular recollection of the communist revolution was materially attached to the Monument during the April Fifth Movement. The reliefs of the Monument functioned like the material foundation of

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 103.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 296.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 104; also 63-64.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 104, 145.

recalling the communist revolutionary past at Tiananmen Square.

Other communist revolutionary events mentioned in the poetic manifestation of Zhou’s revolutionary career include the Xi’an Incident, the Long March, the Resistance War against Japan, the peace conference with the GMD at Chongqing in addition to his political and diplomatic contributions as the State Premier.¹¹⁸ Whereas Tiananmen Square embodies the memory of the May Fourth Movement, these places represent influential events occurring in the course of the Chinese communist history. In this way, the mourners had remembered the communist history with recalling Zhou’s revolutionary career at the “April Fifth” present. The past thus played critical role in the making of “April Fifth” as a keyword in imaging the Chinese revolutionary history.

The Revolutionary Successors (Geming Jiebanren 革命接班人) and Their Ideals

Along with their recollection of Zhou’s revolutionary career, the mourners displayed zealous aspiration to be his “revolutionary successors.” Standing aside the Monument, they made pledges to show their determination to receive the revolutionary banner from Zhou. This emphasis on the desire to be Zhou’s successors to some degree reflected the popular anxiety of the succession crisis after his death. It especially

¹¹⁸ An often mentioned event ascribed to Zhou in the Tiananmen Poems is the Xi’an Incident. In the language of official discourse, the Tiananmen Poems poetically elucidate the significance of the Incident and the role Zhou played in the aftermath of the Incident. When most of them concisely touch upon the Incident, one lengthy poem clearly points out: “In the negotiation for the Xi’an Incident, you resolutely executed the Chairman Mao’s policy, forcing the Thief Jiang to stop the civil war and speeding up the creation of the national united front of resistance against Japan.” See Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 297; also 63, 104.

expresses the popular commitment to oppose the radical leftist line of the Gang of Four while supporting Zhou's pro-economy line of the Four Modernizations. The Tiananmen Poems manifest the political implications of the mourning activities for Zhou.

A careful examination of the Tiananmen Poems shows that one of the most frequently addressed motifs is to turn the grief into the strength of being Zhou's revolutionary successors.¹¹⁹ When the Chinese people first learnt the news of Zhou's death, they tended to doubt it and then fell into profound sorrow when they realized that it was true. Not long afterwards, they would turn their grief into the strength of inheriting the late premier's unfinished will. Many poems describe this psychological process very well. "To resist the endless passionate tears with great difficulty," in the words of one poem, "remembering the Premier's last will in our hearts."¹²⁰ Some would even turn to comfort the soul of Zhou by displaying their determination to inherit his revolutionary vocation as one poem stresses: "May the Premier feel relieved, the revolutionary banner will be received by your successors."¹²¹ One poem makes this popular enthusiasm much more clearly by claiming: "Alas! We are the successors of Communism, and we will follow your footprints to march forward! March forward forever."¹²²

The longing for "inheriting the Premier's last will to carry on the revolution (*jie geming ban* 接革命班)" was so enthusiastic that the authors of the Tiananmen Poems stressed that the succession is absolutely beyond

¹¹⁹ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 16, 17, 24, 26, 33, 34, 47, 70, 72-75, 77, 79, 98-99, 105, 111, 121, 123, 148, 182-183, 193, 196, 204, 223, 230, 231, 239-240, 266, 271, 282, 304.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 204.

question.¹²³ For example, written in the language of national salvation, one poem suggests, “While the Premier sacrificed himself for China, we will succeed to the position of his successor for the eternal survival of the nation.”¹²⁴ While some poems display the mourners’ firm stand to succeed Zhou’s revolutionary vocation, others convey the optimistic prospect for the succession. “It is natural that the person who loves the people will be loved by the people,” as one poem indicates, “how would the revolution have no successors?”¹²⁵ In spite of the difficulties at the time, the mourners were resolute to inherit Zhou’s ambition to carry on the Chinese revolution. In the words of one poem, “Even if the long journey is challenging, it is natural that the revolution will have successors.”¹²⁶

Moreover, many authors used certain symbols such as red flag and Long March to characterize the process of the revolutionary succession. For example, in order to appease Zhou’s spirit, one of them metaphorically states, “the ‘red flag’ will be naturally received by your successors.”¹²⁷ Likewise, in anticipating the aftermath of the succession, one poem says, “It is joyful to have the successors to grasp the flag, striking the drums and launching the Long March again.”¹²⁸ The mourners’ firm determination to “*jie geming ban*” reflected the succession crisis after Zhou’s death in late Maoist era.

While numerous Tiananmen Poems imply the prevalent anxiety about a succession crisis, many of them further elaborate the significance

¹²³ Ibid., 271; also 16, 17, 24, 55, 70, 73, 74, 79, 99, 105, 111, 121, 231, 266, 271, 282.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 24.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 79.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 73.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 17.

of inheriting Zhou's unfinished will. The mourners promised to serve as Zhou's revolutionary successors and showed their determination to oppose the radical leftist line represented by the Gang of Four.¹²⁹ One poem makes the resolution clear: "We come to the base of the Monument to present our poems, inheriting [the premier's] unfinished will to fight against the stubborn criminals."¹³⁰ And, given the difficult situation when the authorities strictly suppressed the popular commemoration, the protesters still showed their courage to uphold the revolutionary banner from Zhou. "Even if we will be beheaded and shed our passionate blood, we will raise the revolutionary flag aloft with our hands."¹³¹ Some of them clearly expressed their steadfastness to protest against the Shanghai clique as one poem indicates: "Receiving the predecessor's gun and pen, we dare to fight with the monsters to the end. Sweeping away the evil pests, we take over the Premier's unfinished will."¹³² Others targeted their criticism directly to Jiang Qing: "Receiving the red flag to inherit the Premier's will, we uphold the torch to burn the White-Bone-Demon."¹³³

Furthermore, some Tiananmen Poems epitomizes the mourners' earnest faith in the utopian vision of Communism. "Making oaths before the Monument," as one poem underscores, "we swear that we will not retreat until the world becomes red."¹³⁴ (TS: 70). While some of them poeticized the people's optimism to carry on the revolution, others represented their devotion to Communism. They not only "believed in the truth of Communism" but also "swore to turn the Premier's revolutionary

¹²⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 123.

¹³¹ Ibid., 33.

¹³² Ibid., 34.

¹³³ Ibid., 150.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 70.

vocation into the Communist enterprise.”¹³⁵ Besides, in order to realize these revolutionary ideals in the long term, the mourners swore to Zhou that they would hand down the revolutionary torch to later generations. One poem vividly depicts this popular ambition: “While the elder generation has not laid down yet, the middle-aged people still embrace the great ambition. While the young people join in [the ranks of revolution] earnestly, the children will catch up. Naturally the revolution will have successors when the red flag is to be transmitted from generation to generation.”¹³⁶

Envisioning a Prospective Vision of China: The Four Modernizations

More importantly, in addition to reflecting the succession anxiety after Zhou’s death, the Tiananmen Poems reveal the dissident protesters’ prospective vision of China based on the ideal of the Four Modernizations. In January 1975, in considering that the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution had destroyed the nation, Zhou Enlai called for China to shift its trajectory to the modernization of agriculture, industry, national defense and science and technology at the First Session of the Fourth National People’s Congress. Under this Four Modernizations policy, China was to turn into a powerful modernized country “with a high degree of socialist industrialization” by two steps: establishing an independent and improved industrial and economic system by 1990 and being “in the first ranks of the world” by the end of the twentieth century.¹³⁷ Implemented by

¹³⁵ Ibid., 17, 34.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 126.

¹³⁷ Gao, Zhou Enlai, 275; *Garside, Coming Alive*, 54; Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, 395.

the First Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese people saw a bright future brought by Zhou's grand plan. However, following Zhou's death and Deng's purge in the spring of 1976, the Gang of Four strangled the prospect of the Four Modernizations. Against such a desperate situation, the popular protesters showed their firm support to the Four Modernizations because they considered it as the only way to save China. This was manifested in the Tiananmen Poems.

First, the Tiananmen Poems represent the popular anxiety of national crisis after Zhou's death while exposing the prevalent support to the Four Modernizations. On the one hand, the mourners related Zhou's death to the crisis of the nation and the Party. As one memorial essay articulates, "the Premier's death has largely to do with the rise and fall of our motherland, the prospect of our Party, and the destiny of our nation."¹³⁸ On the other hand, they displayed the popular anxiety over the political distress caused by the Gang of Four, as one poem addresses in the language of national salvation: "May heaven open its eyes quickly, for the Chinese nation is in disaster. If this continues, our country will perish, and Communism cannot be realized."¹³⁹ Given this atmosphere, they expected the appearance of a national savior as one poem expresses: "While the slaves long for liberation, the people hope for a savior."¹⁴⁰ As a result, this "hope for a savior" was projected into their memory of Zhou when the Tiananmen Poems describe him as the savior who had been "rescuing the Chinese nation from water and fire" and "saving China by socialism."¹⁴¹ Thus, when Mao's aura had faded and Zhou was dead, the only way to rescue

¹³⁸ Liang Xin, "Xinhua [Flowers in the hearts 心花]," in *Bingchen qingming jishi*, 262.

¹³⁹ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 103.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 186-187.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 96, 131, 205, 240.

China from decline was to inherit the “savior’s” unfinished will to “smash the old world and create a new universe.”¹⁴² The unfinished will was Zhou’s project of the Four Modernizations.

Second, some authors weaved the specific features of the Four Modernizations into their memorial poems. For example, one of them implicitly suggested that they would make sacrifice to Zhou on the day the “grand plan” is realized by simply punctuating the date of 2000 without mentioning the Four Modernizations.¹⁴³ As mentioned above, in Zhou’s vision, with the Four Modernizations, China would become a powerful modernized state by the end of the twentieth century. Although the author simply mentioned the date “2000,” the audience can easily grasp his intended meaning. Other poems explicitly indicate the specific procedures of the Four Modernizations. “The Four Modernizations,” as one poem states, “was to be carried out by two steps (liangbu zou daodi 兩步走到底).”¹⁴⁴ The “two steps” is clearly referred to the two milestones set up by Zhou. In showing the optimistic prospect of achieving Zhou’s “grand plan,” one memorial essay clearly specifies the Four Modernizations: “Beloved Premier Zhou, inspired by you immortal spirit, we will definitely build our great PRC into a strong socialist country with modernized industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defense.”¹⁴⁵ The prospect was so optimistic that many people swore to Zhou: “The day the Four Modernizations are realized, we will make sacrifices and pay

¹⁴² Ibid., 16.

¹⁴³ The poem reads: “When the year 2000 comes... we will call your name... respectful premier, please take a look: We have already realized the grand plan that you proposed on behalf of the party center.” Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 194.

¹⁴⁴ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 114; also 177.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 317.

homage to you again.”¹⁴⁶

A careful examination of the Tiananmen Poems allows us to examine how the Chinese people conceptualized Zhou Enlai’s revolutionary career while projecting both the anxiety and prospect for China in the language of national salvation. The Tiananmen Poems expose the popular anxiety of the succession crisis after Zhou’s death and the grassroots hatred to the atrocity of the Cultural Revolution. They epitomize the popular commitment to inherit Zhou’s revolutionary ambition by pursuing the ideal of the Four Modernizations for rescuing the nation. It was in this way that the popular protesters projected a prospective vision for a real New China.

The Changing Meaning of “April Fifth” and Its Political Use by CCP

The aftermath of the April Fifth Movement demonstrated the on-going process in which the popular discourse on “April Fifth” was endorsed by the CCP and turned into official discourse. From the occurrence of the movement through its rehabilitation to Deng Xiaoping’s rise to power, the CCP’s official discourse on “April Fifth” underwent dramatic changes. In this process, along with the power struggles and transitions within the CCP, the destiny of the Tiananmen Poems experienced an extreme alteration from reactionary verse to revolutionary poems. The meaning of “April Fifth” changed radically, too. While the former official discourse was thrown into the dustbin of history with the downfall of the Gang of Four, the popular discourse of “April Fifth”

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 282; also 88.

created at Tiananmen Square was sanctioned as official discourse and appropriated by the CCP to serve its political demands in the post-Mao era.

“April Fifth” as a Counterrevolution and the Purge of Deng Xiaoping

As soon as the Tiananmen Incident was suppressed, the Politburo of the CCP under the control of the radical Maoists defined “April Fifth” as a counterrevolutionary political incident.¹⁴⁷ From the start of the movement, the Gang of Four already estimated the mourning activities at Tiananmen Square to be a reactionary incident. On 30 March, Wang Hongwen suspected that the poems posted around the Monument were to “create public opinion for the counterrevolution.”¹⁴⁸ On April 5, in his speech broadcast at Tiananmen Square before the brutal suppression, Wu De, the First Secretary of the Beijing Party Committee and a member of the Politburo, called attention to the “reactionary” nature of the incident because “some bad individuals are creating disturbances and committing reactionary sabotage in Tiananmen Square.”¹⁴⁹ After the CCP’s Politburo condemned “April Fifth” as a counterrevolutionary incident, *People’s Daily* printed a series of articles to unveil the official discourse on the movement.

On April 8, the first article, “The Counterrevolutionary Political Incident in Tiananmen Square,” was published on the front page of *People’s Daily* (*Renmin ribao*). In addition to determining the reactionary nature

¹⁴⁷ Teiwes and Sun, “The First Tiananmen Incident Revisited,” 231; Garside, *Coming Alive*, 135.

¹⁴⁸ Yan, *Siwu yundong jishi*, 70

¹⁴⁹ *People’s Daily*, April 8, 1976, 1.

of the mourning activities for Zhou Enlai, the article falsely accuses Deng Xiaoping of involving in “April Fifth”. It claims that “a small handful of class enemies” who “used mourning the Premier Zhou as an excuse to create a premeditated, planned and organized counterrevolutionary political incident” to “shift the general direction of criticizing Deng.” The article in general reveals the radical leftists’ intention to use “April Fifth” as an excuse to push Deng off the stage. Next to it is the CCP’s resolution on the dismissal of Deng from his posts in the Party and the State based on Mao’s approval.

After the first article, two more pieces were printed on the front page of *People’s Daily* to amplify Deng Xiaoping’s involvement in “April Fifth.” One of them, “What Does the Incident in Tiananmen Square Tell Us?” published on April 18, pinpoints the connection between Deng’s political line and “April Fifth.” Reciting Mao’s words of criticism to Deng, “the capitalist roader in authority within the Party,” it condemns Deng as the “General Behind-the-Scenes Supporter” of the right-deviationist wind of reversal who stood for the interest of bourgeoisie. It further accuses Deng as the “General Representative (*Zongdaibiao*)” of counterrevolutionaries because the aim of the movement was identified with Deng’s revisionism. It appeared as if the article is not nearly enough to clarify the relationship between “April Fifth” and Deng that another piece was simply published under the title of “Deng Xiaoping and the Counterrevolutionary Incident in Tiananmen Square” on April 28. This article only reiterates the points that had been made in the first two pieces, but in a plainer language. As a counterrevolution, in the article, the “April Fifth” is viewed as the manifestation of Deng’s revisionism that stood for the interest of bourgeoisie. As the “General Manage of the Company of Producing Counterrevolutionary Public Opinion,” Deng had

used the “reactionary literati (fandong wenren)” to instigate reactionary activities by posting “reactionary poems” under the cover of the Four Modernizations to “restore capitalism.”

The three articles constituted the main features of the official discourse on “April Fifth” before the downfall of the Gang of Four. The making of this official discourse can be best understood by locating it in the context of the campaign of criticizing Deng and counter-attacking the right-deviationist wind of reversal since late 1975. In this discourse, whereas the April Fifth Movement is considered as the consequence of Deng’s revisionism, Deng himself was accused as the “General Behind-the Scenes Supporter” of the right-deviationist wind of reversal. Given the atmosphere at that time, it would not be an overstatement to say that the radical Maoists’ discourse on “April Fifth” was intended to topple Deng by wronging him as the “General Representative of the counterrevolutionaries.” This shows the invented nature of official discourse of “April Fifth.”

This invented nature of the CCP’s discourse on “April Fifth” can be evidenced by the Tiananmen Poems. According to Garside, a remarkable feature of the mourning activities for Zhou Enlai was “the absence of any mention of Deng.”¹⁵⁰ Although Garside’s observation is somewhat overstated, he did catch the point. Most of more than fifteen hundred Tiananmen Poems created in the spring of 1976 were written to honor Zhou and criticize the Gang of Four, and only three of them directly refer to Deng. One of the poems shows the people’s sympathy to Deng, who lost his power to dominate the domestic state affairs, while expressing the popular resentment to the official suppression of the mourning activities

¹⁵⁰ Garside, *Coming Alive*, 136.

for Zhou: “Whoever opposes Premier Zhou, we will fight against them to the end. Whoever wants to persecute Deng Xiaoping, they will never succeed.”¹⁵¹ Another projects the mourners’ nostalgia over the period when Deng assumed duty to implement the Four Modernizations policy as Zhou Enlai was fighting his illness in the hospital.¹⁵² In this period, Deng’s reforms not only caused direct threat to the Gang of Four but also resulted in Mao’s distrust of him as mentioned earlier. It was under the circumstances that this poem discloses the prevalent distress to the purge of Deng, a point that is also made in the third piece.¹⁵³ A study of the Tiananmen Poems shows that it is unlikely that Deng was involved in “April Fifth” as the radical Maoists had alleged.

Ironically, it was only after the purge of Deng in the wake of “April Fifth” that more and more poems were posted at Tiananmen Square to express the popular anguish over his fall on the first two anniversaries of Zhou’s death and the movement. Those poems written to show the popular support for Deng can be seen in the unofficial collections of the Tiananmen Poems.¹⁵⁴ On the first anniversary, more than twenty poems were posted to call for the rehabilitation of “April Fifth” while revealing the popular expectation to see Deng reassume his offices. On the second anniversary, interestingly, the poems written for Deng suddenly dropped to only three. This was probably because Deng had returned to his posts in the Party and the State after the Third Plenum of the Tenth Central Committee in July 1977, and the public found no need to uphold justice

¹⁵¹ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shichao*, 151.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 257-258.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 363-364.

¹⁵⁴ Tong, ed., *Tiananmen shiwenji*, vol. 2, 295, 296, 298, 299, 300, 303, 304, 305, 310, 315, 324, 335, 339, 346, 347, 347-350, 361, 375, 376.

for him.¹⁵⁵ While the connection between Deng’s rise to power and those poems produced on the first two anniversaries of Zhou’s death and the movement needs further investigation, for the purpose of this article, it will suffice to point out that they can be viewed as the poetic manifestation of the political use of “April Fifth” from below.

April Fifth as a Revolutionary Action and the Rise of Deng Xiaoping

Although it is difficult to prove Deng Xiaoping’s involvement in “April Fifth,” the Chinese politics in the early days of post-Mao China shows that both of them shared a common destiny. After the fall of the Gang of Four, the public began to demand the verdict on “April Fifth” to be reversed in the memorial poems posted at Tiananmen Square. Following the rehabilitation of Deng came the reversal of the verdict. Thus, in less than three years, the CCP’s official discourse on the significance of “April Fifth” underwent a dramatic change. The movement determined by the radical leftists as a “counterrevolutionary political incident” was to be redefined by the CCP as a “revolutionary action” in November 1978. This process witnessed the power struggles and transitions within the CCP in the post-Mao era through which the meaning of “April Fifth” was “reshaped.”

The official discourse on Deng’s involvement in “April Fifth” began to dissolve at the Work Conference of the CCP Central Committee in March 1977. In an attempt to restore Deng’s power, on 13 March, Chen Yun fired the first shot at the Conference by claiming that “comrade Deng Xiaoping had nothing to do with the Tiananmen Incident” and

¹⁵⁵ Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, 433; Garside, *Coming Alive*, 182.

that, “for the need of the Chinese revolution,” it was “completely right and completely necessary” for Deng to reenter the leadership of the Party.¹⁵⁶ Chen’s opinions were echoed by many of his comrades. Given the considerable voice of supporting Deng, on the next day, Hua Guofeng was forced to announce that Deng had never ever been involved in “April Fifth” and that the Party was to “let Deng return to office in an appropriate time.”¹⁵⁷ On July 17, Deng was authorized to reassume his posts at the Third Plenum of the Tenth Central Committee.

It seemed bizarre to see Deng return to his offices without an official reversal on “April Fifth.” As mentioned above, on the first two anniversaries of Zhou Enlai’s death, the protesters posted poems and posters in public in an effort to fight for a formal rehabilitation of the movement.¹⁵⁸ More amazingly, from September to November 1976, a series of articles on “April Fifth” and selected Tiananmen Poems were published in official newspapers, such as *People’s Daily*, *PLA Daily*, *China Youth Daily*, and *Beijing Daily*. The Tiananmen Poems were redefined as “revolutionary poems” and “April Fifth “a great revolutionary movement.” Meanwhile, In a Land of Silence, a stage play produced to represent the movement, was performed in Shanghai and Beijing and received popular attention from the public (Tong, 1079a: 258-60; Li, 2001: 144).¹⁵⁹ By

¹⁵⁶ Zhang Jincui 張金才, “Lun ‘Zai paihui zhong qianjin’ de liangnian: Cong fensui ‘Si Ren Bang’ dao shiyi jie sanzong quanhui [The Two Years of Marching Forward in Lingering—From the Crash of the Gang of Four to the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP 「徘徊中前進」的兩年—從粉碎「四人幫」到十一屆三中全會],” *Dangdai zhongguoshi yanjiu* [Contemporary China History Studies 當代中國史研究] 14:4 (2007), 77-78.

¹⁵⁷ Zhang, “Lun ‘Zai paihui zhong qianjin’ de liangnian,” 78.

¹⁵⁸ Tong, *Weida de siwu yundong*, 255-258; Chen, “Lishi da shiye zhong de siwu yundong,” 102-111.

¹⁵⁹ Tong, *Weida de siwu yundong*, 258-260; Chen, “Lishi da shiye zhong de siwu yundong,” 111-112; Li, “Huiyi yu sikao: *Tiananmen shichao* chuban qianhou,”

the time that the verdict on “April Fifth” was reversed, the “reactionary” Tiananmen Poems already occupied the official media.

The trend of reversal continued to blow into the circle of elite politics of the PRC since the rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping. On 8 June 1978, Yu Huanchun, a reporter from People’s Daily, openly asked that the verdict on “April Fifth” be reversed at the Chinese People’s Political Consultation Conference by arguing that “the April Fifth Movement is comparable with the May Fourth Movement in modern Chinese history.” His suggestion was supported by many delegates.¹⁶⁰ At the Work Conference in November 1978, a number of veteran party cadres, such as Chen Yun, Tan Zhenlin and Hu Yaobang, also asked that the movement be rehabilitated.¹⁶¹ Many party cadres likewise compared “April Fifth” to “May Fourth” in an attempt to redefine the movement as a revolutionary one.¹⁶² The popular discourse on “April Fifth” thus occupied the CCP’s Party Central.

The day for the reversal of “April Fifth” came soon. On 14 November 1978, the CCP’s Beijing Party Committee announced that the Incident

144.

¹⁶⁰ Wang Donglin 汪東林, “Zhengxie weiyuan huyi wei Tiananmen shijian pingfan [Delegates of the CPPCC called for the rehabilitation of the Tiananmen Incident 政協委員呼籲為天安門事件平反],” *Dangshi bolan* [General Review of the Communist Party of China 黨史博覽] 8 (1998), 6.

¹⁶¹ Zhang, “Lun ‘Zai paihui zhong qianjin’ de liangnian,” 78; Yu Guangyuan 余光遠, “Yijiu qiba nian Beijing shiwei wei Tiananmen shijian pingfan zhenxiang [The Truth of the Beijing Party Committee’s Rehabilitation of the Tiananmen Incident in 1978],” *Bainianchao* [Hundred-year tide 百年潮] 3 (1998), 36.

¹⁶² Chen, “Lishi da shiye zhong de siwu yundong,” in *Siwu yundong*, 121; Likewise, at the meeting of Eastern China Division, Lu Zhengcao asserted that “If there was the May Fourth Movement in the period of democratic revolution, then the Tiananmen Incident is the April Fifth Movement in the period of socialist revolution.” Chen, “Lishi da shiye zhong de siwu yundong,” in *Siwu yundong*, 121-122.

was “completely a revolutionary action.” The reversal was publicized in the official newspapers like *Beijing Daily* and *People’s Daily*. On 18 November, to reveal his reversed attitude, Hua Guofeng inscribed the book title for the official collection of the Tiananmen Poems.¹⁶³ At the Work Conference of the Party Central Committee on 25 November, then, Hua formally endorsed the reversal.¹⁶⁴ The process of the reversal displays how the popular discourse on “April Fifth” had counterattacked step by step from Tiananmen Square and the streets to the official media and finally to the Party Central. In other words, the popular discourse on the movement that can be seen in the Tiananmen Poems was endorsed by the CCP and turned into official discourse.

Four Modernizations and Four Cardinal Principles

The CCP’s official resolution on the Tiananmen Incident was adopted at the Third Plenum. According to the “Communiqué” of the meeting, the CCP redefined the incident as “a great revolutionary mass movement” which “paved the mass bases” for the Party’s “success in smashing the Gang of Four.”¹⁶⁵ The resolution not only marks the official rehabilitation of the movement but also represents the birth of the CCP’s new official

¹⁶³ *People’s Daily*, 19 November 1978, 1; Li Zhi 黎之, “Huiyi yu sikao: *Tiananmen shichao* chuban qianhou [Recollection and reflection: Before and after the publication of Transcriptions of the Poems from Tiananmen 回憶與思考：天安門詩鈔出版前後],” *Xinwenxue shiliao* [New Literature Material Sources 新文學史料] 1 (2001), 144.

¹⁶⁴ Tong, *Weida de siwu yundong*, pp. 260-261; Yan, *Siwu yundong jishi*, 229; Zhang, “Lun ‘Zai paihui zhong qianjin’ de liangnian,” 78; Yu, “Yijiu qiba nian Beijing shiwei wei Tiananmen shijian pingfan zhenxiang,” 37-38.

¹⁶⁵ *People’s Daily*, December 24, 1978, 1; “Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of The Communist Party of China” *Peking Review* 52 (1978), 13-14.

discourse on “April Fifth.” In this popular-turned-official discourse, “April Fifth” is conceptualized as a revolutionary movement that paved the way for the downfall of the Gang of Four.

The same language can be seen in the official news media even before the Third Plenum. On 22 November 1978, *People’s Daily* reprinted an article, “The Great April Fifth Movement.” It claims that, like “May Fourth” which constituted “the beginning of the people’s democratic revolution,” “April Fifth” was “a great revolutionary movement” that “paved the way for the demise of the Gang of Four and its fascist and feudal dictatorship.” It even goes so far as to argue that “April Fifth” was “a movement of intellectual liberation under the banner of Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought” which led to the idea that “Practice as the sole criterion for testing the truth” and laid the “intellectual basis to accelerate the realization of the Four Modernizations.”¹⁶⁶ The article embodies the essentials of the CCP’s new official discourse on “April Fifth.”

“The Great April Fifth Movement” illustrates the political use of “April Fifth” in the early days of the post-Mao era. It can be considered as the result of the power struggle between the “Whatever” and “Practice” factions inside the CCP before the Third Plenum.¹⁶⁷ The article was first

¹⁶⁶ *People’s Daily*, 21 November 1978, 1.

¹⁶⁷ The “Whatever” faction was led by Hua Guofeng who strongly upheld the principle of “Two Whatevers”: “We resolutely support whatever policy decisions were made by Chairman Mao and unswervingly follow whatever instruction were given by Chairman Mao.” See *People’s Daily*, February 7, 1977, 1. This Maoist loyalists’ principle was firmly opposed by the “Practice” faction headed by Deng Xiaoping that put forward the idea of “Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth.” Whereas the “Whatever” faction was inclined to stubbornly stick with and passionately worshiped the political line of class struggle as Mao’s legacy, the “Practice” faction was determined to shift the focus to practically develop national economy based on the program of Four Modernizations. MacFarquhar, et al., *The Politics of China*, 292-294, 297;

published in *China Youth Daily*, the mouthpiece of the Communist Youth League controlled by one of the members of the “Practice” faction, Hu Yaobang. It was written to utilize “April Fifth” to legitimize Deng’s political line when it goes to suggest that “April Fifth” was “a movement of intellectual liberation” leading to the suggestion of “Practice is the sole criterion for testing the truth” and the “intellectual basis” for the realization of the Four Modernizations. This political use of “April Fifth” was manifested in another front-page editorial of *People’s Daily* on the day before the closing of the Third Plenum (21 December), “Long Live the People: On the Revolutionary Mass Movement in Tiananmen Square.” It claims that “April Fifth” not only “anticipated the downfall of the Gang of Four” but also “denoted that the socialist revolution has entered into a new stage of development” in which “the realization of Four Modernizations is the central task.”¹⁶⁸ The article prefigured the coming of Deng’s reform. If Deng had not benefited from “April Fifth,” he had gained benefit from the political use of it.

Serving the cause of the Four Modernizations continued to be the most prominent feature of the political use of “April Fifth” in the early period of the post-Mao era, but it was not the only one. The keyword of “April Fifth” was used to justify Deng Xiaoping’s doctrine of the Four Cardinal Principles. On 5 April 1979, *People’s Daily* published a front-page article under the title of “Developing the Revolutionary Spirit of Tiananmen” to associate “April Fifth” with Deng’s “Four Cardinal Principles.” A comparison with “Upholding the Four Cardinal Principles,” which was proposed by Deng on 30 March 1979, reveals that the article

Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, 433-434.

¹⁶⁸ *People’s Daily*, December 21, 1978, 1.

precisely reproduced Deng’s discourse on the Four Cardinal Principles.¹⁶⁹ Besides reiterating the importance of the Four Modernizations, the article goes so far as to argue: “Today to inherit and develop the revolutionary spirit of the April Fifth Movement is to uphold the socialist path, uphold the people’s democratic dictatorship, uphold the leadership of the CCP, and uphold the Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought.” In other words, the spirit of “April Fifth” is to uphold the “Four Cardinal Principles.” More interestingly, in order to justify the association, it even claims that “April Fifth” could become so influential a movement only because it was “under the leadership of the Party.”¹⁷⁰ In this new official discourse, “April Fifth,” previously defined by the “Party” as a reactionary event, was turned into a great revolutionary movement “under the leadership of the Party.” As exaggerated as it may be, it illustrates how CCP had used “April Fifth” to serve its political demands at the present by redefining the significance of the keyword. This clearly illustrates the constructed nature of any official discourse on the past at the present.

The official manipulation of “April Fifth” to justify the Four Modernizations and the Four Cardinal Principles was employed again at the fifth anniversary of the event. On 5 April 1981, *People’s Daily* reprinted the editorial of *China Youth Daily* of the previous day on its front page. The editorial, entitled “Unite and Develop the Chinese Nation: Commemoration and Vision at the Fifth Anniversary of the April Fifth Movement,” calls attention to the importance of the stability and unity of China in the realization of the Four Modernizations, and the key to meet

¹⁶⁹ Deng Xiaoping, “Uphold the Four Cardinal Principles,” in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1982* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1984), 166-191.

¹⁷⁰ *People’s Daily*, April 5, 1979, 1.

this goal is to develop the “spirit of April Fifth.”¹⁷¹ It argues that what constitutes “April Fifth” as an influential revolutionary movement was because it inherited the glorious tradition of “May Fourth”—“the spirit of patriotism.” “To develop the spirit of patriotism,” the article further claims, “is the first priority we need to do when we commemorate the April Fifth Movement today.” Moreover, in line with the new official discourse, it emphasizes that the tradition of “April Fifth” is to uphold the Four Cardinal Principles. Finally, in reiterating the necessity of stability and unity, the article ends with an unusual statement on the distinction between the “spirit” of April Fifth and its “way of struggle”:

Therefore, on the one hand, [we] need to inherit and develop the revolutionary spirit of the April Fifth Movement, and, on the other, we need to understand that the present situation is totally different and our tasks and the way to achieve them are totally different. The way of struggle of the April Fifth Movement was a product of a very special circumstance in our socialist society. Given that the Gang of Four seriously destroyed the socialist democracy, the people could not but have to use that way of struggle to express their opinions and expectations. Now we have the correct leadership of the Party Central... . If the people want to propose any opinions, suggestions and questions, they can do that by various and proper channels.

In other words, the CCP did need (to use) the “spirit” of April Fifth, but it did not want another “April Fifth.” What really matters to the CCP then was to make sure of China’s stability and unity for achieving the Four

¹⁷¹ *People’s Daily*, April 5, 1981, 1.

Modernizations under the guidance of the Four Cardinal Principles.

The official discourse was further written into the CCP’s official document, “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the PRC.”¹⁷² Reviewing party lines to legitimize the new leadership of the Party Central has been a prominent feature of the CCP’s political culture as demonstrated by the case of Mao’s “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party (1945).” In accordance with this political tradition, “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the PRC,” adopted at the Sixth Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee on 29 June 1981, was released to validate Deng Xiaoping’s leadership. In the document, “April Fifth” was characterized as “a powerful movement” that “laid the ground for massive popular support for the subsequent overthrow of the counterrevolutionary Jiang Qing clique.” More importantly, it argues that the “essence” of the movement was “a demonstration of the support for the Party’s correct leadership as represented by Comrade Deng Xiaoping.”¹⁷³ This is interesting because, in order to justify the mass basis of Deng’s leadership, it actually repeats the old official discourse invented by the Gang of Four in which Deng was accused as being the behind-the-scenes supporter of the movement. The only difference is that the Gang of Four would determine Deng’s line as revisionism rather than a “correct leadership.”

Another point deserving our attention is that the “Resolution” never uses terms like “revolution” or “revolutionary” to define “April Fifth.”

¹⁷² Central Committee of the CCP, *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the PRC* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981).

¹⁷³ CCP, *Resolution on Certain Questions*, 40.

As amazing as it may be, this implicit underestimation somewhat echoed the CCP's official discourse on the movement after the Democracy Wall Movement that emphasized the link between "stability and unity" and the "spirit," and only spirit, of "April Fifth." The "Resolution" reveals the CCP's paradoxical use of the movement. On the one hand, the historical "April Fifth" had led to the fall of the Gang of Four while providing the legitimacy of Deng's "correct leadership." On the other hand, while the "spirit" of April Fifth is central to the "stability and unity" for the Four Modernizations, the CCP hesitated to see another "April Fifth" threaten its leadership in the era of Deng.

Official-Forced Oblivion and Unaccountability

The popular and official use of "April Fifth" unexpectedly witnessed a sudden decrease, if not demise, after Deng's rise to power. While an exploration of this phenomenon deserves a separate study, for the purpose of this article, it will suffice to suggest certain clues that are evident in the official discourse on the movement after the Third Plenum.

According to a comprehensive survey of *People's Daily* from 1982 to the present, no editorial or review article has been printed to memorialize "April Fifth", not to mention any news about the official-sponsored memorial ceremonies to be held. In retrospect, the last two official memorial essays on the movement already anticipated this result. One of them was the *People's Daily's* front-page article, "Developing the Revolutionary Spirit of Tiananmen," that was published on the third anniversary of the movement. As discussed above, the article goes extremely far to emphasize the importance of upholding the Four Cardinal Principles by developing the "spirit of April Fifth." More importantly,

its conclusion implies the dissidents of the Democracy Wall Movement as “a tiny minority of the people” who used “the banner of inheriting the spirit of the April Fifth Movement to propagate disbelief in Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought, the leadership of the CCP, the proletarian dictatorship, and socialism.” Therefore, considering the relationship between the movement and Democracy Wall Movement and Deng’s role in the two events, commemorating April Fifth probably represented a liability for Deng’s leadership. Thus, this implicit admonition of the Democracy Wall Movement anticipated the official indifference to “April Fifth” afterwards.

The last official memorial essay on the movement is *People’s Daily’s* reprint of *China Youth Daily’s* editorial, “Unite and Develop the Chinese Nation,” on the fifth anniversary of the movement. As discussed above, in its conclusion, the essay differentiates “the spirit of the April Fifth Movement” and “the way of struggle of the April Fifth Movement.” While the spirit of the movement was significant in realizing the Four Modernizations, the way of struggle of the movement was no longer encouraged in the new historical stage. For stability and unity of China, the CCP did not welcome another April Fifth Movement.

The tendency to underestimate the significance of the movement is reflected in the “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the PRC.” Other than legitimizing Deng’s leadership and political line by claiming that April Fifth constituted the mass basis of new Party rule after the Third Plenum, the resolution never uses such terms as “revolution” or “revolutionary” to describe the movement, which is different from the language appeared on the official news media before the Third Plenum. Given that the abrupt decrease of the official commemoration of “April Fifth” occurred precisely after the

release of the “Resolution,” it is safe to suggest that the political use of the movement was no longer necessary since the new leadership was consolidated. More importantly, the tendency of underestimation of “April Fifth” demonstrated the official effort to bury both the spirit and memory of the movement.

This official silence on “April Fifth” was reflected in the participants’ anxiety about the forced oblivion of the event. The official erasure of the movement has been an unacceptable injustice in the minds of participants, especially for those people who had been named by the official authorities as the “April Fifth Heroes.” In recalling the movement on its thirtieth anniversary, Cao Zhijie, who posted the first lament on the relief of the May Fourth Movement of the Monument, once mentioned his experience of being forced to keep silent about the movement. In 1986, he was invited to attend an informal commemoration ceremony on the tenth anniversary of the movement, but he was ordered not to mention any terms like “April Fifth Movement” and “Tiananmen Incident,” and his speech notes had to be censored by party cadre. Moreover, while some foreign journalists intended to interview Cao, only the one from Hong Kong was allowed to do so the next day, and the report was never printed in the newspaper.¹⁷⁴ Thus, Cao was forced to remain silent on what he had experienced in the spring of 1976. In considering this official-forced unaccountability of “April Fifth”, another participant complained: “The April Fifth Movement was an epoch-marking turning point after the May Fourth Movement. But, for many years, its history was castrated and marginalized. Some people called this ‘freezing dead pig (dong sizhu),’ that is, putting it in the refrigerator, taking no

¹⁷⁴ Cao, “Wo weishemo zouxiang Tiananmen guangchang,” in *Siwu yundong*, 257.

notice of it, and pretending there is no such a thing.” In conclusion, he called attention to “rescuing this history [of April Fifth].”¹⁷⁵ He was trying to say that we should save the past of April Fifth from oblivion. Those April Fifth veterans were to find opportunities to rescue that memory during and after the June Fourth Movement in 1989 by using “April Fifth” as a keyword in the protest literature along with the college protestors.

Conclusion

The rise and fall of both the popular and official discourses on “April Fifth” before and after the rehabilitation of the movement illustrate the politics of memory making of the past. It also shows the on-going process in which the meanings of “April Fifth” underwent radical “reshaping.” The making of the popular discourse on the movement was an outcome of war over memory under the circumstances of the succession crisis at the end of the Maoist era. Given the official suppression of the public commemoration for a late popular leader, the mourners turned Tiananmen Square into a battleground to memorialize Zhou Enlai’s revolutionary achievements while voicing protest against the Gang of Four by posting poems at the base of the Monument. In this process, they created a short-lived public sphere to penetrate the official block-out of news media to express their memory of Zhou, criticism to the Gang of Four, and an inexplicit disillusionment with Mao in the Tiananmen Poems. As a consequence of this changing meaning of Tiananmen Square, a space of

¹⁷⁵ Sun Qingzhu, “Lishi de zhuanzhe: Jinian Siwu Yundong sanshi zhounian [The turning point of history: Commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the April Fifth Movement],” in *Siwu yundong*, vol. 2, 45.

state discipline was socially produced and transformed into an alternative space by the mourners to make popular memory of “April Fifth” and Zhou Enlai.

The official discourse on the significance of “April Fifth” also experienced radical changes because of the power struggles and transitions within the CCP. From a counter-revolutionary incident to a revolutionary action, the destiny of the movement witnessed the intertwining of the succession politics in Mao’s China with the making of official discourse while demonstrating the constructed nature of the conceptualization or historical understanding of the past at the present. This process shows that the popular discourse of the Tiananmen Poems was ironically turned into an official discourse and used by the CCP to legitimize its political demands of the Four Modernizations and the Four Cardinal Principles in post-Mao China. When Deng’s reform was on its right way, “April Fifth” officially became a forgotten revolutionary tradition, except for its participants. The on-going changing, or “reshaping,” of “April Fifth” shows the power at work in the making of official discourse and the power of discursive making in the collective understanding of the past.

The Tiananmen Poems constitute valuable memory media to examine the spatiality and materiality in the memory making of the keyword “April Fifth.” During the movement, Tiananmen Square not only was turned into an altar for personal worship to Zhou Enlai, which temporarily changed the symbolism and function of the Monument, but also was constructed into a memorial space for the protesters to legitimize their activities and create their collective identity by recalling the place as a sacred site of the communist revolutionary tradition. In this process, Chang’an Avenue was turned into a place to embody the popular memory of Zhou’s death and the movement. In order to legitimize and mobilize popular support

of the grassroots, moreover, Tiananmen Square was converted into a performance stage for the mourners to use “May Fourth” as their “moral resources” in their bodily practices and as a revolutionary “keyword” in their memorial writings which were closely attached to the reliefs of the Monument. Furthermore, the Monument not only comprised the material basis for the mourners to memorialize Zhou while looking at the inscription handwritten by him but also was alternative envisioned as the incarnation of him. The “April Fifth” constituted a keyword, or a manifestation of “political theater,” in twentieth-century China when the mourners usurped the official revolutionary discourse at the space of state discipline, Tiananmen Square, to make their alternative voice of protest by imaging the material objects at that space as something else.

The end of the April Fifth Movement did not mean the end of the memory war over Zhou and the movement. The aftermath of “April Fifth” showed the popular determination to preserve the reminiscences of the movement by preserving the Tiananmen Poems and photographs from the official confiscation so that we have chances to trace the discursive making of “April Fifth.” Revealing the popular enthusiasm to remember Zhou, the mourners preserved the memory to the late premier by erecting an imaginative monument in their hearts that are indestructible from the Gang of Four. Human bodies thus constituted the living monuments to memorialize Zhou and “April Fifth.” A further study will show that an intergenerational memory of the “April Fifth” was sustained and transmitted as a result of the familial bodily practices at Tiananmen Square when the mourners often came to honor Zhou and to read and transcribe the memorial poems and essays with their children and grandsons. This intergenerational memory was manifested in the “political theater” of the June Fourth Movement, to which I will deal with in another article.

The Tiananmen Poems not only render the Chinese communist and Zhou's revolutionary past but also embodied the Chinese people's prospective vision for China. The mourners expressed the prevalent anxiety of the succession crisis at the end of the Maoist era by showing their commitment to serve as the revolutionary successors of Zhou to carry on the Chinese revolution while recollecting Zhou's career with the communist revolutionary tradition. Behind their defiance to the Gang of Four, they projected a new political vision for China's future based on the Four Modernizations as Zhou's legacy in the language of national salvation.

Consequently, as the Tiananmen Poems demonstrate, it was precisely in those ways that an alternative popular discourse of "April Fifth" was created at Tiananmen Square and then used by both grassroots and state power to claim their political demands before and after the end of the Maoist era. But, it would be an overstatement to argue that the popular discourse was completely novel. As novel as their viewpoints may be, the Tiananmen Poems have shown how the popular discourse created during the April Fifth Movement had used the past of the Chinese communist tradition such as "May Fourth" in the language of the Maoist revolutionary discourse. This political drama was to be reenacted in the making of popular discourse and memory during the June Fourth Movement in 1989 when the student leaders intentionally appropriated the official script, or keywords, on the Chinese communist tradition such as "May Fourth" and "April Fifth" as well as traumatic past of the Cultural Revolution at Tiananmen Square:

I never knew that before the Cultural Revolution came May Fourth.

I never knew that after the Cultural Revolution would come April

Fifth.

I never knew that there is today [June Fourth] before tomorrow.

I never knew that there would be a tomorrow when today [June Fourth] is over.¹⁷⁶

As this poem shows, the keywords such as “May Fourth” and “April Fifth” would play important roles in the social mobilization, political practice, and protest literature during the June Fourth Movement in the spring of 1989 and in the shaping of “June Fourth” as a keyword to understand and interpret the political culture and changes in the history of the PRC. The magic numbers of “May Fourth,” “April Fifth,” and “June Fourth” not only signify three prominent watersheds in the history of twentieth-century China but also constitute three “keywords” to examine the changing meaning of Tiananmen Square and socio-political changes in the history of the PRC.

¹⁷⁶ Ji Nan 吉男, “Wo bu zhidao [I Never Knew 我不知道],” *News Herald* [新聞導報] 5 (1989): 4; Han Minzhu, ed., *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 321.

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