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Divergent Paths to Democracy: Radical and Moderate Political Activism during the Democracy Wall Movement, 1978-1981

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Divergent Paths to Democracy:  
Radical and Moderate Political Activism during the Democracy Wall Movement, 1978-1981

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in History

by

Qindian Chen

Thesis Committee:  
Chancellor's Professor Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Chair  
Assistant Professor Emily Baum  
Associate Professor Yang Su

2018



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## **Abstract**

Divergent Paths to Democracy:  
Radical and Moderate Political Activism during the Democracy Wall Movement, 1978-1981

By

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Master of Arts in History

University of California, Irvine, 2018

Professor Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Chair

What was the decisive element for activists' different individual choices during the Democracy Wall Movement? In other words, what were the primary factors for the Democracy Wall activists adopting either a moderate or radical position? This work employs the studies of factionalism of the Red Guard Movement to investigate the divisions among the Democracy Wall activists. Through analyzing the intentions of activists' inner- and inter-organizational divergences, across three different phases, mobilization, divergence, and two parallel movements, this thesis argues that political access to educational and career opportunities was the decisive factor for activists' inter-organizational divergences, which determined whether an activist adopted either a moderate or radical position on a macro-scale. Furthermore, access to higher political status within different organizations was the primary factor for their inner-organizational divergences, which determined whether an activist adopted either a moderate or radical position on a micro-scale.

## Introduction

Late at night on September 29, 1979, around twenty activists, who came from all over Beijing, gathered in a room and intensely discussed whether they should organize a demonstration for October 1, which marked the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China. The origin of this debate was rooted in the conflict between the authorities and a group of artists, who were also activists in the "Democracy Wall Movement", and who tried to hold an unauthorized exhibition called the Star Art Exhibition (星星美展) on the sidewalk on the east side of the National Art Museum of China. However, after two days of exhibition, a group of policemen showed up to confiscate all the displays and forcibly prohibit the exhibition. At this time, the Democracy Wall Movement, which is also known as the "Beijing Spring," had already been going on for almost a year. The movement emerged in a relatively relaxed political environment, while a group of activists publicly expressed their opinions about China's political and social issues through big-character posters, establishing unofficial journals, and forming political organizations. These Star artists, who mainly included writers, poets, painters, and sculptors, also established a literary-oriented unofficial journal called *Today* (今天) to publish their works. Some core members of *Today* were also editors or were affiliated with other major politically-oriented unofficial journals. Therefore, when the Star artists decided to gather a joint meeting with other major Democracy Wall activists to discuss what to do next, the tightly connected personal networks allowed the news to spread rapidly.

Around twenty activists from five major unofficial journals, which were *April Fifth Forum* (四五论坛), *Exploration* (探索), *Beijing Spring* (北京之春), *Fertile Soil* (沃土), and *Today*, participated in the meeting. During the meeting, activists' diverse opinions could be

roughly divided into two camps. On the one hand, some radicals showed a strong willingness to air their grievances and express their political opinions through organizing a demonstration on October 1. The radicals' main motivations were based on inside information about the rifts and political struggles within the Beijing Municipal Committee, which could provide activists an excellent chance to protest for their grievances. On the other hand, moderates were very cautious about this kind of collective activity and did not want to take risks. Through intense debate, the radical opinions were gradually gaining the upper hand, which means the majority of activists agreed to hold a demonstration on October 1. This result dissatisfied some moderates, who believed that radical behaviors would harm the art exhibition and the survival of the Democracy Wall Movement. They thought that, even though the authorities had arrested some of the most radical activists, they had still tacitly tolerated the existence of the majority of the unofficial journals for almost a year. Therefore, radical opinions and behaviors would destroy a unique opportunity to legalize the unofficial journals. Consequently, the members who belonged to the two moderate unofficial journals, *Beijing Spring* and *Fertile Soil*, informed the other activists that they were not going to participate in the demonstration on October 1. The two different decisions about whether to participate in the demonstration were quite influential. Not only did they influence the activists' different destinies later, but also marked the watershed of two divergent paths to China's democratization.

The division of opinions among activists raises an essential question: What was the decisive element for their different individual choices during the Democracy Wall Movement? In other words, what were the primary factors for the Democracy Wall activists adopting either a moderate or radical position? Did personal psychological factors have a decisive influence on their divergent choices? Were activists' divergent paths determined by social structural factors,



like family origins, class interests, social status, personal networks, and so on? Or, were their different personal choices based on diverse life experiences during the Mao era, especially the degree to which they suffered during the Cultural Revolution?

Through investigating the Democracy Wall activists' inner- and inter-organizational divergences, I argue that access to educational and career opportunities was the decisive factor for activists' inter-organizational divergences, which determined whether an activist adopted either a moderate or radical position on a macro-scale. Furthermore, access to higher political status within different organizations was the primary factor for their inner-organizational divergences, which determined whether an activist adopted either a moderate or radical position on a micro-scale. Namely, it was the specific social and political opportunities activists faced both in their respective organizations and within the movement as a whole, rather than social structural factors, personal psychological reasons, or experiences during the Cultural Revolution, that dictated the divergent paths among the Democracy Wall activists.

To demonstrate my argument, it is necessary to first define the terms “moderate,” “radical,” and “divergent paths” in the context of the Democracy Wall Movement. During the movement, the moderates showed fewer grievances about China's socialist political system and tended to use Marxist narratives to express their political opinions. They also lacked willingness to join collective activities, like organizing joint meetings, contacting petitioners, or holding demonstrations. Namely, they were more willing to express their political opinions through governmental channels, like county- and district-level elections of People's Representatives of Beijing University in 1980. In contrast, radicals during the Democracy Wall Movement expressed stronger grievances about China's political system. For instance, there were some radicals who tried to establish their own political organizations to challenge the CCP's one-party

system. Moreover, the radicals usually participated in or organized collective activities more actively. Compared to the moderates, the radicals usually were not satisfied with protesting only through governmental channels or those channels that were tacitly tolerated. For instance, some of the radicals tended to express their voices through foreign journalists, diplomats, and demonstrations.

By using the two terms, “moderate” and “radical,” I am not trying to polarize the Democracy Wall activists. Rather, activists’ different behaviors and choices were more like a spectrum than two groups with clear boundaries. Furthermore, using these two terms does not mean activists’ radical or moderate positions were static. Instead, during the movement, they frequently switched their radical or moderate positions and regularly changed the strategy of protests, and even regrouped to demonstrate their dynamic opinions. Therefore, “radicals” and “moderates” are a relative comparison, rather than an absolute dividing line between activists’ divergent choices. Additionally, using “inner-” and “inter-organization” also does not mean that the Democracy Wall organizations were static entities with impassable barriers. In contrast, like I have mentioned, there were personal connections between different groups. Some activists participated in more than one group and sometimes even regrouped to express their changing opinions.

Moreover, the first time I noticed activists’ “divergent paths” when I had the opportunity to interview Wang Juntao (王军涛), who was one of the core members of the *Beijing Spring* unofficial journal. He asked me, “Have you noticed that only ‘social people’<sup>1</sup> (社会上的人)

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<sup>1</sup> In Chinese, “social people” (社会上的人) usually means that people who do not have a formal job or unemployed. But, right here he means that Democracy Wall activists who were not in universities.

were arrested, not college students?” It shocked me that none of the college student participants, who also usually held relatively moderate opinions during the Democracy Wall Movement, were punished by the Chinese government. Later, they became strong supporters of the CCP’s reforms, and worked for governmental institutions during the 1980s up until they were arrested or exiled after the June Fourth Incident in 1989. Quite the opposite, “social people” participants, who were mainly urban workers and also more radical during the movement, were arrested and then released from prison in the early 1990s. Subsequently, they chose a different path to fight for China’s democratization compared to the moderates or college students, who showed stronger interest in uniting opponents of the CCP, such as Xinjiang and Tibetan exiles, the Taiwanese government, democratic and human rights organizations in the United States, and so on. Some of them also attempted to establish political parties to challenge the CCP’s one party rule in the early 1990s. Even today, after being exiled to the United States for almost three decades, the divergences during the Democracy Wall Movement are still shaping activists’ political opinions about China’s democratization.

Therefore, China’s pro-democratic activists’ divergent paths and varied opinions originated in their different political choices, namely their moderate or radical positions, during the Democracy Wall Movement. To demonstrate my argument, this thesis is divided into three sections: mobilization, divergence, and two parallel movements. In the phase of mobilization, my main questions are: Why did the Democracy Wall Movement appear at this specific time? How did activists organize? And, why did they form diverse organizational identities? In the phase of divergences, through analyzing two waves of splits, I investigate the decisive factors of activists’ different strategies of protest. Then, in the phase of two parallel movements, I illustrate that, after the second split, the moderates only expressed their political opinions through governmental

channels, while the radicals were using strategies that were not tolerated by the authorities, and therefore these activists were arrested.

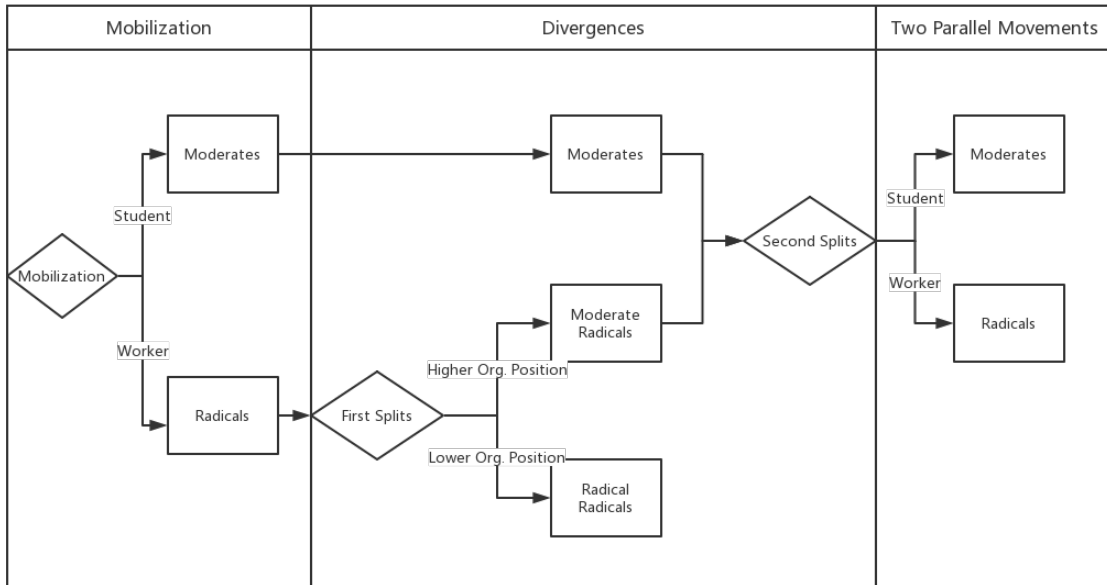


Figure 1: Flow Chart

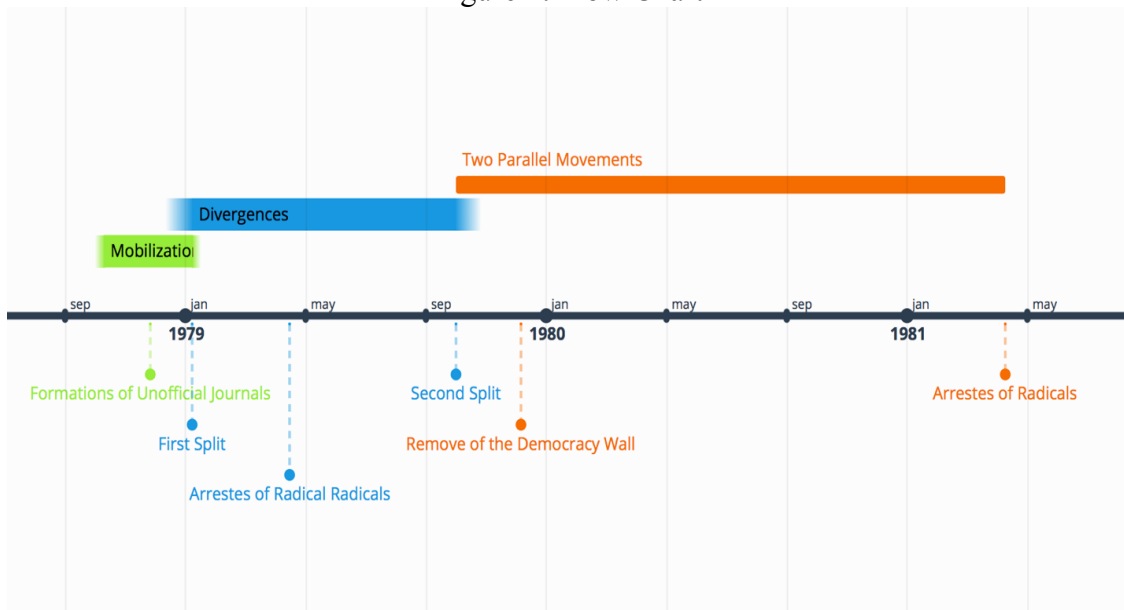


Figure 2: Timeline

## Historiographies

Due mainly to political censorship, Chinese scholarship on the Democracy Wall Movement in Mainland China is very limited. Scholars have rarely mentioned the Democracy Wall Movement in the historiography of the Chinese Communist Party, which has been treated as merely a part of inner party political factional struggles between the Dengist or Reformist groups and the Maoist conservatives and as a social response to the Emancipation of Minds Campaign.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, most Chinese sources on the Democracy Wall Movement were produced overseas by participants in the movement. Many exiles' autobiographies, memoirs and interviews continue to circulate online, and these also are the major primary sources used in this thesis.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Donglian Xiao (萧冬连), *Zhong hua ren min gong he guo shi di shi juan, 1979-1981: li shi de zhuan gui: cong bo luan fan zheng dao gai ge kai fang, 1979-1981* (中华人民共和国史第十卷, 1979-1981: 历史的转轨: 从拨乱反正到改革开放, 1979-1981, The History of the People's Republic of China, Vol. 10: Turning Points in History: Re-examination of the Cultural Revolution and the Policy of Reform and Opening, 1979-1981). Hong Kong: Research Center for Contemporary Chinese Culture, 2008.

Hongling Li (李洪林), *Zhong guo si xiang yun dong shi, 1949-1989* (中国思想运动史: 一九四九——一九八九, The History of Chinese Ideological Movements, 1949-1989). Hong Kong: Cosmos Books LTD, 1999

<sup>3</sup> Hu Ping and Wang Juntao (胡平、王军涛), ed. *Kai tuo: bei da xue yun wen xian* (开拓——北大学运文献, Exploring: Literature of Student Movement in Beijing University). Hong Kong: Tian yuan shu wu, 1990.

Jurgen Kremb (周劲恆), *Wei Jingsheng qian zhuan* (魏京生前传, Biography of Weijing Sheng). Taipei: Jie you chu ban she, 1998.

Wei Jingsheng (魏京生), *Weijing sheng yu zhong shu xin ji* (魏京生狱中书信集, The Courage to Stand Alone: Letters from Prison and Other Writings). Taipei: China Times Publishing Company, 1997.

Xu Wenli (徐文立), *Xu Wenli yu zhong jia shu* (徐文立狱中家书, Xu Wenli's Family Letters from Prison). 民主大學, 1996.

Memoirs from Huang Xiang (黄翔)

Interviews with Hu Ping, Wang Juntao, Xu Wenli, Huang Xiang, and Liu Qing.

“Beijing Spring” – Memories of the Chinese Democracy Movement 1978-1981: <http://pekinger-fruehling.univie.ac.at/index.php?id=183033&L=2>

The earliest foreign scholarship on the Democracy Wall Movement was produced primarily by Western journalists during and immediately after the Democracy Wall Movement. These authors were preoccupied with concepts like “democracy” and “human rights”, without investigating the differences between Western and Democracy Wall social activists’ understandings of these political concepts.<sup>4</sup> Western journalists mainly analyzed selected big-character posters from the perspective of human rights dissent, and then translated and introduced them to the Western world. Within these journalists’ writings, Democracy Wall activists are usually portrayed as romantic heroes, torchbearers of pro-democratic enlightenment who suffered and sacrificed for common interests and political rights. Therefore, one aim of this thesis is to break down the heroic myth of social activists and focus more on their personal demands and intentions, and more importantly, their divergences, during the movements, rather than their idealistic or ideological pursuits.

Aside from Western journalists, who are primarily interested in the personal stories of human rights dissidents, another group of scholars noted the different understandings and interpretations of political concepts like “democracy”. The most representative work is *Chinese Democracy*, by political scientist Andrew Nathan.<sup>5</sup> In his book, Nathan tried to elaborate the conceptual divergences in the notion of “democracy” between Western scholars and China’s Democracy Wall activists through inventing the term “Chinese Democracy”. Subsequently, he tried to trace the origins of “Chinese Democracy” to the thought of Liang Qichao (梁启超), who

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<sup>4</sup> James D. Seymour. *The Fifth Modernization: China’s Human Rights Movement, 1978-1979*. Stanfordville, NY: Human Rights Publishing Group, 1980.

David S.G. Goodman, *Beijing Street Voices: Poetry and Politics of China’s Democracy Movement*. Marion Boyars Publishers, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy: an investigation into the nature and meaning of “democracy” in China today with a report on the remarkable but short-lived Democracy Movement*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1986.

was a Chinese thinker during the late Qing and early Republican periods.<sup>6</sup> Nathan pointed out the conceptual and interpretational differences between Chinese activists and Western scholars. He tried to argue that “Chinese Democracy” has its own origin, developmental trend, and continuities. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the continuities in conceptions of political culture in *Chinese Democracy* failed to explain the formation and transformation of activists’ thoughts in the 1980s. This is mainly because Nathan neglects the influence of the Mao era. The Democracy Wall activists had read very little about Liang Qichao. Their thoughts about “democracy” were predominantly influenced by the writings and the words of Mao Zedong, education in Communist China, political movement practices during the Red Guard Movement, experiences of Sent-Down youth and the April Fifth Movement in 1976, rather than the democratic ideas of the Republican period.

Lauri Paltemaa, in his book *In the Vanguard of History*, has noticed Nathan’s oversight on the Mao era’s influence on Democracy Wall activists.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, he argued that Democracy Wall activists’ interpretations of “democracy” were neither from Western nor late Qing thinkers, but rooted in “new trends of thought” (新思潮), which were mainly a response to China’s bureaucratism (官僚主义), during the late Cultural Revolution.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, he contended that the Democracy Wall activists’ debates on democratic reform “were contributing to Marxism and a way to solve the problem of political superstructure obstructing the realization of socialism,” rather than directly attacking China’s socialist system.<sup>9</sup> Paltemaa also thought that earlier

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Lauri Paltemaa. *In the Vanguard of History: the Beijing Democracy Wall Movement 1978-1981 and Social Mobilization of Former Red Guard Dissent*. Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, page 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

research “had neglected the movement-side of the Democracy Wall Movement and concentrated too much on the issues of the proposed forms of democracy and human rights.”<sup>10</sup> Paltemaa’s main contribution was that he noticed Nathan’s neglect of the Mao era’s influences on the Democracy Wall Movement, and filled the academic gaps between the former Red Guards, sent-down youth, and Democracy Wall activists. However, in my point of view, there is still one major issue in Paltemaa’s narratives: He focused too much on what activists said and wrote, rather than what they did and the intentions they had. This is because Paltemaa’s research mainly depended on the activists’ unofficial journals, especially the 20 volumes of *A Collection of Mainland Chinese Underground Publications* (大陆地下刊物汇编)<sup>11</sup>, but overlooked activists’ intentions for writing and their other activities. Paltemaa had criticized previous scholars’ neglect of “the movement-side of the Democracy Wall Movement.” However, he also fell into ideological debates, rather than emphasizing the “movement-side”. Therefore, this thesis will not only focus on what activists wrote, but also what they did and why. Furthermore, this thesis will also demonstrate that not all activists were trying to contribute to China’s socialist system, which was more popular among the moderates than the radicals. Namely, the themes of this thesis are activists’ intentions and divergences.

Another group of studies relates to the Democracy Wall Movement, is the research on the Red Guard Generation (also known as the Sent-Down Youth Generation, or the Chinese Lost Generation). These works are mainly focused on generational collective experiences and shared memories during the Cultural Revolution, based on the Democracy Wall Movement, the last

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she (中共研究雜誌社), ed. *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* (大陸地下刊物彙編, A Collection of Mainland Chinese Underground Publications), 20 Vols. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she, 1980-1985.



major political event of this generation. For instance, in my opinion, three books are the most representative: Yin Hongbiao's *Footprints of the Missing: Thoughts of the Youth during the Cultural Revolution*, Michel Bonnin's *The Lost Generation: The Rustication of China's Educated Youth, 1968-1980*, and Guobin Yang's *Red Guard Generation and Political Activism in China*. In this group of works, the Democracy Wall Movement usually appears in the last section of the book and is described as a collective generational resistance to the policies of the Cultural Revolution and the Sent-Down Youth Movement. The major question these books raise and try to answer is how Chairman Mao's loyal kids became traitors to Mao Zedong thought and his policies. And, they also wanted to elaborate how this transformation emerged from different perspectives, such as ideology, state policies, and collective experiences.<sup>12</sup>

However, the major issue of this current is that this scholarship tends to treat the Democracy Wall protestors' experiences, thoughts, and behaviors as a generational collective pursuit, barely testing activists' inner divergences and complexities. In other words, I suggest that activists of the Democracy Wall were not a monolithic group. They had very different experiences during previous political campaigns, diverse political opinions, special personal demands and personalities, varying social sources and access to achieve their personal and political goals. More importantly, how did these differences that they brought into the Democracy Wall Movement impact their different choices? And, how did their different choices

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<sup>12</sup> Hongbiao Yin (印紅標), *Shi zong zhe de zu ji: wen hua da ge ming qi jian de qing nian si chao* (失蹤者的足跡: 文化的革命期間的青年思潮, *Footprints of the Missing: Thoughts of the Youth during the Cultural Revolution*). Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2009.  
Michel Bonnin (潘鳴嘯), *Shi luo de yi dai: Zhongguo de shang shan xia xiang yun dong, 1968-1980* (失落的一代: 中國的上山下鄉運動, 1968-1980, *The Lost Generation: The Rustication of China's Educated Youth, 1968-1980*). Hong Kong: Zhongguo da bai ke quan shu chu ban she (中國大百科全書出版社), 2009.  
Guobin Yang, *Red Guard Generation and Political Activism in China*. S.L.: Columbia University Press, 2016.

generate divergent outcomes? In sum, previous generational studies of Red Guards focused too much on Democracy Wall activists' collective thoughts and experiences, rather than their complicated inner divergences and intentions behind their different choices.

Even though very little historical scholarship investigates the divergences among the Democracy Wall activists, there have been fruitful studies on factional struggles during the Red Guard Movement. One of the most important works on the Red Guards' factions was *Fractured Rebellion: The Beijing Red Guard Movement* by Andrew G. Walder.<sup>13</sup> In his book, through investigating the intention and divergences between different Red Guard factions in different universities in Beijing, Walder's main argument could be summed up as:

“... factional identities and the common interests that define them are the product of political interactions rooted in specific contexts whose properties must be researched, not simply assumed. Individual decisions-to join factions, to oppose or support a work team-are not the product of prior socialization or social ties but are actively shaped by political encounters. The focus is on the interactions that generate choices and outcomes, not the prior statuses of individuals or their preexisting social and political ties. These processes determine when prior social statuses or network ties are activated in a conflict, and when they are not.”<sup>14</sup>

Even though, like I mentioned before, there were obvious differences between the Red Guard Movement and the Democracy Wall Movement, the method that Walder used to elaborate the Red Guards' factional conflicts was still worth learning and examining in the context of the Democracy Wall Movement. Therefore, this thesis will adapt Walder's analysis of the Red Guards to the Democracy Wall activists. Consequently, this thesis demonstrates that even though Democracy Wall activists' family origins, social statuses, networks, personal psychological factors, or previous experiences during the Mao era's political movements co-influenced their

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew G. Walder. *Fractured Rebellion: The Beijing Red Guard Movement*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, page 13.

varied choices, it was most importantly the specific political access they had that decisively generated activists' divergent choices during the Democracy Wall Movement.

### **Section One: Mobilization (October 1978 ~ January 1979)**

Why did the Democracy Wall Movement appear at this specific time? How did activists organize? And, why did they form diverse organizational identities? These will be the main questions of this section. To answer these questions, I investigate the phase of mobilization and contend that the emergence of the Democracy Wall Movement was a consequence of two joint forces, which met both bottom-up and top-down political needs. Bottom-up forces reflected the grievances and willingness for political change among activists and ordinary people. Top-down forces demonstrated how CCP reformist elites used the Democracy Wall Movement as a political resource to seize political power from CCP conservatives. In addition, in the early phase, the Democracy Wall Movement's unofficial journals propagated diverse narratives about China's political situation and different political goals. Namely, every unofficial journal and organization had its own identity, rather than a unitary pro-democratic movement. Finally, in the phase of mobilization, differences in social statuses, diverse individual interests, and various experiences during the previous political movements co-impacted the formation of different unofficial journals and their organizational identities. However, it was activists' educational and career status quo that played a primary role in determining their diverse organizational identities. Furthermore, these different identities and varied attitudes about the CCP reformists generated their different choices in the phase of divergences.

*Interactions between the Dengists and Activists*

Why did the Democracy Wall Movement appear in late 1978? Similar to the Mao era political movements, the Democracy Wall Movement was also tightly related to the power struggles within the CCP leadership.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, it was originated in the ideological splits between the CCP conservatives and the Dengist reformists after the death of Mao Zedong.<sup>16</sup> Thus, for seizing power from the conservatives, reformists implemented a series of new policies against conservatives' ruling and Mao's political legacies. On the one hand, these new policies received very strong responses from ordinary people, which provided people an excellent political opportunity to demonstrate their discontent toward the policies of the Cultural Revolution and the CCP conservatives. On the other hand, the reformists showed very welcoming attitudes about activists' protests instead of suppression. Therefore, the emergence of the Democracy Wall Movement was generated by a series of political interactions between the Dengist reformists and activists, from the early 1976 to the late 1978.

On April 5, 1976, during the traditional Qingming Festival, hundreds of thousands of Beijing citizens spontaneously gathered in the Tiananmen Square to mourn the death of former Premier Zhou Enlai and express their discontent about "policies of the 'Cultural Revolutionary' Left."<sup>17</sup> The demonstrations were soon suppressed by Mao Zedong and his political followers, like the "Gang of Four"<sup>18</sup> and Hua Guofeng.<sup>19</sup> This event was later known as the April Fifth

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<sup>15</sup> Lauri Paltemaa. *In the Vanguard of History: the Beijing Democracy Wall Movement 1978-1981 and Social Mobilization of Former Red Guard Dissent*. Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 2005. page 58

<sup>16</sup> Chen, Yan (陈彦), 《“民主墙运动”及其历史地位》. *Modern China Studies*, MCS 2006 Issue 2.

<http://www.modernchinastudies.org/cn/issues/past-issues/92-mcs-2006-issue-2/956-2012-01-05-15-35-10.html>

<sup>17</sup> Sebastian Heilmann, "The Social Context of Mobilization in China: Factions, Work Unites, and Activists during the 1976 April Fifth Movement." *China Information*. Vol. VIII, No. 3 (Winter 1993-1994). page 1.

<sup>18</sup> The "Gang of Four" was a political faction during the Cultural Revolution, which included four CCP officials: Jiang Qing, who was Mao Zedong's last wife, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen.

<sup>19</sup> Li, Honglin. *Zhong guo si xiang yun dong shi, 1949-1989 中国思想运动史, 一九四九-一九八九*. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books LTD, 1999. page 225

Movement (四五运动) in China. The Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, who was also seen as the successor of Zhou,<sup>20</sup> was accused to be a “backstage boss” of the movement and was purged from his position. As a beneficiary of the suppression of the April Fifth Movement, Hua was appointed as the new Prime Minister and the First Vice Chairman of the CCP.<sup>21</sup>

Even though, before the death of Mao on September 9, 1976, Hua was appointed as the highest leader of China, he still felt threatened by the Gang of Four. Therefore, on October 6, 1976, Hua secretly arrested the Gang of Four under the support of a military general Ye Jianying. However, as a young successor, he had very limited political experience and power to resolve the social issues that were left by Mao and the Cultural Revolution. This situation provided Deng, who was one of the most important political competitors of Hua, an excellent opportunity to challenge Hua’s leadership. As Mao’s official successor, who was still continuing the policies of class struggle, namely the “Two Whatevers,”<sup>22</sup> Hua soon became the major target of criticism. Meanwhile, as Hua’s political rival, Deng became a figure of open-minded reformism, who also tried to use people’s grievances about the Cultural Revolution as a political resource to shake Hua’s position. Consequently, under the pressure of general Ye, Hua had to announce Deng to return to the CCP leadership in early 1977, without removing the label of “backstage boss” of the April Fifth Movement. Deng then implemented a series of new policies to gather support.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. page 226

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> The Two Whatevers (两个凡是) refers to a statement in an editorial article of People’s Daily on February 7, 1977, that “We will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave.” This statement was advocated by Hua Guofeng, and later be viewed as doctrine of CCP Conservatives in the late 1970s.

The restoration of the University Entrance Exam, the policy of “Rehabilitation,” and “the Discussion on Criteria of Truth,”<sup>23</sup> when pitted against the “Two Whatevers,” made Deng Xiaoping appear as an open-minded figure who was welcomed both within the party and by the public. Especially, the policy of rehabilitation received strong responses from ordinary people, since so many people had been victims under Mao era policies. Under these circumstances, people started to write letters to petition their erroneous and unjust cases nationally. However, because rehabilitation was a top-down policy that was mainly first applied to CCP officials’ and intellectuals’ cases, ordinary people were discontent. Many of them even went to Beijing to appeal their cases if they were not responded to by the local government. For instance, a big-character poster titled “My Big-Character Poster: to Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping,” by Zhang Xifeng (张希峰), wrote that “you two have corrected ‘unjust, spurious and erroneous cases’ for almost two years, which made your names widely known not only in China but also in foreign countries. However, what is the real situation?” He continued, “capitalists’ properties have been returned. Officials’ injustice cases have been corrected... But what about real ordinary people? How many of their cases have been corrected? On the contrary, new misjudged cases are being made!”<sup>24</sup> This big-character poster also described the situation of the national wide petitioning activities, which showed that the petitioning activities were not only because of people’s grievances during the Cultural Revolution but were also caused by the top-down tardy

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<sup>23</sup> The Discussion on the Criteria of Truth (真理标准问题大讨论) was an inner Party debating in 1977. The reformists published a series of articles to against the theory of the Two Whatevers, who argued that “pragmatism is the only standard in measuring truth (实践是检验真理的唯一标准).”

<sup>24</sup> Zifeng Zhang (张希峰). “My Big-Character Poster: to Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping,” (我的一张大字报：写给华国锋、邓小平). This big character poster is from a personal collection, which was also published in the *Literary Collections during the Beijing Spring* (北京之春诗文选) and the unofficial journal *Exploration*.

progress of implementing the policy of rehabilitation. More importantly, except for few radical big-character posters, like Zhang's article, criticized both Deng and Hua, the majority of petitioners believed that Dengist reformists were executants of the policy of rehabilitation, while Hua conservatives were the main causes of slow progress.

Before October 1978, the majority of posters were written by peasants with individual grievances. They shared some common sufferings, like not being able to find a job or move their household registration back to the cities, poor standards of living, limited living space, or other individual grievances. But, these individual big-character posters were quickly marginalized, since personal cases were usually very similar to each other, and audiences quickly lost interest. Therefore, politically-oriented posters began to show up in October, which were usually more popular, especially radical posters that directly criticized the government or political leaders. The key event that led the politically-oriented big-character posters to dominate the movement was the reversal of the April Fifth Movement verdict. On November 21, 1978, the *People's Daily* published an article titled "The Truth of the Tiananmen Incident" ("天安门事件真相"), which declared that the April Fifth Movement was not a "counter-revolutionary event," but "people's revolutionary actions."<sup>25</sup> Many "counter-revolutionary" prisoners of the April Fifth Movement were released by the authorities and suddenly became national heroes, who dare to against the "revisionist policies" of the Gang of Four.<sup>26</sup> More importantly, the reversal of the April Fifth Movement verdict marked that Deng, the "backstage boss," was finally officially "rehabilitated." This reversal verdict not only left Hua in a very awkward position, but also as a signal to ordinary people that public discussions about China's political issues were now safe. Therefore,

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<sup>25</sup> *People's Daily*. "The Truth of the Tiananmen Incident". November 21, 1978.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*.

after the reversal verdict was made public, many activists gathered and posted their big-character posters in approval of this decision.

There were many places for people to post their petitioning letters, big-character posters, to exchange the information about the progress of the rehabilitation, and to discuss China's political issues in Beijing. The biggest gathering place was the Xidan Wall (西单墙), which was a 200 meter long brick wall in the crossroads of Chang'an Street and Xidan Street, and was later known as the Democracy Wall (民主墙). On November 25, 1978, four days after the rehabilitation of the April Fifth Movement, thousands of people gathered in front of the Xidan Wall and organized a "Democratic Forum" to criticize the Gang of Four, support the "spirit of the April Fifth Movement," and demand for "democracy" and "political rights."<sup>27</sup>

The Democratic Forum was also recorded by many foreign journalists and politicians, who played a very important role in connecting Deng Xiaoping and protestors in the early phase of the movement. For example, on November 26, 1978, Deng directly expressed his support for the Democracy Wall activities during a conversation with Sasaki, who was a visiting Japanese politician in Beijing. "Wall posters are guaranteed by the Constitution," Deng said to Sasaki. "We have no intention of suppressing them or denying the right of the masses to express their views by pasting up wall posters. It has been necessary for some time for us to be urged along by them."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the conversation between Deng and Sasaki made many foreign journalists believe that Deng "might be the force behind the latest poster campaign."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 9 vols. "十一、二五" 民主讨论会见闻纪实. *April Fifth Forum*, issue 14. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. page 22-26.

<sup>28</sup> "Teng is Said to Ask Reversal of Ruling Purging Him in 76: Tells Japanese Visitor That Action Taken by the Politburo After Peking Riot Was Wrong." *New York Times* 27 Nov. 1978

<sup>29</sup> Ibid



On the same day, an American journalist, Robert Novak, visited the Democracy Forum in front of the Democracy Wall. He told people that he was going to have an interview with Deng the next day and promised the crowd that he would return the following day, after the interview. He also asked protestors what questions they wanted him to ask Deng Xiaoping.<sup>30</sup> During the interview, when Novak asked about Deng's attitude toward the Democracy Wall, Deng replied that "the people like to have the right to speak."<sup>31</sup> On November 27, 1978, "a large group of people had gathered there to wait for Robert Novak," however, "Novak did not return to the wall posters, but sent word through another journalist that Mr. Deng had told him the posters were 'a good thing.' This brought a cheer from the crowd, with people perched in trees, sitting on walls and singing the national anthem and 'The International'."<sup>32</sup>

Deng's open-minded speeches about activists were not odd at all, since the Third Plenary Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP was scheduled to be held on December 22, 1978, and Deng had decided to completely seize power from Hua. Therefore, from a series of interactions between the Deng reformists and the Democracy Wall activists, it showed that the emergence of the Democracy Wall Movement met both bottom-up and top-down political needs. On the one hand, the reformist elites, especially Deng, used the people's grievances as a political resource to criticize and seize political power from the Hua conservatives. On the other hand, ordinary people and activists used this political opportunity to express their willingness for

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<sup>30</sup> Fox Butterfield. "Teng Denies He Differs with Hua; Peking Crowd Chants 'Democracy'." *New York Times* 28 Nov. 1977

*Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 9 vols. "十一、二五" 民主讨论会见闻纪实. *April Fifth Forum*, issue 14. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. page 22-26.

<sup>31</sup> Fox Butterfield. "Teng Denies He Differs with Hua; Peking Crowd Chants 'Democracy'." *New York Times* 28 Nov. 1978

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

political change and discontent. This is also why the Democracy Wall Movement emerged in late 1978.

### *Different Organizational Identities*

Deng's open-minded responses to these political discussions fueled the formation of unofficial journals. The Red Guard generation was quite experienced in writing big character posters and unofficial journals. Moreover, almost every activist had skills in printing brochures, which was the way people used to express political opinions during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, many unofficial journals were soon established in front of the Democracy Wall, during and after the Democratic Forum on November 25, 1978. The most influential unofficial journals were *Enlightenment* (启蒙), *April Fifth Forum* (四五论坛), *Exploration* (探索), *Beijing Spring* (北京之春), and *Fertile Soil* (沃土).

How did these different organizations form in front of the Democracy Wall? And, why did they form diverse organizational identities? In other words, this thesis argues that each unofficial journal and organization had its own identity and political goals, rather than a unitary pro-democratic movement. Therefore, the following part elaborate that, during the phase of mobilization, activists' different family origins and social statuses, diverse individual interests, and various experiences during the previous political movements all impacted the formation of different unofficial journals. These unofficial journals can be placed into two broad categories: moderate and radical. Moderate unofficial journals were mainly formed by college students and are formulated based on Marxist and socialist political narratives that contribute to CCP reformist ideology. In contrast, radical unofficial journals formed mainly by workers who tended

to use notions, such as “democracy” and “human rights,” and sought for support from non-Chinese governmental channels. Moreover, even though some worker organizations were also moderate in the phase of mobilization, they soon radicalized as the development of the Democracy Wall Movement. Finally, these different narratives and varied attitudes about the CCP reformists generated their divergent paths later.

The earliest political organization and unofficial journal during the Democracy Wall Movement was *Enlightenment*, which was co-founded by a group of urban workers in Guiyang Province, in early October of 1978. While many petitioners gathered in Beijing to appeal their individual injustice cases, Huang Xiang (黄翔), Mo Jiangan (莫建刚), Li Jiahua (李家华), and Fang Jiahua (方家华) also arrived in Beijing on October 10, 1978. However, different from the majority of petitioners, they were trying to appeal an “historical injustice case,” the Cultural Revolution.<sup>33</sup> Their first publication in Beijing was a collection of poems, “the God of Fire Symphonic Poem (火神与交响诗),” which was Huang’s secret writing before and during the Cultural Revolution. During their short stay in Beijing, they spread out the first issue of *Enlightenment*, and recited the serial poems in the collection in front of *People’s Daily’s* office and in Tiananmen Square. As the earliest organizer of *Enlightenment*, Huang’s original intention was to publish his secret poem, rather than leading a social movement.<sup>34</sup> However, when Huang was reading his poem and showing strong discontent about the Cultural Revolution and the cult

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Huang Xiang  
Huang Xiang’s memoirs: Huang Xiang. “震撼北京”

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Huang Xiang.

of Mao, hundreds of people surrounded him and cheered. More importantly, the authorities did not respond to their activities at all. This experience radicalized Huang's behaviors.

After going back to Guizhou for a month, they then returned to Beijing on November 24, 1978. As the Democratic Forum was held in front of the Democracy Wall, the political environment was even more relaxed compared to their first visit. Huang then posted another famous big-character poster on the constructing wall of Mao Zedong Memorial Hall, in Tiananmen Square. The title of the big-character poster was "Mao Zedong has seventy percent achievement and thirty percent mistakes; the Cultural Revolution must be re-evaluated!"<sup>35</sup> At the same time, they declared that the Enlightenment Society (启蒙社) was established. Huang became the editor in chief, while Li Jiahua was appointed as the vice editor in chief. However, because of Huang's dominating position in *Enlightenment* and mainly publishing his own work and ignoring others' articles, *Enlightenment* split in February, which will be introduced in the phase of divergences. At this time, they declared that the major goals of Enlightenment Society were "appealing on human rights and democracy," while "following the instructions of Chairman Hua," "obeying the Chinese constitutions," "cooperating with the *People's Daily*," "until the poison of the Gang of Four was eliminated completely!"<sup>36</sup> Once again, the authorities did not respond to their actions. Therefore, on January 1, 1979, during their third visit in Beijing, Huang published an even more radical big-character poster on the Democracy Wall, which was

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<sup>35</sup> The Chinese is: 毛泽东必须三七开、文化大革命必须重新评价.

<sup>36</sup> *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 3 vols. "前言" *Enlitenment*. Issue 2. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. Page 62.

an open letter to U.S. President Carter that sought “support for the human rights cause in China.”<sup>37</sup>

This opening letter then received harsh criticism from other unofficial journals. For instance, a major unofficial journal, *April Fifth Forum*, responded to Huang’s opening letter that “the United States was not the paradise of democracy,” “Carter was not a foreign Bodhisattva” for Chinese people, therefore people should not invoke “human rights” from an “imperialist country.”<sup>38</sup> Similar with *Enlightenment*, *April Fifth Forum* was also mainly composed by urban workers. However, the core members of *April Fifth Forum* were living in Beijing during that time, rather than out-comers from other provinces. Therefore, their local personal networks allowed the editorial office to soon expand to over 20 members in January, which also became the largest and longest lasting unofficial journal during the Democracy Wall Movement. The core members of *April Fifth Forum* were Xu Wenli (徐文立), Liu Qing (刘青) and Zhao Nan (赵楠).

On November 26, 1978, Xu Wenli published a pamphlet, *April Fifth Newspaper* (四五报), on the Democracy Wall. Like Huang, Xu’s original intention was also not to lead a social movement, but rather to “establish the first unofficial newspaper in China.”<sup>39</sup> In the foreword of the first issue of *April Fifth Newspaper*, Xu declared that, his newspaper “supports the leadership

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<sup>37</sup> Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard. “The Democracy Wall in China, 1978-1979: Opposition Movement, Wall Poster Campaigns, and Underground Journals.” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No.7 (Jul., 1981), pp. 747-774.

<sup>38</sup> *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 6 vols. “再谈美国是民主的乐园吗?” *April Fifth Forum*. Issue 9. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. Page 17-22.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Xu Wenli.

of CCP and Chairman Hua, studies Marxist and Mao Zedong thoughts, studies the spirit of the April Fifth Movement, and publishes the voices of people who do not have a voice” during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>40</sup> Simultaneously, Zhao Nan also established a newspaper, *People’s Forum* (人民论坛), in front of the Democracy Wall. Therefore, when Zhao and Xu got to know each other, with similar interests and goals, they merged *April Fifth Newspaper* with *People’s Forum* to create *April Fifth Forum*. As a friend of Zhao, Liu Qing then joined in *April Fifth Forum*.

*April Fifth Forum* was also the most complicated unofficial journal, since it had the largest editorial board. It was one of the most moderate unofficial journals during the phase of mobilization, like described in the foreword of *April Fifth Newspaper*, but soon radicalized in the phase of divergences. In the early phase of the movement, the editorial board tended to emphasize their Marxist identity and the spirit of the April Fifth Movement, but later tended to emphasize citizens’ legal rights. For instance, Liu later became one of the main characters to seek activists’ collective activities and actively connect petitioners under the concept of “human rights.” Furthermore, Xu sought to form an underground political party to challenge the CCP’s one party rule, in the phase of two parallel movements. Also, because *April Fifth Forum* was composed by two different unofficial journals with multiple inner groups, it developed a democratic voting process which, even with strong inner divergences, was able to avoid later splits. Specifically, even though Xu and Liu were most influential characters in *April Fifth Forum*, no one could make decisions without other’s approving.

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<sup>40</sup> This a personal collection.

Xu Wenli (徐文立). “创刊号” *April Fifth Newspaper*. 1978.

Another unofficial journal that was founded by workers was *Exploration*. On December 5, 1978, a long big-character poster, titled “The Fifth Modernization: On Democracy and Other,”<sup>41</sup> appeared on the Democracy Wall, which stated that “without democracy, the Four Modernization cannot be achieved,”<sup>42</sup> which soon attracted the attention of many people. That is mainly because, different from the majority of articles, this big-character poster declared that it neither contributed to the Marxist nor “China’s socialist system.”<sup>43</sup> More importantly, it directly criticized and satirized the leadership of Hua and Deng. The author was Wei Jingsheng (魏京生), who was a 29-year-old electrician at the Beijing Zoo, who was later be described as the “first Chinese dissident” by foreign journalists. Wei left his address at the end of the big-character poster. Therefore, Yang Guang (杨光), Lu Lin (路林), and Liu Jingsheng (刘京生) found him, and formed their unofficial journal *Exploration*, on January 8, 1979. It was the best know unofficial journal during the Democracy Wall Movement, but was, however, also the most radical and militant journal.<sup>44</sup> For instance, in March 1979, Wei published an article, titled “Democracy or a New Dictatorship?”<sup>45</sup> to directly criticize Deng who would become China’s new dictator, which led to his arrest later. Wei was also the most strategic activist who took risks to establish connections and gain support from foreign journalists and diplomats, which also explains the reasons that Wei had a such high reputation in Western countries. Different with

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<sup>41</sup> *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 1 vols. “第五个现代化——民主及其他” *Exploration*. Issue 1. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. page 2-11.

<sup>42</sup> “Four Modernization” was a political slogan first set by Deng Xiaoping in 1977, which include modernizations in the fields of agriculture, industry national defense, and science and technology.

<sup>43</sup> *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 1 vols. “发刊声明” *Exploration*. Issue 1. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. page 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard. “The Democracy Wall in China, 1978-1979: Opposition Movement, Wall Poster Campaigns, and Underground Journals.” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No.7 (Jul., 1981), pp. 767.

<sup>45</sup> *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 1 vols. “要民主还是要新的独裁？” *Exploration*. Issue 1. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. page 25-29.

*Enlightenment* and *April Fifth Forum*, *Exploration* showed very few inner organizational divergences, because of Wei's dominating position in the editorial board. However, *Exploration* had the most obvious inter-organizational divergences with other moderate unofficial journals, like *Beijing Spring* and *Fertile Soil*.

*Beijing Spring* and *Fertile Soil* were the most moderate unofficial journals during the Democracy Wall Movement, which were mainly composed of college students. The core members of *Beijing Spring* were Wang Juntao (王军涛) and Chen Ziming (陈子明). The original members of *Beijing Spring* were protesters during the April Fifth Movement, which allowed them to know each other in prison.<sup>46</sup> After the rehabilitation of the April Fifth Movement, they suddenly became national heroes and were able to join the Central Committee of the Chinese Youth League. Therefore, the members of *Beijing Spring* also had the closest relation with CCP reformists, who therefore declared that their major goal was to “make China a powerful socialist country,” “under the directions of Marxism-Leninism.”<sup>47</sup> Similarly with *Beijing Spring*, *Fertile Soil* was another major moderate unofficial journal. The core member, Hu Ping (胡平), was a graduate student in the philosophy department of Beijing University. He was from the Sichuan province and went to Beijing after passing the university entrance exams in 1977. During the movement, Hu had very few connections with radical unofficial journals, which was partially because he was also an out-comer, like Huang. Members of *Beijing Spring* and *Fertile Soil* later became very good friends as they connected on campus at Beijing University. Hu and Wang later

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<sup>46</sup> George Black and Robin Munro. *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1993.

Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard. “The Democracy Wall in China, 1978-1979: Opposition Movement, Wall Poster Campaigns, and Underground Journals.” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No.7 (Jul., 1981), pp. 767.

<sup>47</sup> *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 3 vols. “发刊词” *Beijing Spring*. Issue 1. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. page 279



both participated in the student elections of the People’s Representatives of Beijing University in 1980. Opposite from radical unofficial journals, Hu and Wang showed very little interest in contacting petitioners and foreigners, or organizing collective actions and demonstrations, and also tended to view the Democracy Wall Movement as a social response to the CCP reformists, rather than a people petitioning movement.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the moderate unofficial journals showed very few divergences within each group, compared to the radicals.

In general, during the Democracy Wall Movement, each unofficial journal had its own identity and political goal, which was co-affected by core members’ social statuses, diverse individual interests, and various experiences during the previous political movements. However, student organizations tended to be more moderate and had less divergences, while worker organizations showed fiercer discontent about China’s political system, and also showed stronger interests in connecting with foreign diplomats and journalists. Furthermore, moderate student organizations tended to use Marxist and socialist narratives to express their opinions, while radical worker organizations tended to adopt terms, like “democracy” and “human rights.” More importantly, the radical unofficial journals had more frequent inner-organizational divergence, compared to the moderate ones.

	Core Members	Worker/Student	Radical/Moderate	Whether Split
<i>Enlightenment</i>	Huang Xiang, Li Jiahua, Fang Jiahua, Mo Jiangan	Workers	Radical	Yes
<i>April Fifth Forum</i>	Xu Wenli, Liu Qing, Zhao Nan	Workers	Radical	Divergences
<i>Exploration</i>	Wei Jingsheng, Yang Guang, Lu	Workers	Radical	No

<sup>48</sup> Interviews with Wang Juntao and Hu Ping.

	Lin, Liu Jingsheng			
<i>Beijing Spring</i>	Wang Juntao, Chen Ziming	Students	Moderate	No
<i>Fertile Soil</i>	Hu Ping	Students	Moderate	No
<i>Chinese Human Rights League</i>	Ren Wanding	Workers	Radical	Yes
<i>Today</i>	Bei Dao, Mang Ke	Workers/Artists	Moderate	Divergences

### **Section Two: Divergences (January 1979 ~ October 1979)**

What were radical unofficial journals' inner-organizational divergences? What were inter-organizational divergences between the radical and moderate organizations? How different organizational identities led to activists' different personal choices? These were the major questions of this section. During the second phase, divergence, which included two waves of splits and lasted from January to October 1979. Suppression by the authorities was the main reason for the first wave of splits. Under uncertain political environment, activists' divergent choices were dependent upon their political positions in their respective organizations. In particular, activists who joined an organization later tended to choose more radical paths to enhance their political positions within the group. Ones who founded or joined the organizations earlier, however, were more willing to use moderate strategies to protect both personal status within groups and the safe position of their organizations in the movement. Different from the first wave of splits, the second wave of splits was fueled by ambiguous messages from the Beijing Municipal Party Committee, and uncertain political opportunities. The scene at the beginning of this thesis of the debates over the October 1 Demonstration, was a key event of the second splits. In this phase, activists' educational and career status quo became the primary

factor for their divergent choices. This second split was also the most influential one, which caused a fundamental divergence between moderates and radicals on an inter-organizational scale. It was also a watershed that marked the two different paths among China's pro-democratic activists in the 1980s.

*The First Wave of Splits (Jan 1979~April 1979)*

What were radical unofficial journals' inner-organizational divergences? Why did some radical organizations split? Through investigating activists' divergent choices from January 1979 to April 1979, I contend that the state suppression, which led by the petitioning activities in January, was the primary factor for radical organizations' first wave of splits. Under state suppression, activists' different strategies choices were mainly dependent upon their political positions in their respective organizations. More specifically, like I have stated, activists who joined an unofficial journal later or with lower inner-organizational position tended to choose radical ways to enhance their position within the group. Activists held higher inner-organizational position or with more power, however, were more willing to use moderate strategies to protest.

The state suppression and the first wave of the Democracy Wall activists' splits were rooted in Fu Yuehua's (傅月华) petitioning activities and her trial. In late 1978, when many rural petitioners gathered in Beijing to appeal their personal grievances, Fu Yuehua, who was a 37-year-old unemployed woman at that time, also participated in the petitioning activities.<sup>49</sup> In the big-character posters, Fu claimed that she was raped by the Party Secretary of her work unit

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<sup>49</sup> *China Violations of Human Rights: Prisoners of Conscience and the death penalty in the People's Republic of China*. London: Amnesty International Publications. 1984. Page 21.

while she was a construction worker in Beijing in 1971.<sup>50</sup> Then, during a political campaign, she was labeled a “counter-revolutionary” by the Secretary and therefore lost her job. The “construction company also refused to pay her medical bill which amounted to about two years’ salary.”<sup>51</sup> While petitioning in Beijing, Fu got the chance to know other petitioners. Since many petitioners were illiterate peasants, Fu helped them to write petitioning letters and big character posters.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, she also actively organized petitioners’ demonstrations and “calling for an end to ‘hunger and persecution’ and demanding ‘democracy and human rights.’”<sup>53</sup> Some radical unofficial journals, which tightly connected with petitioners, recorded that Fu participated in at least two petitioners’ demonstrations on January 8 and 14.<sup>54</sup> Her activities soon attracted the authorities’ attention, which led her arrest on January 24, 1979.

Almost simultaneously, the Beijing Municipal Party Committee exposed their concerns about the Democracy Wall Movement in a notice entitled “Meeting Spirit” on January 23.<sup>55</sup> In the Meeting Spirit, the authorities declared that there were “counterrevolutionaries” among petitioners and unofficial journals, and also warned the people who contact with foreigners.<sup>56</sup> This was the time that Deng had completely won the power struggle with Hua during the Third Plenary Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP. Therefore, Deng rapidly changed his open-minded face toward the Democracy Wall Movement, and accused the activists were

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<sup>50</sup> Chinese Human Rights League. “傅月华事件究竟是怎么回事？” *Beijing zhi chun shi wen xuan: min zhu qiang wang he chu qu* 北京之春诗文选：民主墙往何处去。Hong Kong: Ping ming chu ban she 平鸣出版社, 1980. Page 45

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *China Violations of Human Rights: Prisoners of Conscience and the death penalty in the People’s Republic of China*. London: Amnesty International Publications. 1984. Page 22.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 2 vols. “民主的限度？” *Exploration*. Issue 2. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. page 1-5

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

“making a mess in the city.”<sup>57</sup> Especially, for the most radical activists and petitioners who organize demonstrations, like Fu, the authorities now showed a clear signal of suppression. Under this circumstance, different activists therefore choose varied reactions to state suppression, which led the first wave of splits.

Two major unofficial journals showed very strong supportive attitudes toward petitioning activities were the *Exploration* and *Chinese Human Rights League*. The founder of the *Chinese Human Rights League* was Ren Wanding (任畹町), an urban worker, who actively contacted rural petitioners and published many petitioning letters in his journal. Similarly, Wei frequently contact rural petitioners, and even provided places for petitioners to live in Beijing.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, in the second issue of *Exploration*, in an article entitled “Limits of Democracy?” Wei expressed his strong discontent about the Meeting Spirit and the authorities’ negative judgment about petitioners.<sup>59</sup> Except Wei and Ren, another very strong supporter of petitioning activities was Liu Qing, who was one of the core members of the *April Fifth Forum*. However, different from Wei’s dominant position in the *Exploration*, Liu was a relative latecomer in the *April Fifth Forum*. The *April Fifth Forum* was co-founded by Xu Wenli and Zhao Nan in December 1978. Liu joined the *April Fifth Forum* in January 1979 as a friend of Zhao Nan.

During this time, as the core founder and editor of the *April Fifth Forum*, Xu had more influence within his group than Liu and Zhao, and did not want to take the risk of getting involved in petitioning activities. He believed that, since the *April Fifth Forum* was only established for a month, they were not able to handle the consequences of collective activities or

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<sup>57</sup> *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 2 vols. “民主的限度?” *Exploration*. Issue 2. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. page 1-5

<sup>58</sup> Kremb, Jurgen. *Wei Jingsheng qian zhuan* 魏京生前传. Taipei: Jie you chu ban she 捷幼出版社, 1998.

<sup>59</sup> *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 2 vols. “民主的限度?” *Exploration*. Issue 2. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. page 1-5

demonstrations. In addition, he thought that petitioners' pursuits were very fragmented, and some requests were even unjustifiable. He was also concerned that the organizers would have to take full responsibility, if some petitioners shouted extreme slogans against the authorities or CCP during the demonstration, which would provide the authorities a perfect excuse to abolish their journal.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, as the earliest founder who had high position within *April Fifth Forum*, Xu's major concern was how to protect the existence of his unofficial journal.

On the opposite side, the latecomer, Liu showed very strong interest in contacting petitioners and a supportive attitude toward Fu. He even suggested to organize a "greeting visit group" (慰问团) to Fu's prison.<sup>61</sup> As Liu's organizational introducer, Zhao also agree with Liu's opinion that supporting petitioners is the responsibility of *April Fifth Forum*. Moreover, the radicals insisted the opinion that "only uncompromising demonstrations could awaken people's sympathies and supporting toward the Democracy Wall Movement, which made activists in an invincible position."<sup>62</sup> Therefore, editors of the *April Fifth Forum* split into two camps. On the one hand, Liu represented the radicals, who suggested that the *April Fifth Forum* should support petitioning activities and Fu. On the other hand, Xu, the relative moderate, believed that the survival of the *April Fifth Forum* was more important. Then, they decided to take a vote within the *April Fifth Forum* group. Before the vote took place, Liu tried to convince other members to help petitioners. Furthermore, in order to increase his influence within the *April Fifth Forum*, Liu also brought more of his friends and relatives onto the editorial board. However, during the vote,

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Xu Wenli.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Liu Qing (刘青). "回忆民主墙联席会议" *Beijing Spring*. January 1995.  
<http://beijingspring.com/bj2/1995/240/2003129133729.htm>

Xu's relatively moderate opinion passed by only one vote. Zhao then abandoned *April Fifth Forum* and joined *Exploration*.

Even though Liu lost the vote within the *April Fifth Forum*, he still did not give up his relatively radical position, which brought him more political sources within the radical organizations. For instance, even though Xu's two-room apartment was editorial office, on the cover page of every issue of *April Fifth Forum*, Liu's home address was printed as the official contacting address, which provided him more opportunities to contact other unofficial journals and activists. Liu Qing's brother Liu Nianchun (刘念春) was also a member of *Today*, which allowed Liu Qing to meet *Today*'s members. Furthermore, because of Wei's radical opinion about the petitioning activities was very close to Liu Qing, which made them become very close friends.<sup>63</sup> Their wide personal networks within the Democracy Wall radical activists made Liu Qing become more influential and one of the major activists who sought closer co-operation between unofficial journals.

Responded to the state suppression in January, Liu then suggested to organize a Joint Council (联席会议) between Democracy Wall unofficial journals, therefore could cooperate with each other closely to against the authorities. Therefore, a Joint Declaration was signed by seven unofficial journals on January 25, which included *April Fifth Forum*, *Exploration*, *Masses' Reference News* (群众参考消息), *Chinese Human Rights League*, *Enlightenment*, *People's Forum* (人民论坛), and *Today*. Liu was elected as the convener of the Joint Council (民刊召集

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<sup>63</sup> Liu Qing, Hu Ping, and Wei Jingsheng. “胡平与魏京生、刘青对话”  
<http://www.chinesepen.org/blog/archives/101020>

人). However, one thing need to be noticed that the Joint Council was a very loose organization, which held discussions every week, sometimes biweekly.<sup>64</sup> It had very limited influence on the decision-making process of each unofficial journal.

Activists' different attitudes toward the Joint Council could also explain the divergences within radical groups, and among radical and moderate organizations. For instance, the moderate unofficial journals, like *Beijing Spring* and *Fertile Soil* declined the offers to join the Joint Council. Interestingly, all members of the Joint Council were worker organizations, rather student groups. Moreover, within the *April Fifth Forum*, Xu once again disagreed with Liu's suggestion, who thought that focusing on publish high quality articles was more useful than organize collective activities.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, Liu was the one frequently represent *April Fifth Forum* in the Joint Council, while Xu was focusing more on the editing and publishing articles. In contrast, on the side of radicals, activists usually treated the Joint Council as a very useful political access to organize and even lead the Democracy Wall Movement. For instance, *Exploration* sent three representatives to the first meeting of the Joint Council, while the rule was one representative per organization. *Exploration's* main excuse for this action was human equality, which infuriated other unofficial journals' representatives.<sup>66</sup> Eventually, this contradiction was solved by Liu's proposal on an alternate member system.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, Wei also suggested to the Joint Council that "erect a permanent building in front of the Democracy Wall to serve as a democratic study center and the movement's Head Quarters."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Lauri Paltemaa. *In the Vanguard of History: the Beijing Democracy Wall Movement 1978-1981 and Social Mobilization of Former Red Guard Dissent*. Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 2005. page 100.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Xu Wenli and Liu Qing.

<sup>66</sup> Lauri Paltemaa. *In the Vanguard of History: the Beijing Democracy Wall Movement 1978-1981 and Social Mobilization of Former Red Guard Dissent*. Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 2005. page 101.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.



Varied strategic choices about petitioning and collective activities showed the divisions within radical unofficial journals. For instance, through supporting petitioners and the establishment of the Joint Council, compare to the co-founder Xu, the late-comer Liu, as the convener of the Joint Council, now became more influential within *April Fifth Forum* and the Democracy Wall Movement as a whole. Fortunately, like I have mentioned, even with strong inner divergences, *April Fifth's* democratic voting process was able to avoid its later splits. However, what happened to the radical organizations without a democratic decision-making process? Under the state suppression in the late January of 1979, many radical organizations split, and *Enlightenment* was a very typical example. Similar with *April Fifth Forum*, members of *Enlightenment* who were in relatively lower organizational positions tended to choose more radical strategies to enhance their influence. On the opposite, the founders or activists who were in higher organizational positions tended to use relatively moderate ways to protect the safety of organization and whose inner position.

As a core founder and main writer, Huang Xiang was a dominating figure who had the almost absolute power in publishing and decision-making, which caused growing discontentment among other members in *Enlightenment*. An event could show Huang's superior inner organizational position was during their second visit in Beijing, in November 24, 1978. Huang even slapped Li Jiahua's face and assailed, "are you scared?" when Li, the vice editor in chief, came late to Tiananmen Square to post their big-character to criticize Mao and the Cultural Revolution.<sup>69</sup> The dominating position in *Enlightenment* made Huang became a relative moderate in *Enlightenment* when facing suppression from the authorities. For instance, before publishing the big-character poster, "Democracy or New a Dictatorship?" to directly criticize

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<sup>69</sup> Memoirs from Huang Xiang: Wang Yogan (王永安), Zhou Xiuqiang (周修强). "启蒙社始末记"

Deng, Wei asked Huang to sign and co-publish in the names of *Enlightenment* and *Exploration*. Huang then rejected Wei, since he believed that “it was totally unnecessary to infuriate Deng at that time.” Huang believed that “activists should use Deng’s tolerance to extend the existences of unofficial journals and the Democracy Wall Movement.”<sup>70</sup> He suggested to other members that *Enlightenment* should focus more on topics like literature, rather than politics and joining collective activities.<sup>71</sup>

Huang’s relative moderate behaviors provided Li, the vice editor in chief, and excellent excuse to challenge Huang’s “autocratic leadership.” Therefore, during an inner-organizational meeting in the night in February 8, 1979, Li and other later-comers of *Enlightenment* harshly criticized Huang’s “patriarchal styles” (家长作风) and forced Huang’s ally, Fang Jiahua, to give a self-criticizing speech. Li’s faction stated that, “Huang only published his articles and ignore others, which was not democracy!” Furthermore, they argued that all members’ contributions, rights, and positions should be equal; founders should stop to “self-compliment” and “decide everything by one man’s say.”<sup>72</sup> Huang then counter-argued that “we established the journal. You can go to other places, if you do not agree with us. But you cannot use the name *Enlightenment!*” The meeting was lasted from seven o’clock until next morning at one. Eventually, *Enlightenment* was split, when Li established a new organization and named Thaw Society in February 27, 1979.

In the proclamation of Thaw Society, Li wrote that “since *Enlightenment* gradually became conservatives,” therefore they established a new organization to “propagate all

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<sup>70</sup> Huang Xiang’s memoirs: Huang Xiang. “震撼北京”

<sup>71</sup> Memoirs from Huang Xiang: Wang Yogan (王永安), Zhou Xiuqiang (周修强). “启蒙社始末记”

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

progressive thoughts of human being, especially Rousseau's thoughts of human rights and Sun Yat-sen's democratic thoughts."<sup>73</sup> This kind of non-Marist and non-socialist views on politics attracted the attention of the authorities, which led to his arrest in April of 1979.<sup>74</sup> Then, almost all core members of *Enlightenment* and the Thaw Society was arrested in Guizhou province in April of 1979. Interestingly enough, after few days of investigation, Huang was soon released by policy and transferred to security department of his work unit. Later on, Huang even frequently interviewed by official medias, like *People's Daily*, about his experience during the Democracy Wall Movement.<sup>75</sup> In Beijing, few days before Huang's and Li's arrests, Wei was also arrested in the late March, after his pointed criticism on Deng who would become China's new dictator in the big-character poster, titled "Democracy or a New Dictatorship?"<sup>76</sup> However, different with Huang, Wei's experience after arrest was totally different, who was sentenced for 15 years' imprisonment in October. Wei's trial later led to the radicalization of the other worker organizations, eventually all worker organizations turned to be radicals, which will be introduced in the phase of two parallel movement.<sup>77</sup>

Base on the arrest list during the first wave of split, the authorities arrested only the radicals, like organizers of demonstrations, activists who strategically contacting with petitioners and feigners, and people who dare to directly criticize Deng and question China's socialist system, who were all from worker organizations. Nevertheless, during the first splits, not all worker activists were radicals. Except for few united radical organizations, like *Exploration*, the

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<sup>73</sup> *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 20 vols. "解冻宣言" *Thaw*. Issue 1. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. page 287.

<sup>74</sup> Huang Xiang's memoirs: Huang Xiang "震撼北京"

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> *Da lu di xia kan wu hui bian* 大陆地下刊物汇编. 1 vols. "要民主还是要新的独裁?" *Exploration*. Issue 1. Taipei: Zhong gong yan jiu za zhi she 中共研究杂志社, 1980-1985. page 25.

<sup>77</sup> *China Violations of Human Rights: Prisoners of Conscience and the death penalty in the People's Republic of China*. London: Amnesty International Publications. 1984. page 24

worker radicals were mainly in a lower inner-organizational position. In the opposite, the worker moderates, during the first wave of split, usually held higher inner-organizational positions. However, this situation soon changed during and after the second wave of splits, when was a process of radicalization of worker moderates.

### *The Second Wave of Splits (June 1979~Oct 1979)*

I have showed the inner-organizational divergences within radical or worker unofficial journals in the first wave of splits. What were inter-organizational divergences between the radical and moderate organizations? This question is the main theme in investigating the second wave of splits. During this period, from June to October 1979, after the arrests of worker radicals, the worker moderates were now radicalized, while students were remaining moderates. Namely, the second wave of splits were happened between college students and moderate workers who were not arrested in April 1979. Eventually, student organizations remained in moderate positions in the phase of two parallel movements, while all worker activists became radicals.

The second splits among the Democracy Wall activists, was rooted in a conflict between the authorities and a group of artists, who were mainly from *Today*, who tried to hold a non-permitted exhibition named the Star Art Exhibition (星星美展) on the sidewalk on the east side of the National Art Museum of China, which later came to be viewed as a milestone in the history of Chinese modern art. However, after two days of exhibition, a group of policemen showed up to confiscate all their displays and forcibly prohibit the exhibition. The first reaction of these artists was to seek help from friends or relatives who worked for the government, since some artists were from eminent families with extensive personal networks. Soon, a journalist

from the *People's Daily* tried to calm the artists down and claimed that he would call some high leaders of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee to solve their problems. As he promised, he made a call and then came back with two options: they could either choose to continue their exhibition in Beijing Zhongshan Park, or wait until October and exhibit their works in the Painted Boat Studio at Beihai Park, which is a bigger and more professional art gallery. Because the National Literary and Art Representative Conference (全国文学艺术代表大会) was scheduled to be held in Beijing in mid-October, the artists agreed that they could wait until then. At this moment, they felt very happy with this result.

The news of the compromise between the Star artists and the Beijing Municipal Government spread very quickly among the Democracy Wall activists, since many artists were also editors or were affiliated with other major politically-oriented unofficial journals. Soon, some activists came to talk with the Star artists. Some people accused the Star artists of been bribed. Others reminded them that they were not supposed to be striving for only one exhibition, but the right to artistic freedom.<sup>78</sup> One person said, “if you guys are going to hold an exhibit in Beihai Park again without formal official explanation, then that will detract from your reputation.”<sup>79</sup> These accusations shook the Star artists’ decision, and they decided to hold a meeting with the major Democracy Wall activists to decide what to do next.

Therefore, on October 29, the Star artists spread the message across Beijing to major unofficial journals, including *April Fifth Forum*, *Exploration*, *Today*, *Beijing Spring*, and *Fertile Soil*. That evening, around 20 activists gathered in the home of Zhao Nan to decide whether they should organize a demonstration for October 1, which marked the thirtieth anniversary of the

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<sup>78</sup> Hu Keping (胡克平). “星星往事”. <http://art.ifeng.com/2015/0805/2459009.shtml>

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

establishment of the People's Republic of China. On the one hand, some radicals showed a strong willingness to air their grievances and express their political opinions through organizing a demonstration on October 1. The radicals' main motivations were based on inside information about the rifts and political struggles within the Beijing Municipal Committee, which could provide activists an excellent chance to protest for their grievances and shame the authorities. On the other hand, moderates were very cautious about this kind of collective activity and did not want to take risks. Through intense debate, the radical opinions were gradually gaining the upper hand, which means the majority of activists agreed to hold a demonstration on October 1. This result dissatisfied some moderates, who believed that radical behaviors would harm the art exhibition and the survival of the Democracy Wall Movement. They thought that, even though the authorities had arrested some of the most radical activists, they had still tacitly tolerated the existence of the majority of the unofficial journals for almost a year. Therefore, radical opinions and behaviors would destroy a unique opportunity to legalize the unofficial journals.<sup>80</sup>

During the meeting, Xu Wenli, and Liu Qing participated in as representatives of *April Fifth Forum*. In the early phase of the meeting, *April Fifth Forum* was split into two camps. According to the conversation during the meeting, Xu was the most radical one who insisted on holding the demonstration on October 1st, while Liu believed that they should use more moderate ways to protest. However, few months earlier, while debating whether *April Fifth Forum* should support the petitioners' demonstrations and the Joint Council, Liu and Xu were in completely opposite positions. At that time, it was Liu who believed that they should help organize petitioners' demonstrations and use radical ways to gain sympathies and supports from ordinary people. Xu totally rejected Liu's idea and believed that collective activists were too

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Hu Ping.

risky for new established *April Fifth Forum*, therefore refused to get involved in petitioners' demonstrations. Ironically, eight months later, Xu and Liu's positions now switched. This was partially because, after Liu served as the convener of the Joint Council, who became more influential in both *April Fifth Forum* and the Democracy Wall Movement as a whole, and therefore considered the existence of the Democracy Wall Movement as the primary thing. After winning the vote, as the most radical activists who insisted to held demonstration, Xu then was elected as one of the headquarters of demonstration. As the developing of debating, Liu eventually changed his opinion in supporting demonstration, and elected as one of the sub-headquarters of demonstration. Even though, *Today's* members also split into two camps, they ultimately decided to obey the result of vote and were going to participate in the demonstration. As the most radical unofficial journals, even though the core founder Wei has been arrested, *Exploration* also approved the final decision on holding organization.

The vote result now left student unofficial journals, *Beijing Spring* and *Fertile Soil*, in very awkward positions. They were the most moderate organizations, each of which only sent one of their minor members to the October 1 debate, and they were observing rather than participating in the discussion. The representative of *Fertile Soil* even did not use his true name.<sup>81</sup> Since the early phase of the Democracy Wall Movement, these two organizations rarely participated in the Joint Council and other collective activities. Interestingly enough, during the April Fifth Movement, Wang was one of youngest demonstrators and prisoners to protest against the Gang of Four and the policies of the Cultural Revolution. But now, while he had the chance to join the Central Committee of the Chinese Youth League as a college student, he had become the most moderate member in the Democracy Wall Movement. Hu Ping, the core founder of

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<sup>81</sup> Hu, Keping (胡克平). “星星往事” <http://art.ifeng.com/2015/0805/2459009.shtml>

*Fertile Soil*, was also cautious about participating in collective activities. Hu is very critical about radical behaviors even today, who thought that “the unofficial journals may still exist today, if activists could more rational.”<sup>82</sup> Therefore, Wang and the *Beijing Spring* members decided not to participate in the October 1st demonstration at all. Hu and the members of *Fertile Soil* decided that only their “art group” (艺术组) would participate. But, in the next morning, a few hours before the demonstration started, *Fertile Soil* members noticed other participants were going to quit completely.<sup>83</sup> This decision displeased some activists, as the slogans and posters had already been written with *Fertile Soil*'s signatures. Therefore, for showing their discontentment, some activists tore down half of *Fertile Soil*'s signature, but intentionally left the majority of it visible, so that was still recognizable. Eventually, only worker organizations participated in the demonstration on October 1, 1979, while all student unofficial journals quit.

In general, during the phase of divergences, from January to October 1979, activists took very different strategies to participate in the Democracy Wall Movement. In a large inter-organizational scale, student activists always adopted in moderate positions, while worker activists tended to adopt in more radical positions. In a small inner-organizational scale, student or moderate unofficial journals showed very few divisions of opinions, while worker or radical organizations displayed very strong divergences. Furthermore, radical organizations' splits showed that lower inner-organizational position tended to radicalize activists' behaviors, while higher inner-organizational position tended to make activists become more moderate.

### **Section Three: Two Parallel Movements (November 1979 ~ April 1981)**

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Hu Ping

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Xu Wenli



The previous section has elaborated the divergent choices within radical unofficial journals, and among moderate and radical organizations. However, why did student unofficial journals tend to be moderate, and worker organizations tend to be radical? This section contends that whether have the political access to achieve their political goals was the determining factor for the divisions between students and workers. In the third section, which is the phase of the two parallel movements between November 1979 and April 1981, I will show that, after the second split, moderates or college students were more willing to express their political opinions and achieve personal political goals through governmental channels. On the contrary, the radicals or “social people,” who did not have the chance to go to universities or governmental institutions, tended to use more radical protest methods. Furthermore, activists’ behaviors showed that, in the camp of the radicals, even though the extreme radicals kept being arrested by the authorities, some relative moderates would transform into radicals, replace the original radicals, and continue the movement. Therefore, I contend that when the radical positions became political resources for activists, they chose more seemingly irrational and radical actions to pursue political goals and retain advantaged positions within the movement, even if it was very risky.

#### *Radicals’ Activities after the Second Splits*

What did make un-arrested or moderate workers radicalized? These is the questions need to be investigated in this section. After the demonstration on October 1, 1979, un-arrested or moderate workers were radicalized by two events: the trial of Wei Jingsheng and the remove of the Democracy Wall. The trial of Wei and activists’ rescuing activities led the arrest of Liu Qing and some members of *Today*. The authorities’ hard punishment on Wei and removing the Democracy Wall then made the un-arrested radicals use fiercer methods to achieve their political

goals. For instance, Xu Wenli secretly contacted activists from other cities and tried to organize a national underground network and political party to challenge the CCP's one party rule in 1980. These kinds of risky activities ultimately led to harsh punishments, which also dramatically shaped their political opinions until today.

The first key event was Wei's trial, which was brought in "public" on October 16, 1979. However, in reality, the trial was not open to the public, since all audiences was selected by the authorities.<sup>84</sup> The Beijing Intermediate People's Court convicted Wei of "passing on 'military secrets'" about the Sino-Vietnamese war "to a foreigner and conducting 'counter-revolutionary propaganda and agitation' through his writings," who then was sentenced to fifteen years.<sup>85</sup> Few days before the trial, Liu Qing heard the news from an *Today's* activist, who was working for China Central Television, and going to be the cameraman of Wei's trial. Liu then secretly told Xu about this news and suggested to record and open the trial process, which might help with rescuing Wei. This time Xu and Liu were finally agreed with each other. Since the demonstration on October 1, worker or radical unofficial journals, especially *April Fifth Forum* and *Today*, become much closer with each other. Xu was also benefited by supporting, organize, and lead the demonstration, which made him become more influential. Therefore, a rescuing plan was agreed by both Xu and Liu. Liu then informed the cameraman to sound record the trial. Then, during Wei's trial, while Xu was leading a group of activists to yell and pretend to rush into the court from the front door, Liu then stealthily wait in the back door until get the tape.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, on November 9, transcripts of Wei's trial were published on the Democracy Wall and the newest

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<sup>84</sup> *China Violations of Human Rights: Prisoners of Conscience and the death penalty in the People's Republic of China*. London: Amnesty International Publications. 1984. Page 24.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Xu Wenli.

issue of *April Fifth Forum*.<sup>87</sup> People were gathering in front of the Democracy Wall to buy the transcripts, which completely enraged the authorities. Four activists were arrested by the police, while were selling transcripts. Liu escaped first, however then went “that evening with several friends to Beijing Police Headquarters to inquire about those arrested he was himself detained.” Before Liu decided to go to the police station, he talked with Xu. Xu promised to Liu that he would take care of Liu’s mother, if Liu was arrested.<sup>88</sup> As their expected, Liu was arrested and “assigned to three years’ ‘re-education through labor’ in a labor camp,” in mid-1980.<sup>89</sup>

The second key events that radicalized the un-arrested activists was the authorities’ decision about removing of the Xidan Wall in November 1979, and abolishment of people’s rights to write big-character posters in August 1980. These decisions did not only crack down the Democracy Wall, but also completely cut off the workers’ political access. Therefore, going underground became the only choice for un-arrested workers, who were also drastically radicalized. In the March 1980, Xu officially declared the stop publication of *April Fifth Forum*. However, he then established an underground journal, entitled *Studies and Communication* (学习通讯), in July 1980. This underground journal did not just circulate in Beijing, but also spread out to eighteen provinces. The main function of *Studies and Communication* was tremendously different with *April Fifth Forum*. Xu was trying to build a national network of dissidents.<sup>90</sup> Xu also secretly invited few activists from other provinces and tried to establish an underground

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<sup>87</sup> *China Violations of Human Rights: Prisoners of Conscience and the death penalty in the People’s Republic of China*. London: Amnesty International Publications. 1984. Page 28.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Xu Wenli.

<sup>89</sup> *China Violations of Human Rights: Prisoners of Conscience and the death penalty in the People’s Republic of China*. London: Amnesty International Publications. 1984. Page 29.

<sup>90</sup> Chen, Ziming. *Xian zheng de meng ya: 1980 nian jing xuan yun dong 宪政的萌芽: 1980年竞选运动*. Hong Kong: Zhen xiang chu ban she 真相出版社, 2013. page 34.

political organization named “The Council for the Promotion of Chinese Democratic Reunification” (中华民主统一促进会), which included four sub-Council in mainland China, Taiwan, Hongkong, and Overseas.<sup>91</sup> Xu’s actions were not unique. An organization named “The Association of Chinese National Unofficial Journal” (中华全国民刊协会) was also established by an former editor of *April Fifth Forum*. Another un-arrested worker activists even sought to establish an underground political party, named “Chinese Public Rights Alliance,” in 1980.

In general, un-arrested worker activists, who were mainly the moderates during the previous phases, were dramatically radicalized after the trial of Wei and removing of the Democracy Wall Movement. These underground radical activities then led very harsh punishment. In March 1981, the authorities issued a file, entitled “Document Number Nine,” (九号文件) which decided to completely suppress the Democracy Wall Movement. Therefore, thousands of radical activists, who were all workers without exception, were arrested nationally.<sup>92</sup> Xu was arrested in night of April 9, 1981 and then sentenced fifteen years as a “counter-revolutionary.”<sup>93</sup>

### *Moderates’ Activities after the Second Splits*

Why did student unofficial journals tend to be moderate? What were their political accesses? These were the main question of this section. As I have described, the divisions between worker radicals and student moderates were not just happening in the phase of two

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid 35.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid 35 and 96.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Xu Wenli.

parallel movement. Even in the phase of mobilization, student unofficial journals have showed more moderate attitudes about China's political issues and the CCP reformists. These was mainly because that student position provided activists a more effective and safe political access to achieve their goals. Because of the student identity, they usually had closer relation and more interactions with the CCP reformists, which also made them tend to view the Democracy Wall Movement as a social response to Deng's reform, rather an "advanced" petitioning movement. Furthermore, after the cracking down of the Democracy Wall in late 1979, while worker radicals, who did not have political access, were using underground activities to continue the movement, the People's Representatives elections then provided student activists a governmental political access to achieve their political goals. Namely, the existence of governmental political access made student organizations to become moderate and show few inner-organizational divergences.

For instance, Hu Ping, a core editor of *Fertile Soil*, had many interactions with CCP reformists during and after the Democracy Wall Movement. In June 1979, an official of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, contacted Hu Ping and expressed that unofficial journals should be preserved. The official said to Hu that "there are no Rightists anymore, and that there used to be unofficial magazines as early as 1958, so there are all the reasons to preserve something like this." Again, in the late 1979, an official of the Marx-Lenin Research Institute, had strong interest in the unofficial journals, who then gathered a meeting in the Communist Party School of Beijing Municipal, and invited many moderate activists, include Hu Ping.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, Hu participated in the Democracy Wall Movement with publishing a famous essay, entitled *On Freedom of Speech* (论言论自由). However, because its Marxist

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

narratives and moderate opinions, the essay did not receive too much responses among the Democracy Wall unofficial journals, however started to widespread during the election campaign of Beijing University in 1980. Then it really gained traction until 1986 when the reformist periodical *The Youth Forum* (青年论坛), which was founded by the CCP reformist Hu Yaobang's son, published it. Even the conservatives leaders in the political bureau of CCP, Hu Qiaomu (胡乔木), who was the most important theorist of the CCP, had admired Hu's article.<sup>95</sup> Wang Juntao, the core founder of *Beijing Spring* also had very close relationship with the CCP reformists. After the reversal of the April Fifth Movement verdict, Wang was not just rehabilitated, but also able to join the Central Committee of the Chinese Youth League, which means that he would be trained as a future CCP officials. The positions of Beijing University student and member of CCP Youth League also enable him to meet and get suggestions from Hu Yaobang, who was a core member of Politburo Standing Committee of the CCP, during the Democracy Wall Movement.<sup>96</sup>

Even though, *Beijing Spring* and *Soil Fertile* were very moderate and barely contact with radical unofficial journals and seldom joint collective activists, like the Joint Council. They still faced suppression from the authorities after the second wave of splits, when the authorities decided to completely remove the Democracy Wall. Meanwhile, in January 1980, under the pressure, Wang had to "make a self-criticism to the Central Committee of the Chinese Youth League."<sup>97</sup> However, different with radicals' underground activities after cracking down of the Democracy Wall in late 1979, members of *Beijing Spring* and *Soil Fertile* then completely gave

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with Hu Ping.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Wang Juntao.

<sup>97</sup> Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard. "The Democracy Wall in China, 1978-1979: Opposition Movement, Wall Poster Campaigns, and Underground Journals." *Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No.7 (Jul., 1981), pp. 766.

up their unofficial journals and turn to use governmental channels to archival their political goals.

Their governmental political access originated in the Second Session of the Fifth National People's congress, when the authorities decided to reform China's Election Law, in late June of 1979. For the first time, China's Election Law allowed ordinary people to participated in the election of county level People's Representatives, rather than just party members. Therefore, college students easily abandon unofficial journals compare to the radicals, was mainly because they got better political access. According to the new law, Beijing University could elect two students as the People's Representatives of Haidian District of Beijing City. Consequently, in early 1980, *Beijing Spring* and *Fertile Soil* tightly contact and cooperate with each other, and to prepare for the upcoming election. Their original plan was that Wang as their main candidate, while Hu as the leader of advisory group to support Wang.<sup>98</sup> However, during the phase of preparation, they soon realized there were great opportunities that both of them could win the election. Eventually, Hu also decided to join the election.

On November 3, 1980, the election began, Hu then re-publish his article *On Freedom of Speech* as his manifesto of election in Beijing University, which received very strong supports among college students. Hu eventually won one spot with 3467 votes out of 5967 voters, during the election campaign.<sup>99</sup> However, because his harsh criticism about Mao, while many college students were still deeply influenced by the cult of Mao, Wang lost a lot of votes.<sup>100</sup> In the end, Wang lost the election by get 2936 votes out of 5967 voters, since he was not get over 50 percent

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<sup>98</sup> Chen, Ziming. *Xian zheng de meng ya: 1980 nian jing xuan yun dong 宪政的萌芽: 1980年竞选运动*. Hong Kong: Zhen xiang chu ban she 真相出版社, 2013. page 37.

<sup>99</sup> Hu, Ping and Juntao Wang, *Kai tuo: bei da xue yun wen xian 开拓: 北京大学运文献*. Hong Kong: Tian yua shu wu 田园书屋, 1990. Chart 7.

<sup>100</sup> Chen, Ziming. *Xian zheng de meng ya: 1980 nian jing xuan yun dong 宪政的萌芽: 1980年竞选运动*. Hong Kong: Zhen xiang chu ban she 真相出版社, 2013. page 47.

of votes. Hu became the only student People's Representatives of Beijing University. From January 16 to 23, 1981, Hu and ten other students who were from other universities, participated in the First Session of the Seventh Haidian District People's congress.

In contrast to workers' radical ways of protest, after the second wave of splits, student activists then chose an obviously different paths to continue the Democracy Wall Movement. While radicals were forming underground political parties, moderates later participated in the student elections of the People's Representatives of Beijing University in 1980, which enabled them to join governmental institutions and China's political reform process in the 1980s. Students' arrests and exiles did not happen during the Democracy Wall Movement, but mainly led by the participations of the June Fourth Movement in 1989.

### **Conclusion**

Through analyzing the Democracy Wall activists' different experiences in three different phases, mobilization, divergences, and two parallel movements, it was very clear that student activists were the moderates and the worker activists were the radicals. Student organizations showed very few divergences across the whole movement from late 1978 to 1981, who also barely participated in collective and petitioning activities. Student moderates were more likely to use Marxist or socialist narratives and tended to contribute on the CCP reformists' ideologies. On the opposite, Worker organizations had very strong inner- and inter-organizational divergences. They were also switching positions more frequently, compare to the moderates. In the very early phase of the movement, some worker activists were also use Marxist and socialist narratives, however they soon radicalized as the development of the movement. Terms like "human rights," then became a concept that could justify their behaviors of helping



and organize petitioners. Furthermore, through investigating worker radicals inner-organizational divergences, I found out that activists who with lower inner-organizational position tended to choose radical ways to enhance their position within the group and seize power from founders. Activists held higher inner-organizational position or with more power, however, were more willing to use moderate strategies to protect the organization and the Democracy Wall Movement as a whole. Why did student and worker choose different way to protest? Why did divisions exist between lower- and higher- power holders? This thesis suggest that it was the political access generated activists' divergent personal choices. When an activist has political access to achieve one's political goals, who then tended to adopt moderate position. When an activist lack of political access to achieve one's political goal, who then tended to adopt radical position. Furthermore, educational opportunities and organizational positions were the key factors that generated the political access. Even though, family origins, class interests, social status, personal networks, and so on, all impacted activists' political access, that were educational opportunities and organizational positions determine when these factors are activated and when they are not.

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