

that right away. China is not going to privatize everything right away. And though these guys are signing up certain kinds of agreements, they are not going to live up to those agreements. China is still a very highly protected economy. And nobody is going to force them *not* to protect their economy. I don't think the premise is correct that just because you sign laws and you're going along with them. As far as I can tell, I don't know who's going along with them anyway. This is the problem with the WTO, they're signing all these agreements, it is not clear; then North America and the United States, or Europe are suing one another for giving protections etc.... I'm not sure that the Chinese government now is willing to give up on this. As a matter of fact, in my sense, to the extent that they get serious about this "Chinese Way" as they called it, that on the one hand they talk globalization, on the other they talk this "Chinese Way," which is a particular way not losing yourself into the WTO. As long as they talk about this, they are not going to do what is speculated. It is difficult to say that they are going to collapse. And if they're going to do all that (privatization etc.), yes... There might be a lot of things. There are lots of contradictions in Chinese societies. And I wish that they would recognize some of those contradictions and re-organize politically. I am unwilling to make any sort of predication. Look, in the Soviet Union with all those difficulties, but it didn't collapse. Sure you give some of the other republics away, but that's not collapse.

You have also been actively communicating with intellectuals in Taiwan. The other day you mention China with an "S." "There are a number of China(s)." Can you share your insight on the comparative social realities of the two China(s)?

Do you remember Li Tenghui said there are seven Chinas? As far as I can tell, Taiwan is doing very nicely. I find what is happening in Taiwan very interesting because of this business of indigenization. This is sort of like Hong Kong but much stronger. All of a sudden, stressing this "Taiwanese" identity. ("本土化") To me, this should be an instance of creating a place-based identity, place-based politics. In that sense I have a great deal of admiration of what's going on in Taiwan. You know, my hope would be something like that would happen in Hong Kong also. I have friends in the PRC who said, "It's a very good idea. It should happen here too." But inside PRC, things are a little bit difficult. I've got colleagues in the United States, Americans, political scientists, who think that China should unify. There are foreigners who are advocates of a "greater China" or something. I don't know what all those are supposed to mean. To me, it is really very important that these various Chinese societies achieve some kind of democracy. And I don't see how you can achieve a democracy in a country this size ruled from Beijing, according to habits which are very dictatorial. I try to conceive of it in reverse, that the government in Beijing, instead of fearing that if Taiwan separates out, then maybe Tibet would follow, and then Xin Jiang too. I think that's what they are afraid of. But they also could use Taiwan, or Hong Kong, as an example of creating democracy slowly from the bottom up rather than controlled from the centre. That could happen. Why not? I'm really afraid that (while) you're always playing this balance game, sometimes there is an emergence of this "Chinese Chauvinism," that ends up as a racialized nationalism. And that is a scary kind of thing for everybody, for the Chinese people more than anybody else. And that is a possibility too.

Whereas there is this other thing easily recognized in local differences, and democracy must be based on differences, not homogenate. In that sense, I am all for what's going on in Taiwan. By the way, Lenny, a few years ago, when I was in Taiwan... what's that place, for a long time there has been an anti-dam protest going on...

Ah, Meinung. (<http://www.mpa.ngo.org.tw>)

Yeah, Meinung. That happened to be a day of protest, you know, everybody was there, intellectuals from Tai Da (National Taiwan University), local indigenous people, local county people...and they put us on the platform shouting "Long Live Meinung!" Within Taiwan itself, this is interesting. There are different places that the Taiwanese government has to take into account in its own talk about democracy, right? And this is the problem of place-baseness. Both the problem and the promise: democracy from the bottom up. It is very important for all of us. This democracy that we speak up also has an ecological angle to go with it that I think is very important. In a place like Meinung was very ecological in its orientation. Its indigenous people are very ecologically orientated.

You've been able to speak to different sectors of people in the academia of PRC, are they really releasing the grip on the intelligencia and people are free to research and study anything they feel an urge for?

I think so. Whatever that is pushing it. As I've told you, a graduate student in Fu Dan University, with the encouragement of his professor, translated my Chinese Anarchism book into Chinese. We've got to the point where I've got the permission from the University of California Press to have it published in Chinese. Then,

in Shanghai, they couldn't publish it as the authority says NO. Because towards the end of the book, you remember, I had some comments about Deng Xiaoping, that couldn't pass the censors. So, there are things that you couldn't publish. There are things you can talk about though. A few years ago, I was with a group of Chinese friends, of course quite an unusual group, the so-called China's New Left. It was a conference of literary people. During the conversation I said, did you hear about what Li Tenghui said that there are seven Chinas? Their respond was: "That's a great idea!" But this is a particular group who believe in local bottom up democracy. People have political differences. There are Chinese intellectuals, just like there are Americans who cannot tolerate the idea of many Chinas, different Chinas. In other words, there are political differences among Chinese intellectuals. These days, at least you can see not everybody is trying to follow the party line. People in a meeting can make fun of certain things. People in party institutions like the one that I gave my talk, can make cynical comments about the party line. That means in a sense you can say certain things and get away with it. But you cannot say everything. It's difficult to publish any books about Chen Duxiu, or any thing positive about Anarchism.

There are a number of reports lately about China's stamp on free speech on the internet. Police surveillance is rampant. People got into jail simply because of posting dissident views on bulletin boards or blogs....

Absolutely. You can get into trouble. You have to make a certain distinction. When I talk to people, especially officially connected people...look, they think of me as a Marxist. From the beginning they always say, Arif Dirlik is one of the few Marxist historians in the United States. That's how I was introduced when I gave my first talk in Nan Da (Nanjing University) twenty years ago. Some people complained that I was a revisionist; nevertheless, they see me as the Marxist historian. In a way, when they deal with me, they deal with me as a person who's on the same side. Even when I can disagree with them. But then there are other people, who make up stories – sometimes you can easily sell stories- Americans love to hear things: about how bad the Chinese are, the communist China. But this other consideration also enters: that are you hostile or are you a sympathetic critic? I've never done anything that involved me with the (Chinese) government. I've always been invited to talk with fellow academic friends. But I've written things and my works are translated into Chinese, critical of what goes on after Marxism and after contemporary government etc. Even when they translated sections of my "Origins of Chinese Communism," my interpretation that the Chinese Communist Party in its origin emerged by suppressing other social alternatives, including Anarchism. That part was translated into Chinese. And the person who translated that, of high level official...

It is quite often in Chinese censorship that they have manuscript translated wholly but cutting away sensitive parts when they go to press...

But in my case they translated that part and they said, "This is the kind of things that we should openly acknowledge and realize if we're going to have party democracy. Suppressing dissident alternatives within the party is not always that good." On the other hand, if they cut out part of Hillary Clinton's book, which contains a lot of nonsense that came from people who're very much anti-Chinese; Hillary Clinton should not be complaining, but be more careful about what she includes and who she talks to. I don't think books should be cut, but there are a lot of professional anti-communists in the United States. Most of them are. They make a fortune. They'll get some negative information and goes to a hostile government, and said, see, this is what I discovered in the PRC. And then it would be used as anti-propaganda. One time I ask one of my friends in China, I said, we do all these cultural studies stuff, I write them and you guys are translating them into Chinese, is there a problem? He says, na, the censors don't care most of the time. They don't understand these cultural studies stuff!

It's when you do some social science stuff, beginning to talk about class differences and these things that they understand more easily and interfere. You definitely have to be careful. Comparatively speaking, there are so many people writing so many things now.... I've got these books (published in China), you can buy them here, on class formation in China, new princes in China, new aristocracy in China etc. They are being written by Chinese scholars and read by the populace. There are so many divisions within the party itself. Between people who want to talk about these problems and people who don't. You can see these contradictions. And every once in a while people got caught up.....

Do you think this floodgate of ideologies could be opened up by scholars and writers putting in their effort to publish their new perspectives, so that a basis could be form to usher the central party to a social threshold more plural and tolerant so that a humanistic China could emerge?

Absolutely. I think it is possible to write things critically. It

depends on how you write them. Let me give you an example. I tried to mix criticism with sympathy. And that is how I was measured. I think that's the way why I could get along so nicely with the intellectuals in PRC. They don't think of me as an enemy. I am not typically American because I came from a third world position. So my approach to China is different from most of the American historians, and we can always communicate on those grounds.

Let me tell you about this case. I forgot this guy's name. Some Arab scholar, an aborigine. He lives in Europe some place. Anyway, one of the universities in the States made an offer to the guy for a faculty position, because he was respected for his work in his field, related to Arab societies. He got his work permit and work visa. He was just about to come over to the States when the new National Security administration revoked his visa, on the ground that he had written anti-American things. See, people who talked about China should always keep this thing in mind: that this guy because he had written critical things about United States policy and Israel, is being denied a visa as a fault member of a university! How does this make a different with what happened in the PRC? There are people like Leonard Peltier, the American Indian (<http://www.ratm.de/politik/arm.htm>), and this activist in Philadelphia, what's his name...Mum...

Abu-Jamal Mumia? (<http://www.mumia.org>)

Yeah, Mumia. They are in still jail! Even though people have testified! There are political prisoners in United States. My position is that, of course we should criticize the PRC government when it does badly, but that should always be placed next to what these other people are doing. That there are political prisoners in the States, and there are people putting coercion on academic freedom. In the United States, very often you can do it through private agencies so it doesn't look bad. Like the trustees in the universities. Fifteen years ago, when the Soviet Union failed, some alumnus wrote to the Duke University alumni magazine saying that "now that Communism has fallen in Eastern Europe, we should do something about Marxists at Duke." The university administration stated that "we need intellectual diversity etc...." Which is good. But there are people who ban books in the United States at local libraries etc. So if we are going to be critical of attacks on freedom, we should be critical of attacks on freedom everywhere. And just not speaking about what's happening in PRC in isolation to other places. In that sense there is no difference between Hillary Clinton and George Bush as far as I'm concern.

Coming back to Tiananmen, and dialogues, there must be some alternatives from keeping it as a ritual of vigilante....

I think we need to bring certain kinds of sensitivity and sensibilities into question. Yes, Tiananmen was awful. But, fifteen years later, maybe there is room for dialogue. Way back in the early 80s, I was the few scholars in the US, writing critically of Deng Xiaoping and at that time I was attacked as a Maoist. I said, things are bad, and sooner or later things are going to break apart. It's going to turn into some kind of conflict. Not that China is going to collapse. There are so many contradictions. In come party politics and things are going to happen. Of course, then there are problems in 83, in 86, and finally in 89 it broke up in Tiananmen. But, when Tiananmen happened --I was also really angry. I wrote an article with my wife shortly after-- on the one hand it brought along many contradictions. It brought in Deng's dictatorship. My colleague Mori Meisin in the States wrote: Deng is much more of a Stalinist than Mao. He is a "party order guy." But I also was very much disturbed that Tiananmen was being used by lots of people to undermine the whole idea of socialism. So it was not just a China kind of thing, it is a total attack on socialism. And I think it is very important for the critics to bear in mind also, that Deng made a very interesting statement the following year. He himself has been a revolutionary for very long, and has this memory. In respond to Tiananmen, when there was a boycott of PRC that lasted a couple of years, including United States and England, Deng gave a speech, he said, "these people who have this boycott against China now, are the same people, who during the boxer uprising, invaded China." He said it is a legacy of imperialism that we have not forgot. That too, was true. I know how people in Hong Kong responded to Tiananmen. I was in Hong Kong at that time, summer of 1989. But there was no question Tiananmen was also used by all these people who are predicting and hoping the collapse of China. If you have any sympathy for the Chinese people, would you really want China to fall apart? What a disaster it would be! It's one thing to argue for local government and local democracy, it's another to wish for the collapse of China. With all these criticism, we have to keep in mind, the multiplicity of perspectives and not just look at it from one narrow perspective of what is happening. ? @

