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The role of intellectuals in social development in China

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This international conference was organized by the department of international politics under Prof. Zhao Baoxu and Prof. Shen Mingming, and convened in the new conference building on the Beida campus. The participants were scholars from various disciplines and foreign countries (Australia, Denmark, Singapore, USA), but also former high-level politicians and old cadres, prominent writers and journalists. The majority of participants came from China or were overseas Chinese.

The opening remarks and keynote speakers were well chosen but four out of six speakers were not present personally and their speeches needed to be read out by somebody else. These keynote speakers included among others Li Rui (the former deputy minister of the organizational department of the Central Committee and former secretary of Mao Zedong), Liu Ji (the former deputy chairman of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, consultant of Jiang Zemin and head of the propaganda department, today head of the Sino-Euro international business school), Wu Jiang (a former close associate of Hu Yaobang and dean of the education department at the Party's University), and the former vice president of the Beijing University, Ji Xianlin. Li Rui's long speech introduced the central problem of the conference: the (self-) definition and function of Chinese intellectuals in a non-democratic environment. He demanded in an unusually open manner democratic reforms, a free press and the phasing out of the long enduring, totalitarian dictatorship. Simultaneously he called for the realization of "real Marxism". Like the following speakers, he also focussed on the reflection of the role of intellectuals since the May 4th movement 1919, and addressed both the central question "Who are we?" and the necessity to protect independence as well as a critical spirit.

Throughout the whole conference, the most heated debates were caused by such themes as the evaluation of Hu Yaobang, the emancipation of intellectuals as an important modernization force, and the question, whether the implementation of a democratic system could help to free intellectuals from their dependency on the party.

The evaluation of the role of intellectuals in Chinese history was also concerned with their traditional dependence on politicians and their lack of independence. Yu Keping (Beijing, Center for Comparative Politics) for example, demonstrated by using the destinies of prominent people like Qu Qiubai, an important protagonist of the May 4th movement and scholar of Li Dazhao that too much critical spirit will only lead to failure. Yu and many other participants used an old metaphor of Mao Zedong, "Intellectuals are the hair on the skin", i.e. they do not possess their own skin. Li Jingpeng (Beijing University) on the other hand stated, that Mao Zedong's description of intellectuals was wrong. So as to prove that intellectuals are the cen-

tral force for modernization, he referred to the Enlightenment movement 1915-1919, and to the "Enlightenment movement of scientific socialism" from 1919 to 1921. In his closing remarks, he urged the intellectuals – despite their major role in modernization – to work on their weaknesses i.e. peasant consciousness, grade orientation and opportunism.

The journalist Yang Jisheng from the Xinhua news agency provocatively stated that there is no such group as intellectuals in China if defined as an independent group. Other, more substantial critiques reflected on the Party's history, especially the anti-rightist movement and the Cultural Revolution. It was stated by Prof. Zhao Baoxu and others, that without open reflection and much more detailed research on the Cultural Revolution there would be no chance for democratization in China. Despite the positive evaluation by Cai Decheng (editor of *keji daobao* ["science report"]), that intellectuals became emancipated during the 1990s and that everybody should support the entrance into the WTO because in the long run this would guarantee stability and human rights, the discussion turned again back to the definition of intellectuals. Xu Xianglin (Beijing University) pointed to the necessity of producing "big democratic thinkers" to promote modernization, while others like the nationalist Pan Wei (Beijing University) questioned whether China needs democracy at all. He argued that democracy is a Western product which nobody understands anyway.

Xu Datong (Tianjin University) deconstructed in a very interesting way the belief of some Western and Chinese scholars, that the theory of the "three principles of the people" (*sanmin zhuyi*) of Sun Yatsen can be identified as a condensed form of ancient, democratic ideas in China. He highlighted the aspect that only the preservation of power and stability pressured the rulers to be concerned with the people, and that the concept of "the three principles" has nothing to do with democracy. Qin Hui, another protagonist of the search for indigenous elements of democracy, who has slowly advanced to become "China's Habermas", elaborated the tensions between the three, big philosophical schools of Confucianism, Legalism, and Taoism and compared them with liberalism. The hope for China in the eyes of Qin Hui lies in the formation of "a new Confucianism" which creates a theory of the people and not of the state. Feng Chongyi (Sydney University) analyzed the changing role of intellectuals confronting commercialization and globalization. He sees new possibilities for independence for professionals.

In the conclusion there was a wide consensus that intellectuals should not be treated as instruments for politicians. Interestingly, the discussions revealed much more the concern of the participants than the papers. Against the background of the recent debates inside China, the hot topic was political reform. Especially the possibility for informal debates and the prominence of the participants created a lively atmosphere. Besides that the conference was very well organized, the organizers provided the participants with a lot of information besides the copies of the papers, and a very nice excursion.

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