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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

29 June 1987

China: Struggle Over Educational Policy

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Summary

Since the fall of Hu Yaobang in January, conservative leaders appear to have reasserted their influence forcefully in several areas, including state educational policy. We believe they have been instrumental in beefing up political indoctrination on college campuses, reintroducing stricter ideological qualifications for college applicants and imposing new restrictions on students applying to study abroad. Although these policies will probably increase student alienation from the ruling Communist Party, they have had their intended chilling effect for now on student activism. Reformers appear to have gone along with these changes, but we suspect that educational policy will be one of several key areas where conservatives and reformers quietly struggle for dominance.

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_____ This memorandum was prepared by Political Assessments Branch, China Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 29 June 1987 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Political Assessments Branch, China Division, OEA,

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New Emphasis

Although Zhao Ziyang and other reform leaders have tried to limit the struggle against "bourgeois liberalism"¹ to the party, we believe that conservatives such as Peng Zhen and Deng Liqun have ignored the restriction and have already begun to exert considerable control over state educational policy--an important barometer of the overall political atmosphere. The conservative cast of four central documents this year (numbers 1, 2, 3, and 8) has prepared the way for a number of new, more conservative educational policies, including:

- More politicized admission standards by which more academically qualified students may be rejected on ideological grounds.
- Institution of mandatory political courses in universities.
- Greater emphasis on "social practice"--practical work outside the university--extending into summer vacations and beyond graduation in order to tighten control over students' activities.
- More rigorous party inspection of applicants for overseas study and a new requirement that applicants first work for two years, designed to weed out those who might not return.
- Abolishment of student grants on the premise that students who must borrow money for their education will adopt a more serious attitude toward their studies.
- New restrictions on student debating societies designed to ensure tighter party control.
- The promotion of university political instructors to lecturer and professor status starting in June of this year. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Chinese Academy of Arts and Sciences is now demanding to review all student manuscripts destined for possible publication. [Redacted] many students who demonstrated last winter are expecting work assignments in remote regions as punishment for their activism. [Redacted]

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¹ Conservatives have used the drive against bourgeois liberalism, following on the heels of the student demonstrations and the ouster of party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, to accuse their opponents of promoting capitalism and "total Westernization." [Redacted]

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Impact of The New Policies

To date, conservative-led efforts to reassert party control over the campuses apparently have had their intended effect--student activism has been muzzled. Since the clampdown began, leading reform intellectuals at various universities have been silent, and politically charged anniversaries marking the Tiananmen Incident, May Day, and the May 4th Movement have passed quietly. The new policies, however, will in our judgment exacerbate another problem--the party's already low credibility and prestige among young intellectuals. During the student demonstrations the deteriorating state of the student-party relationship was especially apparent when local party organizations, including the Communist Youth League (CYL), were unable to defuse student unrest. [redacted]

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Student alienation from the party has manifested itself in several other ways:

- The CYL, in which student membership is nearly mandatory, has come to be viewed by students as only a mouthpiece for party authorities rather than as a voice for (or representative of) their interests, according to students in several cities.
- Those students who join the party often do so only to enhance their career prospects, according to Shanghai students interviewed by consular officers.
- After party ostracism of University of Science and Technology Vice President Fang Lizhi, Beijing students showed their defiance by electing him by write-in vote and his wife through regular voting procedures to the Haidian district People's Congress, according to Hong Kong's South China Morning Post. (The Post stated that authorities later nullified Fang's election.)²
- In early June students at Beijing's Central Institute of Finance and Banking directly challenged the party's recent efforts at control by boycotting classes in protest over the occupation of their campus by a tobacco factory since the Cultural Revolution. [redacted]

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Outcome Uncertain

We believe educational policy will increasingly become a center of quiet struggle between reformers and conservatives. Conservatives are likely to push their educational policies as an indirect means of attacking the overall reform agenda. The extent to which Deng Xiaoping and leading reformers can block further conservative inroads will provide one indication of their relative strength over the next several months. We expect the reform leadership to focus on shielding those educational reforms they believe most vital to China's economic development, including admissions based on academic excellence, relatively free debate--at least privately--among intellectuals, and

² The Haidian district of Beijing municipality includes 100,000 of Beijing's 130,000 students. Students comprise 10 percent of the district's population. [redacted]

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rationally assignment of jobs based on students' training. Reformers at the same time probably will accept the increase in political indoctrination on campuses and "social practice" during vacations and after graduation, some seeing these as relatively small sacrifices and some agreeing with conservatives that students would benefit from such programs. [redacted]

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At the local level, we believe that reform officials and academics, who have gained increased autonomy in recent years, will resist many of the new policies while paying lip service to them. A gap between policy and implementation is already evident:

- In Liaoning Province, delegates to a work meeting on education vehemently attacked bourgeois liberalism, according to consular officials, yet their final report dealt solely with improving higher education and increasing funds.
- Subsequent to this meeting a Liaoning university president confided to a consular official that at his institution, practical application of the new policies had boiled down to enforcement of discipline--keeping dormitories clean and enforcing participation in morning exercises.
- Beijing Embassy officers noted that although students theoretically must work for several years before applying to study abroad, individual units continue to make numerous exceptions to the rules.
- At Nanjing University only fifty students have been sent to factories; a college official blamed the weak participation on insufficient funding and the reluctance of factories to receive students. [redacted]

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Possible Impact on Sino-US Exchange Program

The battle over education policy could further complicate an already sensitive area of US-China relations--Beijing's unhappiness over the number of Chinese students who choose not to return after completing their studies here. Indeed, fear of reprisals for supporting the December student protests may prompt more Chinese students in US universities to seek residence here. According to press reports, many students have expressed fears of retaliation for voicing support, especially since the arrest of one student who returned to China to participate in the demonstrations. [redacted]

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We believe conservative leaders might try to capitalize on such an increase in emigration to press reformers to place still tighter restrictions on the selection of candidates for the overseas study program or perhaps even reduce some exchanges with the United States they consider expendable. At minimum we would expect them to criticize US immigration policy, hoping to embarrass reformers who are strong supporters of these exchanges. In fact, several delegates to the recent National People's Congress--where conservatives have a strong voice--singled out the United States for criticism for not preventing Chinese students from obtaining jobs with US firms. Conservatives might also press for an expansion of more "ideologically safe" student exchange programs with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe--a proposal education

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minister Li Peng may have made last year, [Redacted] At
present those countries play host to only a few hundred Chinese students compared to
the 19,000 now in the United States. [Redacted]

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