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China: Grappling With the Lure of the West

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An Intelligence Memorandum

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This memorandum was written by
of the Office of East Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Domestic Policy Branch, OEA,

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This memorandum was coordinated with the National Intelligence Council.

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China: Grappling With the Lure of the West

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Summary

For over a hundred years China's leaders have grappled with the problem of how to limit the social and political impact of contacts with the West, and it is once again an issue in the leadership. This memorandum explores some of the problems and concerns raised by this longstanding dilemma, including its impact on the political infighting taking place as the Chinese Communist Party prepares for its 12th Congress this fall. Beijing, which earlier displayed its concern over foreign influences by staging a campaign against corruption, is disturbed by what it sees as a growing adoption of Western "bourgeois values" by the nation's youth, and a deteriorating faith in the party and socialism.

The fears expressed by some Chinese officials that youthful fascination with foreign things will lead to social upheaval seem exaggerated, in our view; disagreement among top leaders over how to handle the issue of foreign influences has the potential to become more contentious and disruptive than the problem itself.

Conservatives within the leadership are using the issue of youth behavior and Western influences to attack Deng Xiaoping and his open-door economic policies; Deng is attempting to preempt his critics by instituting measures to restrict the spread of foreign ideas and to reinforce socialist ideology. In any case, Beijing has made it clear that China's interest in nurturing economic and technological links with the West will not change.

Efforts to combat foreign influences probably will succeed in reducing the obvious signs of "bourgeois liberalization," such as Western music and hairstyles, but they are unlikely to affect the underlying causes of youth dissatisfaction—political alienation and high unemployment.

Information as of 16 July 1982 has been used in the preparation of this report.

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Leadership Concern

The recent clamor in the Beijing media about the "corrupting influence of Western values" reflects a longstanding leadership concern that contacts with the West are a potential threat to the socialist nature of Chinese society. China's leaders, in addition to historical concern for preserving Chinese values, now also worry about restoring the integrity of the Chinese Communist Party following the disruptions of the late Mao–early post-Mao era, and maintaining social stability in the face of the influence of foreign values. The anticorruption campaign initiated early this year criticized bourgeois values as contributing to the widespread corruption that has blackened the party's public image, increased public dissatisfaction, and hindered economic growth.[1] Party attacks, reported in the Chinese media, similarly link literature critical of government and party to the influence of bourgeois values.

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Beijing now has turned its attention to the influence of bourgeois values on Chinese youth, and in recent weeks the Chinese press has expressed heightened concern about exposing young Chinese to Western lifestyles. Even Deng Xiaoping, who is committed to expanding relations with the West and has generally been more relaxed about the social consequences, has expressed such concerns, telling US visitors last fall that Chinese youth had lost its way and needed to be reeducated. More recently, Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Wenjin told a foreign diplomat that not only Chinese leaders but the masses are concerned about the corrupting influence of bourgeois culture on the conduct and morality of young Chinese.

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In recent years, many Chinese youths in urban centers have adopted lifestyles that offend the puritanical morals of their elders. Party leaders have complained about young people wearing Western clothes, dancing to Western music, and engaging in sexual relations with foreigners. The media have reported an increase in juvenile delinquency and the issue is brought home to party leaders by the behavior of their own children, many of whom have been involved in criminal activities ranging from gang rapes and drugs to embezzlement and smuggling.

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In Beijing's view, this type of behavior represents an erosion of morals which ultimately threatens the future of China's socialist revolution. The media dwell on the creeping influence of bourgeois values which corrupt

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The new look of Chinese youth. [redacted] *Asiaweek* © 25X1

ideals and, unless checked, would lead to the "peaceful evolution" from a socialist country to a nonsocialist one. In March a *People's Daily* editorial called this "corruption" a disaster for the socialist cause and warned that the struggle against this disaster concerns the very rise or fall of the party and the country. Beijing, moreover, saw in the events in Poland a lesson for socialist societies given to too much liberalization. [redacted] 25X1

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Ideological Corruption and the Open Door

[redacted] while Chinese leaders stand united in their concern about bourgeois influence on youth they differ over the causes. Some conservative members of the leadership such as Secretariat member Wang Renzhong, blame the spread of bourgeois values on Deng's economic reform policies which open the door to a greater Western presence and permit more free market activity. The military, which traditionally has been vigilant in matters affecting the social order, has also voiced concern publicly and privately about foreign influences on socialist values. [redacted] 25X1

Deng and his associates refute their critics by making a distinction between the open-door policy itself and its implementation, which they admit has led to some negative side effects. In their newspaper articles, the reformers place the blame on the Gang of Four for creating conditions—for example, erosion of respect for the law and for moral standards—that encourage bourgeois behavior. Commentaries reflecting this view vigorously assert the necessity of the open door for China's modernization, emphasize the need to strengthen ideological and political education to prevent errors in carrying out the policy, and stress that the primary causes of corruption are internal. As one provincial paper put it, "worms only breed when things already have started rotting." [redacted] 25X1

Youths' Perspective

Media discussion of the problem of youth behavior fails to capture many of the issues troubling young Chinese. Attitudes of Chinese youth undeniably are affected by greater exposure to the West. The open-door policy has 25X1 increased the availability of Western goods and contact with foreigners, leading to rising expectations. We believe internal factors are at least as important, however, in explaining the behavior of young Chinese. [redacted]

Chinese youth are increasingly disillusioned with and alienated from the party, in large part as a result of the behavior of older cadre. [redacted] the many and extreme shifts in political ideology during the Cultural Revolution and the Gang-of-Four period have left many young people with little respect for party pronouncements. [redacted]

Practical concerns about their futures discourage young people. In conversations with Embassy officers, young Chinese dwell on the lack of educational opportunities, plus poor teachers and equipment. Those educated during the Cultural Revolution are bitter about receiving a substandard education that limits their prospects in life. High youth unemployment and lack of economic opportunities further contribute to 25X1

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dissatisfaction. The employment situation will get worse in the future; we estimate an annual average of 5 million young workers will enter the urban work force during the next 10 years. 25X1

Combating Bourgeois Liberalism

The leadership is taking a threefold approach to combating the growth of bourgeois values among youth: limiting contacts with Western goods and people; strengthening political education; and improving the party's image. 25X1

Limiting Western Influences

The Central Committee and the State Council issued instructions strictly controlling reactionary or pornographic sound and video products.[2] The provinces have reinforced this ban by issuing implementing regulations. The black market in foreign tapes and recorders is being closed down and in Guangdong antennas capable of receiving Hong Kong television were recently banned. Other directives rule out long hair, blue jeans, and similarly unacceptable Western styles. A ban on disco (dancing to any Western music) in public places has recently been extended to cover private social gatherings. 25X1

Central government and local authorities are stepping up investigations to ferret out offenders. The press reported that a recent crackdown in one district of Shanghai alone netted over 1,000 pieces of pornography. 25X1 25X1 Those found to be involved in proscribed activities may be criticized, fined, subjected to administrative detention or sent for labor education. Party members face the additional threat of expulsion from the party. 25X1

Authorities also have attempted to limit or control contacts between Chinese students and foreigners. New regulations for reporting contacts discourage them from visiting the homes of foreign residents in China, and in April, Shanghai students were prohibited from attending films at the American Consulate. Articles in the media remind Chinese of the proper conduct to be observed in dealings with foreigners, which includes avoiding romantic involvements and being mindful of security concerns. Concrete examples, such as the recent arrest and deportation of an American researcher in Beijing, serve as additional reminders. The researcher's Chinese fiance has been detained, as have the Chinese contacts who gave her internal Chinese Government documents. Embassy and Consulate officials report surveillance of foreigners in China has increased in recent months. 25X1

[2] Pornography in China includes anything with love as a major theme or "racy" content. 25X1

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The old and the new: traditionally clad workers pass cosmetics advertisement.

Asiaweek ©

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Other government measures place strict controls on Chinese students going abroad to study. Central Directive 20 restricts children of high-level cadre from studying overseas in the future, and reduces the number of those who may study abroad by eliminating privately funded study. Briefings prior to departure warn students heading overseas to maintain national pride and not to bring back Western goods or ideas.

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Increased Ideological Education

Ideological education, a constant theme in remarks by party leaders, is being undertaken with renewed vigor at all levels: primary and middle schools, universities, work units, and within the Army and provincial militia. Official guidance calls for improved indoctrination for youths, persons involved in foreign affairs, and children of party cadre, with stress

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placed on the concepts of personal and national integrity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued guidelines on reinforcing the political education of children of its personnel and has called on organizations involved with foreigners to prevent incidents by launching educational drives on patriotism. 25X1

Universities are reemphasizing political education, too, with attendance at study sessions mandatory. Beijing also has announced a new goal of universal enrollment of its 190 million children aged 7 to 14 in the Young Pioneers, dropping for the first time the requirement that children be of suitable class background. Numerous provinces have reported in their media organizing work teams to conduct education on socialism and politics. 25X1

A national conference in June on literature and arts called on the artistic community, which suffered a round of criticism late last year, to reflect these themes in its works. The Minister of Radio and Television and the party Propaganda Director, both newly appointed, have a record of being hardliners on cultural issues who can be expected to fight bourgeois influences in their areas. 25X1

Improving the Party's Image

Beijing's desire to inspire young people and improve their attitude toward the party is part of the drive behind the campaigns to eliminate economic corruption and end abuses of privilege. party editorials call the campaign against economic corruption a major part of the fight against bourgeois liberalism. central authorities have repeatedly urged provincial investigators to seek out party members and high-level officials guilty of crimes to illustrate to the masses the party's intolerance of corruption. 25X1 25X1 25X1

Special attention has been given to the problem of ranking cadre whose children are involved in illegal activities. Cadre have been warned not to shield their children from criminal prosecution, and cases in which parents have refused to help guilty children have been given wide approving publicity. In our view, the restrictions on overseas study for children of ranking cadre are aimed partly at preventing cadre from using "back door" methods to secure this privilege for their offspring. 25X1 25X1 25X1

Effectiveness of the Struggle Against Bourgeois Influence

Beijing will achieve some success in reducing obvious displays of Western goods and lifestyles, but we believe attempts to convince youths that foreign ideas are undesirable will not succeed any more than attempts to convince them of the advantages of socialism. 25X1

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Beijing is cracking down on dancing to Western music.

Asiaweek ©

Although some provincial governments have been slow to enforce the various prohibitions against decadent music and other Western influences, the crackdowns and penalties will reduce the number of long-haired, blue-jeaned youths on China's streets. The efforts at renewed ideological education, however, are not working at many universities. Students report that study session leaders are ridiculed by students, and some students forced into leadership roles refuse to call meetings or openly tell students not to bother to attend. Often student leaders are advocates of party reform. The leadership may be more successful initially in impressing the virtues of socialism on the fertile minds of the Young Pioneers, although the gap between promise and performance will become apparent to them as they grow older. 25X1

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Beijing's attempts to improve the party's image also are unlikely to succeed, and may even increase popular disdain. The anticorruption campaign is meeting resistance throughout the bureaucracy, and is seen as generally ineffective. Provincial media assessments of the campaign hint at disappointing results, while many people, see the campaign as having "snared the small rats and mice but not captured the tigers." Some even view the emphasis on ideological education and the antipornography campaign as attempts to

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divert the masses' attention from cadre involvement in corruption. [redacted] 25X1
[redacted] officials regard the restrictions on study abroad as 25X1
hypocritical because they know many top leaders already have children studying overseas. [redacted] 25X1

Despite indications that many ordinary persons share the leadership's concern about bourgeois liberalism, the masses are skeptical of this campaign and political campaigns in general. Press commentaries indicate that people are reluctant to get involved in the bourgeois liberalism issue for fear it will be followed by a backlash if the political mood shifts. [redacted] 25X1

Beijing's measures moreover fail to respond to young people's concern about lack of opportunities. Attempts to upgrade education are under way—Beijing has reinstated academic standards, increased teacher education, and is attempting to expand facilities for higher education—but we expect progress will be very slow. [redacted] 25X1

The issue of youth unemployment will be even more difficult to resolve [redacted] 25X1
[redacted] the government is 25X1
having serious problems finding jobs for this year's secondary school and college graduates. The government's bureaucratic streamlining measures have reduced the number of office openings for officials, and almost all available employment is in the science and engineering fields. Most 1982 graduates, who would prefer factory employment, will have to settle for less attractive jobs. Even then, Chinese officials have told US Embassy personnel that urban youths often wait two years or longer between graduation and assignment. [redacted] 25X1

Implications for US Interests

Efforts to combat bourgeois liberalism will, we believe, cause the United States some inconvenience but will not threaten the overall relationship. The anticorruption campaign, for instance, may temporarily slow some business contacts between Chinese and Western businessmen. Similarly, the restrictions on contacts with foreigners will make it more difficult for US diplomatic personnel, journalists, and foreigners to meet with Chinese. Beijing is committed to the open-door policy, however, despite rumblings from conservative members of the hierarchy. Deng, Premier Zhao Ziyang, and others have repeatedly affirmed present economic and trade policies, and even commentaries critical of the open door have not suggested reversing them. [redacted] 25X1

Persistent Issue

China has been worried about the corrupting influence of foreigners since it first opened to outsiders during the 19th century, and while restrictions on contacts with foreigners may ease at some point, we believe the issue of

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bourgeois liberalization will remain a sensitive one in the leadership. China's need for contacts with the West—and its concern about those contacts—will continue, as will discontent among Chinese youth.

The fears expressed by some Chinese officials that youthful fascination with foreign things will lead to social upheaval seem to us to be exaggerated. We have seen no evidence indicating that Chinese youth, many of whom remain basically apathetic about politics, are interested in or capable of translating their essentially self-centered concerns into a political movement. Deng Xiaoping also has demonstrated his willingness to crack down on any movement which seems to be getting out of hand.

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The disagreement among top leaders over how to handle the issue of foreign influences is more significant. Conservative members, in our view, will continue to focus on youth lifestyle as a means of attacking the entire reform program. Deng will seek to reduce his vulnerability on this issue and co-opt his critics by supporting measures to limit foreign cultural influences while ensuring that the basic economic policy of opening to the West remains intact. The reformers also must beware of the latent xenophobia running beneath the campaign against bourgeois influences. Too strident a tone against Western values threatens to activate antiforeign sentiments among the population; Deng and his allies want to avoid frightening China's foreign business contacts.

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We believe the topic will tend to be more fractious at times of increased political sensitivity, such as prior to important political meetings. The 12th Party Congress, expected this fall, undoubtedly is one factor in the attention currently given to bourgeois influences and will serve to keep the issue before the public and the leadership in coming months. Deng will have to deflect criticism of his program continually and work to isolate further his opponents, who, as the 12th Party Congress approaches, will seek to use any political handhold to forestall a sweep for the reformers.

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