

Minzhu and the Dynamic Definition of Democracy in China

Abstract

The Chinese word “Minzhu” is often equated to the word “democracy” in English translations. However, this translation is not entirely accurate and the definition is much vaguer than at first glance. With translations being ambiguous, it may be more helpful to understand minzhu from the perspective of those who have supported this concept. I look into both the Democracy Wall Movement of the late 1970s and the 1989 demonstrations in China to better understand what minzhu meant to this era of protesters. The definition of minzhu and the changes to it are fundamental in understanding these so-called democracy movements in the 1970s and 1980s.

Introduction

From the appearance of a Democracy Wall in the late 1970s until the 1989 demonstrations, a “democracy movement” gained prominence in China. However, describing it as a movement for democracy may not be particularly accurate as the word “Minzhu,” the notion that the protesters were supporting, is not a direct translation for democracy. This raises questions about what exactly minzhu means and what the demonstrators were fighting for. Even if there were many varying ideas in this democracy movement, surely there must have been some consensus among the demonstrators about what minzhu meant. Since the late 1970s, this democracy movement was always a movement dedicated to securing more human rights for the population, but its goals only began to resemble many aspects of Western democracy towards the end of this democracy movement in the late 1980s.

This paper is organized to differentiate the Democracy Wall Movement from the protests in 1989 and why the movement became more Westernized in 1989 than it was in the late 1970s. This look into the democracy movement starts with Lei Guang's attempts to find a direct translation to minzhu and how the word is incredibly vague in its meaning. Then, the participants of the Democracy Wall are analyzed to highlight the difficulty of finding a definition for minzhu from a movement that was so ideologically diverse. The 1989 protests are then examined, starting with the economic issues that often defined the protests and why earlier works like those of Wei Jingsheng showcase why this began to Westernize the demonstrations. Some consideration is also given to show how the movement became less influenced by some of the old Marxist ideas that had been more common in the 1970s. The analysis then goes on to showcase how and why minzhu came to resemble Western Democracy in 1989.

Attempting a Direct Translation

When attempting to understand minzhu and its meaning beyond the translation of "democracy" it is important to look into minzhu's actual direct translation. However, this itself is still mired in complexity. The word is composed of two characters; The first character is "min" which generally indicates the governed or the common people. However, as Lei Guang points out, other definitions are also given to min, definitions which contradict each other. The communists used it to describe the proletariat despite the fact that other theorists use it as a way to allude to individual citizens. Zhu is the second character and has no easy direct translation either. One translation claims that it means "master" while it can also be used to mean "primary". These multiple definitions already give even the most direct translations of minzhu great

complexity.¹ Already, it appears as though direct translations are too distinct from each other to give minzhu an unambiguous meaning, especially in the context of the democracy movement. Depending on which definition one uses, thoroughly different meanings could be given to minzhu as a concept. Claiming that the protestors were fighting for the proletarians to be masters is very different from seeing them as advocating for the primacy of the individual citizen. None of these definitions outright mean democracy in the Western sense either, which only further complicates the link between minzhu and any Western idea of democracy. To understand minzhu in the context of the Democracy Movement, it may be more useful to look at specific details of the movement to gain a clearer picture of what the protestors really meant when they pushed for minzhu in their demonstrations.

Minzhu's Meaning During the Democracy Wall

In late 1978, it was a brick wall in Beijing that facilitated the ideas of minzhu. Every day, people would come to put posters on this unassuming wall, eventually known as the Democracy Wall, discussing a wide range of topics.² To look at the Democracy Wall is to look at a movement that was very much divided in its goals. Brodsgaard points out two very different groups which comprised some of the supporters of the Democracy Wall: the “Socialist Democrats” and the “Abolitionists”.³ The socialist democrats viewed minzhu through a Marxist perspective and believed the Communist Party had fallen out of touch with the people. They advocated for a socialist government that was more accountable to its citizens and also protected

¹ Lei Guang, “Elusive Democracy: Conceptual Change and the Chinese Democracy Movement, 1978-79 to 1989,” (*Modern China* 22, no. 4 1996): 419-420, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/189303>.

² George Black and Robin Munro, *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement*, (New York, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993), 42.

³ Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard, “The Democracy Movement in China, 1978-1979: Opposition Movements, Wall Poster Campaigns, and Underground Journals,” (*Asian Survey* 21, no. 7 1981): 768-769, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2643619>.

its citizens' human rights. They often held up Yugoslavia or the Paris Commune as a system of government that China should implement. To many, ideas that resembled human rights were the main focus over participation in government.⁴ Meanwhile, the abolitionists believed that democracy would not function within a socialist system and that an entirely new system was needed to bring about their vision for a democratic government. They believed in implementing a multiparty democratic system similar to that of the United States, doing away with one party rule. The socialist democrats believed that in order to ensure democracy in China, the socialist revolution needed to undergo changes, while the abolitionists believed the socialist revolution needed to be entirely undone.⁵ This demonstrates that, just like the definition of minzhu itself, this democracy movement seemed to be split since the days of the Democracy Wall. The supporters still seemed to have very different ideas on what China's problems were and how to fix them. However, it seems as though both supported enhanced human rights. While neither could particularly agree on the exact government structure, they wanted a government that would respect the rights of the citizens and have greater input from the public to ensure these rights were upheld. At least during the Democracy Wall, it appears as though minzhu did not really mean democracy as much as it meant the enhancement of human rights under a disparate array of profoundly different systems of governance.

It should be noted that the material posted on the Democracy Wall was much more diverse than just two differing political ideologies about what kind of democracy is ideal. Much of it consisted of general complaints that had very little to do with the lack of democracy in the

⁴ Lei Guang, "Elusive Democracy: Conceptual Change and the Chinese Democracy Movement, 1978-79 to 1989," (*Modern China* 22, no. 4 1996): 430-432, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/189303>.

⁵ Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard, "The Democracy Movement in China, 1978-1979: Opposition Movements, Wall Poster Campaigns, and Underground Journals," (*Asian Survey* 21, no. 7 1981): 768-769, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2643619>.

government. Some people criticized societal standards, such as the idea that premarital sex was wrong. Other complaints were political, but were not necessarily promoting a more democratic direction. Instead, protestors would simply make claims that Mao was not infallible or that there needed to be a reconciliation with the Soviet Union. This was generally supported by the reformist wing of the party under Deng Xiaoping, which had rehabilitated many people who had been persecuted under the Cultural Revolution and the Anti-Rightist Campaign for their beliefs and promoted an atmosphere where the people would be allowed to act and speak more freely than they had been prior. This was the first time the party had ever allowed this kind of spontaneous mass movement free from the government since 1949.⁶ At the first glance, it would seem like this makes the Democracy Wall overall, too broad to find any true unified consensus on minzhu among those who participated. However, this is not the case. Instead those who were involved in the Democracy Wall were supporting greater rights by expressing a sense of freedom of speech. The communist government had never allowed them this kind of freedom before, even statements just questioning Mao's leadership were a newly accepted idea. Now, ordinary people no longer had these rights denied like they had in the decades prior, they were allowed to challenge some ideas and the government even allowed this to occur. This shows that the movement for minzhu, at its heart, was a movement supporting the enhancement of greater rights and freedoms in China more than it was about any specific form of government. Opinions within the movement at this time were simply too diverse for there to be much of a consensus beyond that. For example, Chen Ziming and Wu Juntao's journal the *Beijing Spring* openly praised Deng Xiaoping and gave their support to the party in its efforts to reform and allow for enhanced rights under his leadership. In contrast, Wei Jingsheng's poster *The Fifth Modernization* claims that

⁶ George Black and Robin Munro, *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement*, (New York, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993), 40-41.

Deng's leadership would change nothing substantially and that China needed to embrace democracy, freedom and happiness if the country ever wished to modernize.⁷ Enhanced rights was the only thing these disparate groups could agree was necessary for China just from wildly different perspectives. That is what the Democracy Wall was about. Even though many participants were not explicitly demanding greater freedoms, they were still supporting it via speaking their mind in a way that was previously frowned upon. After oppressive programs like the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Cultural Revolution, people were finally granted more leeway regarding what they could say, and with that, the ball was now rolling on minzhu as it could be expressed by those who had been denied it. During the summer of 1979, Deng Xiaoping had decided the Democracy Wall Movement had grown too radical against the government and closed down the Democracy Wall as well as requiring that all posters had to be registered and have their contents pre-approved before they could be posted. Thus, the mass movement of free speech not subject to government supervision had come to an end.⁸

A Definition Bound in Economics

The relative lack of freedoms and rights that remained after the Democracy Wall was shut down also eventually led to the 1989 Democracy Movement. One of the main causes was a lack of economic freedom that was felt by many at the time. Despite the government's efforts at reforms, the status of economic rights in China still left much to be desired. Even though the government had been allowing for greater market control over the economy it still did not want to give up too much control to businesses in their ability to participate in the market. Controls

⁷ George Black and Robin Munro, *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement*, (New York, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993), 44-50.

⁸ George Black and Robin Munro, *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement*, (New York, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993), 52.

over things like investment and raw materials did not end up being given to businesses but instead wound up in the hands of provincial officials. The reforms to the economy generally led to a form of decentralization which delegated power to different levels to provincial officials instead of central government officials over private business. Many resources were also sold at prices that had been set by the state instead of market prices, which often had very large variations. This decentralized state control over the economy eventually led to a massive culture of corruption among bureaucrats, stemming from the decentralization that often led to a lack of oversight over provincial officials who now had much more power.⁹

The issue of inflation as well was an issue that led to unrest in 1989. Loose government spending practices that resulted in an increased monetary supply eventually led to increased inflation, as the central government gave provincial authorities more authority to spend money on investment projects.¹⁰ Even though the government may have given more control over the economy to the market, it still appears as though it held all the cards when it came to economic decision-making. Decentralization was not a process that relinquished state control in any way over the economy, it just pawned the job off to a different level of government that was much more corrupt due to the aforementioned lack of oversight. With dissatisfaction over disappointing economic reforms, it may be hard to find where the expression of minzhu may come into play here. However, it shows that people were denied their rights in economic decision making as corrupt provincial officials controlled the economy over private individuals. What this stemmed from was a lack of minzhu in the economy, there was still much to be desired

⁹ Huang Yasheng. "The Origins of China's Pro-Democracy Movement and the Government's Response: a Tale Of Two Reforms," (The *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 14, no. 1 1990): 32–33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45289938>.

¹⁰Huang Yasheng. "The Origins of China's Pro-Democracy Movement and the Government's Response: a Tale Of Two Reforms," (The *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 14, no. 1 1990): 33–35, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45289938>.

in the rights of the common people to be able to have their own sway over their own economic situation. Coupled with the issues brought on by inflation, people wished to express their rights of dissatisfaction with the government's perceived economic mismanagement. Think back to the Democracy Wall and how many used it as an opportunity to use this right of expression to complain about many different kinds of government policies. This, too, is how the 1989 Democracy Movement began as; a movement dedicated to expressing discontent with economic policy which saw many attempting to kindle a right to protest the government's decisions. Protesting in order to gain more rights in the economic sphere is almost emblematic of minzhu's overall goal of securing more rights and freedoms for the populace whether that be their rights to expression or in the economic realm.

The concept of minzhu and the economy were fundamentally linked for some of the supporters of the democracy movement during this time period. This included Wei Jingsheng, who wrote that it was China's fifth modernization during the Democracy Wall era. He challenged Deng Xiaoping's idea of the Four Modernizations that were promised would allow China to surpass developed nations like the United States. It was then argued by Wei that the only means to truly accomplish this was through democratization. Modernizing the economy without doing the same for society was viewed as a fruitless task. The Democracy Wall is highlighted by Wei as the people's first battleground for democracy which will eventually lead to freedom and modernization.¹¹ This idea of minzhu leading to modernization was not limited to Wei and carried on in the movement all the way through 1989. Many of the student demonstrators promised that minzhu's individual rights were a means to an end for China's

¹¹ Wei Jingsheng "The Fifth Modernization" in *The Search for Modern China*, edited by Janet Chen, Pei-Kai Cheng, Michael Lestz and Jonathan D. Spence, (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 498-506, 2013.

further modernization. Many believed the reason for the lackluster economic reform was a lack of minzhu reform.¹² This shows that, to many, minzhu was merely an economic stepping stone that could lead to China's economic modernization after the economy had seemingly been underperforming in the late 1980s. However, this also represents somewhat of a shift in minzhu's definition. While the idea dates back to Wei's writings and the Democracy Wall, they seem to become fully apparent in 1989. Many now wanted to emulate developed Western democratic nations. It appears as though minzhu may have taken more of a Western turn with the 1989 Democracy Movement as Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms left much to be desired. Even if this was for purely economic reasons, it still does demonstrate that many in the movement gave a nod to developed Western nations as the movement became more aligned to achieving a democracy that began to resemble something which was getting similar to Western democracy instead of the more varied opinions during the Democracy Wall Era in the late 1970s.

The Westernization of Minzhu

It would be the death of the reformist former General Secretary of the Party Hu Yaobang which began the demonstrations in 1989. With the loss of such prominent reformer and the aforementioned economic woes, there was a great feeling of anguish among students and many others as well. While it only started with a few hundred students, the 1989 demonstrations eventually came to involve millions of people, many of whom were not students either.¹³ Some other echoes of the Democracy Wall movement from the late 1970s still existed in the 1989 student demonstrations. Much like how the Democracy Wall facilitated people's abilities to post

¹² Lei Guang, "Elusive Democracy: Conceptual Change and the Chinese Democracy Movement, 1978-79 to 1989," (*Modern China* 22, no. 4 1996): 427, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/189303>.

¹³ Jiping Zuo and Robert D. Benford, "Mobilization Processes and the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement," (*The Sociological Quarterly* 36, no. 1 1995), 131-135, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4121281>.

complaints and grievances about the government, in 1989 Tiananmen Square became a space dedicated to making critiques. Demonstrators had much to say about the aforementioned economic woes and corruption, but also discussed other topics such as police brutality and hunger.¹⁴ This shows that Tiananmen Square had become a similar forum to what the Democracy Wall once was: a place dedicated to the right to speak freely and criticize the government for its imperfections. This is still in the same spirit of the minzhu which had inspired many to do the same thing about a decade prior and post their grievances to the Democracy Wall, which represented a spirit of enhanced rights. Even though the perceived failure of economic reforms proved to be a large sticking point for the demonstrators, they used the opportunity to express their grievances over many other problems that they felt like the government could improve on. These rights were still what the demonstrators had desired first and foremost. Rights over the economy, rights over speech and rights to criticize. They wanted these rights to be enshrined while expressing them at the same time. Demonstrators and minzhu supporters were still willing to take the opportunities to express their rights where they presented themselves. This expression of these rights that loosened government control over the people was fundamentally the heart of the minzhu movement.

Despite many of the similarities to the divided Democracy Wall Movement, the student demonstrators in 1989 were certainly becoming more Western in their rhetoric as well. In the Democracy Wall Movement, many demonstrators criticized the government from a Marxist perspective. However, that had changed by the time of the 1989 student demonstrations, as many of the students sounded much more like Western figures than they did Marxist ones. For

¹⁴ Dorothy J. Solinger, "Democracy with Chinese Characteristics," (*World Policy Journal* 6, no. 4 1989): 625, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40209125>.

example, some students in their posters echoed the words of foreign figures like Martin Luther King Jr and his “I Have a Dream” speech.¹⁵ This demonstrates the fact that the definition of minzhu was becoming less about a very vague concept of rights to be granted and became more inspired by Western ideas of democracy. The movement’s supporters from the days of the Democracy Wall who would have defined minzhu as greater rights under a still socialist system had become less prominent than the abolitionists who believed minzhu was some form of Western Democracy. The definition of minzhu was shifting and becoming more solid than it once had been. The mood that had led to the Democracy Wall’s very general complaints and suggestions had given way to a movement that wanted more from the government than just a few policy changes. Instead now protestors began asking for major changes which would allow China to emulate Western democracies and therefore imitate their prosperity that they felt had eluded China during Deng Xiaoping’s time as the country’s leader. Essentially, the 1989 demonstrations broadly wanted to emulate Western economic success via implementing something resembling a Western Democratic system in China.

Distancing the Movement from Marxism

It should also be noted that many of the demonstrators in 1989 had to cloud their own message as a tool of political convenience so that the demonstrators would be more tolerable in the view of the government as well. According to Philip J Cunningham’s observations of the protests on May 4, 1989, many students utilized communist banners and anthems as a means to tie the 1989 movement to the May 4th movement of 1919, a movement which the Communist Party also ties itself to. This made it harder for the government to crackdown on these

¹⁵Michael S. Duke, *The Iron House: A Memoir of the Chinese Democracy Movement and the Tiananmen Massacre*, (Laton, Utah: Peregrine Smith Books, 1990), 24.

demonstrations, as on the surface level these were just young communists who were celebrating an anniversary that was also celebrated by the Communist Party itself. However, Cunningham implies these connections to the current communist government truly were only surface level, one look at the rhetoric being used and it becomes clear that this was hardly supporting the Communist Party as it had been ruling thus far. Slogans calling for the end of the of the despised corruption within the government or outright claiming that the demonstrators are asking for both Western democracy and enhanced rights often accompanied these supposedly communist inspired protests.¹⁶ Minzhu is a word that dates back much further, even being used by reformers towards the end of the Qing Dynasty. However, it was still the slogan of those students who had marched in 1919, yet it was clear these demonstrators were marching for a government of the people that had yet to exist and not one supporting the current communist one.¹⁷ Despite the attempts to placate communist authorities with the connections to the communist sentiments of the May 4th movement, these connections hardly went any deeper than that. These were not the same demonstrations of the Democracy Wall that often utilized Marxist language due to government influence in the demonstrators' thought process. Instead, these were students who believed in something completely different from their predecessors and wanted a democratic system to be implemented. They were claiming the communist government was corrupt too, something which is not exactly emblematic of supporting it. These connections to the communists of May 4th were little more than lip service. It was not a hard connection for the student demonstrators to make, after all, they were still shouting the same words that had been shouted by students in 1919 even if the circumstances surrounding them were incredibly

¹⁶ Philip J. Cunningham, *Tiananmen Moon: Inside the Chinese Student Uprising of 1989*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 26-27.

¹⁷ Philip J. Cunningham, *Tiananmen Moon: Inside the Chinese Student Uprising of 1989*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 48.

different. The demonstrators' genuine connections to May 4th 1919 were the ones that emphasized the calls for minzhu or democracy which had gone unanswered for decades, not for the Marxist elements of the movement which was highlighted by the communist leadership.

The 1989 Democracy Movement's separation from socialist thought becomes clearer in some of the big character posters. One such poster claims that the Stalinist socialism that has been present in China since Mao has been an autocracy the whole time. It claims that this variety of socialism that has existed in China is monarchist and feudalist. The regime has been centered entirely around the rule of a few men over the rule of law and that this means China has hardly been a republic as it claims to be and is instead merely a monarchy in actuality. The anonymous creator of this poster also laments the fact that the party and government are so intertwined and that the high-ranking cadres have become a privileged class at this point.¹⁸ This shows how some demonstrators truly felt about the socialist system in China beyond vague gestures to appeal to the communist party officials. It was viewed as just another autocracy, completely antithetical to the concept of minzhu. The definition of minzhu had lost much of the Marxist connotations of making the proletariat masters that it had gained under Mao's rule. The way many demonstrators during the Democracy Wall Movement along with the way the communist government had depicted the word in a Marxist light was being challenged by these demonstrators. Instead now, it advocated for rule of law and the end of one-party rule, something that certainly stands in contrast to the protestors who were simply advocating for continuing the same system with more rights being granted to the people. Instead, an entirely new system needed to be implemented in the view of many of the demonstrators in 1989.

¹⁸ "Defects of the Stalinist Political System," in *China's Search for Democracy: The Student Movement and the Mass Movement of 1989*, ed. Suzanne Ogden, Kathleen Hartford, Nancy Sullivan, and David Zweig, (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 113-114.

Freeing the Press as a Stepping Stone

Many also began to view the idea of increased rights as just the first part of a much larger process of changing Chinese government and society. For example, a contemporary journal article published by Han Hua supporting the 1989 democracy movement advocates for a free press as a means to influence Chinese society and bring about a process of democratization that will begin to resemble that of Western countries. He discusses how people have been able to speak more freely in recent years, but that this has done little to bring about actual change as individual complaints have been ineffective at getting much accomplished. Han also laments the fact that China's press has largely remained unchanged since the late 1970s and that it needs to be freed if the people are to actually be influential in any meaningful way. This freedom of the press is necessary for any form of political pluralism and democracy to form as it would begin to decentralize political power with many different press organizations that no longer are the government's mouthpiece. It is pointed out that many Western countries had democratic revolutions when private individuals' newspapers came to prominence. Many other socialist countries were beginning to carry out reforms like this and it was argued that China should also begin to ease its press laws.¹⁹

This focus on the free press demonstrates the differences in the Democracy Wall Movement's concept of minzhu and the 1989 Democracy Movement's concept of minzhu. In the late 1970s, achieving these greater rights were an accomplishment on their own. Freer speech and an ability to criticize the government more were accomplishments themselves and embodied what minzhu meant back then. Now, however, these relaxed controls were not enough to achieve

¹⁹ Han Hua, "The Road to Freedom of the Press in China," in *Cries For Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement*, ed. Han Minzhu and Hua Sheng (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 107-110.

minzhu by 1989 and the movement needed to demand more freedoms. Certainly, a fully free press was a more expansive demand than just a more relaxed ability to individually criticize some government policies. But not only that, the free press was not completely satisfactory on its own either. It was what the free press could truly accomplish, which was beginning a democratization process that would pluralize China's political system and end one-party rule in the country. The enhanced rights that minzhu once primarily advocated for were sidelined for the larger picture of a what sounds much more like a democracy than the minzhu of the 1970s. The depth of the movement was deepening and its goals becoming narrower despite how more grandiose they were now becoming.

The Western influence in this process should also be noted as well. It is being argued here that China should follow the same course of democratization that many Western countries had in the past with this freeing of the press, which shows that the minzhu being advocated for in 1989 was becoming more comparable to Western democracy than it ever had before. This is in line with how many of the student demonstrators had criticized the aforementioned economic problems as well. If China were to fully economically modernize, it had to do it as the West had via implementing democracy. If China were to implement democracy, it had to do it as the West had via freeing the press first. Han's points about the press illustrate just how westernized minzhu had now become compared to its earlier definitions in the late 1970s.

Why the Definition Changed

But what had changed since the Democracy Wall that made the supporters of minzhu become so much more Western-oriented? Why did the definition of minzhu change so much in only about ten years? During the 1980s, the government had become much more lax in censoring and suppressing unauthorized political groups. This allowed many students to view the

government more critically and have a more independent mindset. Many political organizations began to form on college campuses as a result of these loosened controls, oftentimes being unofficial and not inline with the government's ideology, which was in stark contrast to the Mao Era's use of strict political studies and frequent imprisonment for those who spoke critically. These political groups also became important in organizing the demonstrations that would take place in 1989.²⁰ This coincided with thousands of Chinese students being allowed to study abroad, the United States being an especially popular country to travel to. Many students came back with more knowledge of Western democratic freedoms and prosperity from this openness and now wished for China to implement these same values.²¹ It would appear as though Deng Xiaoping's policy of greater openness on both the domestic and international stage had unintended consequences for him. It brought in new ideas that contrasted his authoritarian government and caused many to question whether his policies were truly effective at bringing prosperity to China's economy. Students were bringing these Western ideas in and now being allowed to speak about them much more freely than they had been just ten years prior. As economic reform failed to live up for many, the ability to criticize the government's policy as being ineffective if it did not include some form of Western-inspired democratic reform became pivotal to the minzhu movement by 1989. Many looked to the West and its ideas of democracy as a means to fix China's problems, they had now seen firsthand what it had to offer compared to Deng Xiaoping's reforms and many students were convinced it was the way to advance. It now became much easier for minzhu to resemble Western Democracy instead of just a version of the

²⁰ Jiping Zuo and Robert D. Benford, "Mobilization Processes and the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement," (*The Sociological Quarterly* 36, no. 1 1995), 135–36, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4121281>.

²¹ Michael S. Duke, *The Iron House: A Memoir of the Chinese Democracy Movement and the Tiananmen Massacre*, (Laton, Utah: Peregrine Smith Books, 1990), 21.

same system with more rights included. Students now knew much more about Western Democracy than their Democracy Wall predecessors. Minzhu was changed because China had changed. The government's ability to control political thought was no longer as stringent as it had been around the time of the Democracy Wall movement and thus the thought process of the movement's supporters had changed since then.

Conclusion

The definition of minzhu had changed a good deal since the beginning of the democracy movement in the late 1970s to the student movement in 1989. What initially could only be broadly defined as a call for enhanced rights with Marxist connotations for many became increasingly westernized and began to resemble a full-fledged Western democracy. Minzhu cannot be given a very specific definition throughout this era of the minzhu movement, the closest to one would be implementing greater rights. Minzhu's definition changed as China changed, but it certainly had proper meaning in each distinct era of the movement as each demonstration built its own overall consensus on minzhu's definition.

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