NEW MAY FOURTH MANIFESTO[i]
read by Wuer Kaixi at Tiananmen Square May 4, 1989

”Fellow students, fellow countrymen:

Seventy years ago today, a large group of illustrious students assembled in front of Tiananmen, and a new chapter in the history of China was opened. Today, we are once again assembled here, not only to commemorate that monumental day but more importantly, to carry forward the May Fourth spirit of science and democracy. Today, in front of the symbol of the Chinese nation, Tiananmen, we can proudly proclaim to all the people in our nation that we are worthy of the pioneers of seventy years ago.

For over one hundred years, the pioneers of the Chinese people have been searching for a path to modernize an ancient and beleaguered China, Following the Paris Peace Conference, they did not collapse in the face of imperialist oppression, but marched boldly forward. Waving the banners of science and democracy, they launched the mighty May Fourth Movement. May Fourth and the subsequent New Democratic Revolution were the first steps in the patriotic democracy movement of Chinese students. From this point on, Chinese history entered a completely new phase. Due to the socioeconomic conditions in China and the shortcomings of intellectuals, the May Fourth ideals of science and democracy have not been realized. Seventy years of history have taught us that democracy and science cannot be established in one fell swoop and that impatience and despair are of no avail. In the context of China's economy and culture, the Marxism espoused by the Chinese Communist Party cannot avoid being influenced by remnants of feudal ideology. Thus, while New China has steadily advanced toward modernization, it has greatly neglected building a democracy. Although it has emphasized the role of science, it has not valued the spirit of science--democracy. At present, our country is plagued with problems such as a bloated government bureaucracy, serious corruption, the devaluation of intellectual work, and inflation, all of which severely impede us from intensifying the reforms and carrying out modernization. This illustrates that if the spirit of science and democracy, and their actual processes, do not exist, numerous and varied feudal elements and remnants of the old system, which are fundamentally antagonistic to large-scale socialist production, will reemerge in society, and modernization will be impossible. For this reason, carrying on the May Fourth spirit, hastening the reform of the political system, protecting human rights, and strengthening rule by law have become urgent tasks of modernization that we must undertake.

Fellow students, fellow countrymen, a democratic spirit is precisely the absorption of the collective wisdom of the people, the true development of each individual's ability, and the protection of each individual's interests; a scientific spirit is precisely respect for individual nature, and the building of the country on the basis of science. Now more than ever, we need to review the experiences and lessons of all student movements since May Fourth, to make science and rationalism a system, a process, Only then can the tasks the May Fourth Movement set before us be accomplished, only then can the spirit of May Fourth be carried forward, and only then can our wish for a strong China be realized.

Fellow students, fellow countrymen, the future and fate of the Chinese nation are intimately linked to each of our hearts. This student movement has but one goal, that is, to facilitate the process of modernization by raising high the banners of democracy and science, by liberating people from the constraints of feudal ideology, and by promoting freedom, human rights, and rule by law. To this end, we urge the government to accelerate the pace of political reform, to guarantee the rights of the people vested in the law, to implement a press law, to permit privately run newspapers, to eradicate corruption, to hasten the establishment of an honest and democratic government, to value education, to respect intellectual work, and to save the nation through science. Our views are not in conflict with those of the government. We only have one goal: the modernization of China.

... Our present tasks are: first, to take the lead in carrying out experiments in democratic reform at the birthplace of the student movement - the university campus, democratizing and systematizing campus life; second, to participate actively in politics, to persist in our request for a dialogue with the government, to push democratic reforms of our political system, to oppose graft and corruption, and to work for a press law. We recognize that these short-term objectives are only the first steps in democratic reform; they are tiny, unsteady steps. But we must struggle for these first steps, we must cheer for these first steps.

Fellow students, fellow countrymen, prosperity for our nation is the ultimate objective of our patriotic student movement. Democracy, science, freedom, human rights, and rule by law are the ideals that we hundreds of thousands of university students share in this struggle. Our ancient, thousand-year civilization is waiting, our great people, one billion strong, are watching. What qualms can we possibly have? What is there to fear? Fellow students, fellow countrymen, here at richly symbolic Tiananmen, let us once again search together and struggle together for democracy, for science, for freedom, for human rights, and for rule by law.

Let our cries awaken our young Republic!”

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[i] *NEW MAY FOURTH MANIFESTO* in Han Minzhu, editor, *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 135-137