

## China's Hero of Democracy: Gorbachev

By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF and SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES MAY 14, 1989

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When Mikhail S. Gorbachev arrives on Monday for four days of talks designed to restore normal relations between China and the Soviet Union, he will be cast in the unusual role of champion of democracy.

It is the role that American Presidents like to fill, but there is much more anticipation in China's democratic movement today than there was on the eve of President Bush's visit in February. Almost everybody seems to think that the Soviet leader's visit will do more for democracy in China than Mr. Bush's trip did, and some believe that the Soviet Union will do more than the United States to inspire political liberalization in China.

"China used to be afraid of influence from the West," said Yan Jiaqi, a prominent political scientist and supporter of greater democracy. "Now we are afraid of influence from the Soviet Union.

"If we want to keep out Western influence, we can say we're against 'bourgeois liberalization,' or against 'total Westernization,' " Mr. Yan added. "But we can't use that pretext against Soviet influence. Nobody, not even Deng Xiaoping, can resist the Soviet influence, because there is no ideological concept to resist it."

Democracy Is Not on the Agenda

The perception of Mr. Gorbachev as an evangelist for democracy might

surprise some political dissidents in the Soviet Union, and it has little to do with the real purposes of his talks with Chinese leaders from Monday through Thursday. The agenda of the summit includes trade, economic cooperation and the Cambodian conflict, not democracy and human rights.

Nonetheless, the enthusiasm for Mr. Gorbachev is a tribute to the extent to which he has opened up the political system in the Soviet Union. It is a commonplace, here as well as abroad, that China has gone further than the Soviet Union in economic liberalization but that Soviet Union has done much more in political liberalization.

The result is not quite Soviet fever, for most intellectuals here seem much more interested in visiting New York than Leningrad. Many seem to regard the Soviet restructuring less as a model to be meticulously examined than as a key debating point to push for change in China. *Eclipsing a Daring Reformer*

The support for Mr. Gorbachev is a deep embarrassment for the man who otherwise might well regard the summit as a personal triumph: Deng Xiaoping. Mr. Gorbachev is coming to Beijing mostly on Mr. Deng's terms, having withdrawn troops from Afghanistan, reduced Soviet forces on the Chinese border and brought pressure on Vietnam to end its occupation of Cambodia. Moreover, this may be one of Mr. Deng's last major acts, for the capital is full of rumors of his impending retirement.

Mr. Deng, however, has been humiliated by the recent student demonstrations, and by the successful defiance of his order last month that they be suppressed. After having made his career as a daring reformer, Mr. Deng is suddenly made to look like a stodgy old man outshined by the strong young socialist dynamo from Moscow.

The contrasts have been evident even in the Chinese press. The China Youth News published a long account in which a Soviet citizen was quoted as saying that before Mr. Gorbachev "our country was run by old and sickly people who need help to walk, who lack the breath to speak, whose minds are stiff and muddled." In a country where criticisms are always made indirectly, this appeared to be a comment on Mr. Deng and a call for "a young and strong leader," as the article described Mr. Gorbachev.

The differences are also evident on China's campuses, where the talk is often bitterly critical of Mr. Deng these days. At Beijing University, the most important institution in the country, thousands of students have signed an open letter

inviting Mr. Gorbachev to speak at the school. The authorities have said that Mr. Gorbachev's schedule is full, but the gesture was an indication that many students who dislike their own leader regard Mr. Gorbachev as a hero. A Contrast With Bush

The invitation to Mr. Gorbachev also contrasts with the attitude toward Mr. Bush during his brief visit in February. There was considerable interest in Mr. Bush, partly because he had once served as head of the United States mission in Beijing, but the interest focused on him as a person or on the United States as a rich and exotic country.

"Bush and Gorbachev cut different figures among students," said Zhang Binjiu, a research scholar at Beijing University. "Chinese see Bush as just another president, who represents a remote, rich and beautiful country. But Gorbachev's image is of a resolute leader taking on political reform."

Mr. Zhang also noted that recent events in China - principally the student demonstrations - also contribute to the influence of Mr. Gorbachev on the democratic movement. There were no such demonstrations before Mr. Bush's visit and at that time there was little talk of the need for more democracy.

"Both Bush and Gorbachev carried with them a democratic breeze," Mr. Zhang said. "When Bush was here, there was no fire in China. Now there is a fire already burning, and so the wind can make it spread." Sense of Hope in the Air The Chinese authorities, of course, are not so keen on seeing the fire spread. Prime Minister Li Peng said last month that democracy should not be implemented too rapidly and that China would not "mechanically copy" the policies adopted in the Soviet Union.

That remains the official line, but there is a sense of hope in the air after the student demonstrations, which began after the death April 15 of Hu Yaobang, the ousted party leader who was considered a proponent of liberalization. Mr. Gorbachev's visit is contributing to the expectations, even though few people expect him to do anything specific to encourage democracy in China.

While they are vague about how the summit will encourage the democratic movement, in general they suggest that contacts with the Soviet Union will increase, and that the example of Mr. Gorbachev will become increasingly significant in China.

"My institute has already begun exchanges with Soviet scholars," said Xu Kui, director of the Institute of Soviet and East European Studies under the Chinese

Academy of Social Sciences. "In our meetings, it's natural that we should discuss restructuring and exchange opinions. After normalization, such exchanges will develop further."

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