8-29-2009

Readings on Speech and Protest in China

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive
Part of the Asian History Commons, Asian Studies Commons, Chinese Studies Commons, and the International Relations Commons

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive/389

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the China Beat Archive at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The China Beat Blog Archive 2008-2012 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
1. Hu Jintao has made a trip to Xinjiang, his first since riots there in July. Xinjiang was in the news earlier this week as well, when international news organizations picked up a story, first reported in Monday’s China Daily, which announced that trials would begin shortly for more than 200 people arrested in connection with the riots. The regional government, however, quickly denied that any trials have been scheduled, and stated that only 83 people have been officially arrested to date. Over at the Wall Street Journal's China blog, Sky Canaves writes on this story and what it reveals about the media landscape in China today:

Regardless of which account is accurate, the episode appears to be yet another reminder of the unofficialness of much of what is still often called China’s “official” media. Once upon a time, China Daily (and much of the rest of the country’s state-run media), could be relied on to dutifully relay the government’s pronouncements – especially on sensitive issues – and to do little else. But in today’s increasingly competitive media landscape, China Daily and other publications often doing their own reporting – with all the potential that brings for publishing things that don’t accord with the official line. It can be confusing for readers to discern the difference.

2. Another post by Sky Canaves at the WSJ blog discusses the release of Xu Zhiyong from custody on Sunday morning. Xu was granted qubao houshen, or “obtain a guarantor while pending trial”–not exactly bail, but closer to non-custodial detention or probation. Although Xu’s supporters are calling this a victory, Canaves reports that Chinese authorities can use qubao houshen to their advantage as well:

Unlike in the United States, where bail is routinely granted in cases where the suspect doesn’t pose a major flight risk or a danger to society, qubao houshen is rarely granted to Chinese suspects, who are generally held in custody until trial. China’s legal activists have long called for authorities to increase the availability of bail to suspects in criminal cases, especially when relatively minor crimes are involved.

The fact that bail is granted only in extraordinary cases in China has led many to proclaim Mr. Xu’s release as a sort of victory, even if only temporary. As Mr. Xu himself noted, police are still investigating his tax evasion case and he may still be subject to prosecution . . .

However, in certain respects, Mr. Xu’s release puts police in a better position to continue investigating him. Under qubao houshen, police can monitor his activities for a full year, investigating not only the tax charges for which Mr. was arrested, but any other leads that could be used to make a case against him. Had Mr. Xu been kept in custody, the police investigation would have typically had a much shorter period of a few months in which to conclude their investigation.

3. Malcolm Moore at the Telegraph examines the current “beat and compress,” or da ya, mode of the Chinese government. The da ya mode is most prominently characterized by the recent detentions of many leading activists as the government tightens its control. Although many observers are linking this da ya period to a desire for stability in the lead-up to the quickly approaching 60th anniversary of the PRC, Moore writes, “The question is whether the current round of da ya will relent after the anniversary passes in October, or whether it is the beginning of a longer period of repressive measures by the Communist Party.”

4. Alec Ash, who blogs at Six, has a piece at the Huffington Post on today’s Chinese university students and their attitudes toward the 1989 Tiananmen protests. While Beijing University (“Beida”) students led several major protest movements during the twentieth century, Ash’s conversations with members of the campus community show that times have changed:

In 2009 — a new generation of students, a fresh capitalist incarnation of ‘new China’ — there is no indication in Beida of such a rebellious past. The 90th anniversary of May 4th and 20th of Tiananmen passed on campus not so much without incident as without notice.
Ash takes up the question of why current Chinese students are less active in protest movements than their predecessors were, and disagrees with some answers, such as disinterest and lack of knowledge about the past, that are frequently offered by the foreign press when contemplating this issue:

If a Beida student doesn’t talk to Western journalists about their personal views on May 4th, Tiananmen or any other taboo, it doesn’t mean they are ignorant or don’t have any. There are plenty of students reading banned books and discussing forbidden topics – they do it in their dorms (if cautiously, in case of informers), or more quietly in canteens. Just not anywhere where they might seem to be taking a public stand.

But, these dorm discussions are (I hazard a generalisation) more in agreement with the general status quo in China than they are against it. While democracy is an appealing model for most, they are not convinced it is an appealing model for China at this point in its development. Western ideas no longer hold sway for them purely by virtue of being Western. They would all go study in America in a heartbeat, but none fawn over the US: many are disillusioned by Western press coverage of China, and Timothy Geithner’s June visit to campus barely raised a head from its study. They consider themselves less naive than their predecessors, and most think of protest as simply not the way to fix China’s domestic problems – rather, they believe central government is doing a good job in difficult circumstances. A surprising number of those I talked to volunteered that their futures are brighter for the failure of Tiananmen and the economic miracle which followed it.

5. The myths and realities of China’s firewall are the topic of a post at the China Solved blog. While the blocks against social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube might appear inconsequential to those working in the business world, the post’s author argues otherwise:

The 20th century benchmarks for international trade were how many containers or freighters one nation sent across the water to another. In the 21st century, it will be about data, viewers and users. The few big sites that have been blocked and hobbled in China are powering thousands of small businesses and driving the future of online commerce. China has become a dead-zone for any business planning on building an international online presence.

Tags: Xinjiang