



HAL
open science

The Fly in the Ointment? Chinese Dissent and US-China Relations

Jean-Philippe Béja

► **To cite this version:**

Jean-Philippe Béja. The Fly in the Ointment? Chinese Dissent and US-China Relations. United States - Asia Relations Today : A New "New World Order"?, Dec 2002, CERI, France. hal-01052991

HAL Id: hal-01052991

<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-01052991>

Submitted on 29 Jul 2014

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT ? CHINESE DISSENT AND US-CHINA RELATIONS

Jean-Philippe Béja
CERI - CNRS

Since the early eighties, transnational forces, non-governmental organisations, and all kinds of non-State actors which constitute the “international civil society” (B.Badie), have played an increasingly important role in the shaping of international relations.

Political refugees, a phenomenon which goes back to the nineteenth century, can be considered as a precursor of these forces. Whether in the thirties -- when German political opponents who took refuge in Western Europe or the USA put pressure on the governments of their host country to act tough toward Hitler’s regime --, or after World War II, -- when Spanish or Portuguese refugees in France acted to isolate the dictatorships that had taken power in their country – refugees have tried to intervene in the Foreign policy decision making process of their host countries. In the nineties, these pressures have been further legitimized by the positive image enjoyed by non-State forces in politics, whether domestic or international. The Chinese émigré dissident movement is a good example of these new developments.

The 1989 pro-democracy movement has been the largest spontaneous popular movement in China since 1949. It has given rise to a large group of militants who tried to set up autonomous organisations. Although students represented the chore of the protest leaders, many non conformist intellectuals supported their actions and took part in the demonstrations. And for the first time since 1949, an autonomous federation of workers, distinct from the official unions, was founded on Tiananmen Square¹.

After the June 4th, 1989 Tiananmen massacre, and for the first time since the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), a substantial number of political activists succeeded in leaving their motherland. They had in common a perception of the nature of the communist regime, an experience of political participation in a very repressive regime, and an exposure to the international media which had comprehensively covered the movement, and made its leaders icons.

A few months after they left China, the student and intellectual leaders of the movement decided to create a political organization which meant to regroup all the militants who had left China for political reasons since the foundation of the PRC. In September 1989, all the activists who, in the United States, had founded opposition journals or organizations (such as the alliance for Chinese democracy), the main dissident intellectuals who had taken refuge abroad, and the many leaders of the Tiananmen pro-democracy movement who had taken refuge in France, took part in the creation of the Federation for a Democratic China (FDC). Whereas the Federation's objective consisted mainly in mobilizing the population in China itself in order to put an end to "One-Party rule", it also recognized the importance of political action in the West, and especially the need to convince Western governments to put pressure on Peking leaders for the democratization of China. For most of the activists present in Paris, the West meant the US, and therefore, most of those who had taken refuge in France decided to emigrate to the United States. Was the émigré dissident community going to become an effective lobby of the type of the Taiwan lobby or the Cuban lobby? Thirteen years later, the overall picture is, at best, mixed.

I have decided not to include the Tibetan dissidents in the category of Chinese dissident. Although Tibetan activists have been in touch with Chinese dissidents, their agenda, as the Uyghurs', is quite different. I also decided not to talk about the Falungong, which has very specific ways to influence public opinion and decision makers. I am aware that these decisions might sound arbitrary to many.

¹ On the 1989 pro-democracy movement, Cf. J.P.Béja, M.Bonnin, A.Peyraube, *Le Tremblement de terre de Pékin*, Paris, Gallimard, 1991.

PROLOGUE: THE CONTEXT OF US-CHINA RELATIONS

In the last two decades, US-China relations have kept developing and their importance in American domestic politics has been growing, especially since 1989. The end of the cold war has made China, the last largest communist country, a possible adversary of the United States. Besides, during the 13 years that have elapsed since the Tiananmen massacre, Sino-US trade has developed exponentially and the trade deficit, of 10.5 billion in 1990, has reached more than 80 billion US dollars² in 2000. The development of China and the changes in the international situation have made Sino-US relations an important issue in American Foreign policy. As such, it has played an important part in the 1992 presidential election, during which Bill Clinton denounced incumbent President Bush's "amoral position" for having failed to emphasize the importance of Human rights in China. During the decade that elapsed since then, the China question has been a bone of contention for various political forces in the US.

Numerous actors intervene: business interests represented by the US-China Chamber of Commerce lobby in favour of a warm relationship between the two countries; the Taiwan lobby, which is very well structured and has a long-standing relationship with various forces on Capitol Hill and in the military establishment militates for a tough attitude towards Peking; the main Unions, quite powerful with the Democratic party, try to protect American workers from competition by Chinese cheap labor, to name just a few of the actors. We shall try to assess how much Chinese dissidence has been able to become an actor in a game which is characterized by a multiplicity of actors, most of which are much more structured and influential than it is.

The picture is complicated by the fact that both parties have changed attitudes over the years, with the Democrats denouncing the Republicans' compromising attitude in the early 90s whereas George Bush Jr denounced president Clinton's concept of "strategic partnership" during the campaign of 2000. In this fluctuating situation, it is all the more difficult for a newly emerging force to act efficiently. It must evaluate the political situation quickly, and choose the fields of action with care.

² Table 5: China's Trade with the United States (\$ billion)

: US Exports: US imports: 15.22, Balance :-10.47 Total: 20.03

	1990	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Q1 2000	Q1 2001
US Exports	4.81	12.0	12.8	14.3	13.1	16.3	3.2	4.4
US Imports	15.22	51.5	62.5	71.2	81.8	100.1	20.0	22.4
Total	20.03	63.5	75.3	85.4	94.9	116.4	23.2	26.8
Balance	-10.47	-39.5	-49.7	-56.9	-68.7	-83.8	-16.7	-18.0

Source : Us-China Business Council, <http://www.uschina.org/press/tradetable.html>

I. IS THERE A CHINESE DISSIDENT LOBBY?

The émigrés' influence depends on the strength of organizations, personalities

1) The Difficulty to Structure a Political Organization:

1990-1993: Inspired by Sun Yat-sen's precedent in the early twentieth century, the leaders of the Tiananmen movement decided to unify all the branches of the overseas dissident movement to make it the voice of the broad-based Tiananmen pro-democracy movement. However, the political inexperience of most activists, the difference of experience between generations, and their scarce knowledge of the way Western political systems function made cooperation difficult. Although there were few differences in terms of analysis of the Chinese political system, the founders of the Federation were at a loss as to how push for the democratization of the motherland: the absence of a network of supporters, of relay organisations in the PRC reinforced the dissidents' isolation. The fact that people's discontent had not given rise to more demonstrations after June 4th made it difficult for the new Federation to claim that it represented the wishes of the Chinese people. The activists could not agree on which social group should lead the struggle for democracy, and suspicion ran high between the student leaders and the intellectuals. This division was reflected in the leadership structure where the first chairman and vice-chairman had difficulty to work together.

A second constraint weighed on the efficiency of the FDC: the ignorance of English, and of the ways of the American political system limited the influence of its members. The choice of political scientist Yan Jiaqi³, who had led the Autonomous Federation of Intellectuals during the Tiananmen movement, especially, was a mistake: to these drawbacks, one must add the lack of personal charisma. More popular figures with the media such as Wuer Kaixi, Chai Ling, Li Lu, who had been stars during the events in Peking, knew how to deal with the media, but they competed for attention rather than collaborated. Therefore, they were not able to build up on their image by strengthening their links with decision makers in the NSC, the State Department and on Capitol Hill. Within the FDC, relations between students and intellectuals, and between the students themselves led to a dramatic rise of factionalism, disputes, denunciations, severely hurting the image of the dissident movement as a whole. Its isolation from China, where it could not count on organized support or underground organizations, its inability to establish a political program which might appeal to the

³ For an English translation of Yan Jiaqi's main works, cf, Bachman, David, and Yang, Dali *Yan Jiaqi and China's Struggle for Democracy*, Armonke, M.E. Sharpe, 1994

population in the motherland, and its deteriorating image of infighting and corruption in the Chinese and Overseas Chinese populations, weakened its capacity to appear as an alternative, albeit distant, to CCP power.

Nevertheless, the obvious legitimacy crisis faced by the CCP in China, the sympathy that the “victims of the Tiananmen” massacre enjoyed with American opinion, gave the dissident movement an undeniable importance, especially in the first half of the 1990s, even though the FDC had some difficulty to achieve its goal of being considered a viable alternative to the Communist Party. During the first few months of 1990, the student leaders excelled at mobilizing their contacts with the media in order to exert influence on decision makers. The conferences they gave in universities and their popularity with the Chinese residents of the United States gave them some weight: they were often consulted on Chinese affairs.

2) Initial Success

In the early years after the Tiananmen movement, and with the end of the cold war, Chinese dissidents could build upon the immense goodwill which existed in the American public, especially thanks to the continued interest of the media for the Chinese opposition movement. The movement as a whole, despite its deep divisions, was vocal and its voice was respected in the area of Sino-US relations. Its leaders were consulted by some members of Congress. For example, Democratic representative for California Nancy Pelosi (who since has become the Democratic Party whip at the House of Representatives) was particularly active in her opposition to the Chinese Government. In September 1991 she went to Peking and deployed a banner on Tiananmen Square with the following inscription, in Chinese and in English: « To those who died for democracy in China »⁴. In January 1993, she attended the third Congress of FDC. On the other end of the political spectrum, Chinese dissidents have also established a good working relationship with Republican Representative Christopher Cox⁵

In June 1990, President Bush announced his support for MFN. In July, the House passed a bill linking the renewal to the freedom of all those jailed for their participation in the 1989 movement. The Senate added more conditions, such as the suppression of import of prison labor made goods, and voted it. President Bush vetoed the bill. But the emigré movement's position had been instrumental in the decision made by Congress. The demonstration they organized attracted attention, and they drew a lot of support from the American public⁶. When Bill Clinton was elected at the White House, he tried to adopt an alternative policy

⁴ *Washington Post*, 5/9/91

⁵ Nancy Pelosi is representative for San Francisco, and Christopher Cox for Orange County. Both areas have strong Chinese communities.

toward China, hoping to exert pressure on the Peking government so that it relaxed its rule and freed political prisoners if it wanted the renewal of the MFN. During the first year of President Clinton's rule, the White House regularly sought the opinions of major dissidents on this subject. Relations were established, and the prospectives for the emergence of a "dissident lobby" were bright.

However, the White house's interest decreased when in 1994, the President decided to delink the granting of MFN from the human rights situation. This decision, added to an increase of factional infighting, resulted in a weakening of the dissidents' influence.

3) Fragmentation and the importance of personalities

The factionalism which plagued the FDC since its creation became increasingly serious with the passing of years, and was a factor of the decreasing importance of Chinese overseas democratic opposition in the eyes of American decision makers. Most of the student leaders of the Tiananmen movement, either didn't join (such as Chai Ling who arrived in the US later than the others, in May 1990), or did not feel obliged to act in the name of the federation. At the FDC second congress in the fall of 1990, Yan Jiaqi and Wuer Kaixi were not re-elected, and they acted increasingly as individuals rather than as militants of a group. Although this personalized action had a certain degree of efficiency, especially with the media, in the long run, it became counter productive as individuals tended to enhance their personal positions, and to try to weaken the others' images. These individual initiatives contributed to weaken the organisations which had been created earlier.

After the failed attempt at unification between the Chinese Alliance for Democracy and the Federation for a Democratic China in January 1993, the various factions started to leave the organization and to create new parties: the Chinese Social Democratic Party, the Justice Party, the Liberal Democratic Party etc. regrouped no more than a few dozens of members who had no following in the motherland. This multiplication of parties dealt a mortal blow to the political organization of overseas dissent as such.

This fragmentation was reinforced by the star system: student leaders especially used their social capital with the media to try to influence policy-making on US-China relations. In the second half of the nineties, networking by individuals with politicians in Congress, (Wuer Kaixi, then Wei Jingsheng with Senator Jesse Helms, and California representative Nancy

⁶ Lee, Ta-ling, Copper, John, *The Bamboo Gulag: Human Rights in the PRC*, Occasional Papers/Reprint Series in Contemporary Asian Studies, University of Maryland, n°4, 1994 (123), pp.193-94

Pelosi⁷ for example), or famous journalists and academics, replaced the collective pressure exerted in the name of the dissident movement as a whole.

This trend towards personalization of dissent was reinforced by the successive liberations of famous dissidents from Chinese jails, obtained thanks to international pressure. These liberations often followed by a measure of exile. Once, the newly liberated activists had arrived in the United States, each of them tried to build up his position as the main representative of Chinese dissent and struggled to be received at the White house, in order to enhance his position in the emigré community. The unequal treatment they enjoyed from the media or from politicians provoked deep conflicts within the community. The liberation of Wei Jingsheng -- a political dissident who, as soon as 1978, had demanded the establishment of a democracy, and had spent 17 years in jail – and his subsequent expulsion to the United States caused some hope for the unification of the dissident associations. Very well known in the United States, helped by all the organizations which had militated in favour of his liberation, he was considered a hero and was received at the White House. His international prestige, his image among Chinese dissidents, his undeniable charisma put him in a very good position to become the spokesman for the whole movement. But his attempts failed and he became the target of attacks from all sides. Nevertheless, he was able to maintain contacts with politicians in Congress, and has been lobbying hard for the United States to adopt a tough position towards Peking.

The trouble with the personalization of the movement is that the main personalities have been unable to unite on the setting of an agenda, even on some major questions such as the granting of MFN to China: for example, whereas Wang Xizhe, another activist of the 1979 Democracy Wall movement, and later, Wei Jingsheng, opposed such a measure, Fang Lizhi, known as the “Chinese Sakharov” and later Wang Dan, a student leader of the 1989 pro-democracy movement favored it.

This factionalism puts even the most supportive American politicians in an awkward position. For example, in 1996, 58 congressmen signed a letter asking the Nobel Peace Price committee to give the Price to Wei Jingsheng. But soon, other dissidents in China, Ren Wandong and Xu Wenli – both active during the 1979 Democracy Wall movement and jailed for their participation-- relayed by overseas organisations (the Justice Party) denounced Wei Jingsheng as a fake opponent. These events have had a very negative effect on politicians who wished to support the overseas opposition movement.

There are, however, opportunities for Overseas Chinese dissidents to display their unity. One such opportunity is the annual demonstration organized in Washington, New York and major

⁷ Nancy Pelosi has been very active in support of the democratization of China, and she has a good working relationship with most Chinese dissidents. Her position as the Democratic party Whip at the House of Representatives makes her a very

cities for the commemoration of the June 4th, 1989 Tiananmen massacre. On this occasion, they express the grief that the Chinese people is prohibited to show in China, and perform the important role of carrying on the memory of these tragic events.

To sum up, the Chinese opposition movement in the United States has been unable to create an efficient, unified organization, capable of setting an agenda of priorities and push it with the executive and legislative branches of the US Government. Even the most famous dissidents personalities, despite their social capital with the media and with concerned politicians, have had difficulty exerting influence for fear of denunciation by their peers.

But the environment in which they act is a very difficult one. In contrast with the Cuban lobby, they cannot count on a large community of compatriots who have fled the country for political reasons, and have enjoyed long time relations with politicians in the US. And, to the difference of the Taiwanese lobby, they do not represent a government, and lack the financial resources which could help enhance their efficiency.

II. THE RISE OF SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONS: A HIGHER LEVEL OF EFFICIENCY

Seeing the opposition's influence was dwindling in China, the Chinese émigrés concentrated their limited means on lobbying American decision makers. The second part of the 1990s saw the rise of the influence of Emigré Chinese NGOs.

1) Human Rights in China

Founded in March 1989 by Chinese scholars and prominent American China specialists, Human rights in China has been through an impressive development. To the contrary of the political organizations, HRIC, reinforced by the arrival of Liu Qing -- a Chinese dissident who spent ten years in jail for having made public the minutes of Wei Jingsheng's 1979 trial, and having denounced the Chinese judiciary system in a samizdat⁸-- HRIC's efficiency was also accrued by its straight collaboration with Human Rights Watch. The association's influence kept growing during the last decade thanks to the following factors.

important asset of Chinese dissidents.

⁸ Liu Qing's book was smuggled out of jail and published in French in 1981. Liu Qing, *J'accuse devant le tribunal de la société*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1981.

a) A high quality of information: HRIC has become a very valuable source of information on the human rights situation for academics, think tank researchers, and politicians interested in China. Thanks to its network of informers in the PRC, this NGO does not suffer from the same isolation from the Chinese public as do political organizations. Victims and their relatives inform HRIC of human rights violations. The fact that it is run mostly by Chinese activists reinforces its credibility.

b) A high level of research: HRIC has numerous researchers, permanent or on contract, who write serious reports on subjects linked to human rights violations, but also on some social and political aspects of the reality of the PRC. These reports are widely used by the media, academics and politicians.

c) A wide network in government and Congress: The credibility and the quality of its information, as well as its early collaboration with HRW, have provided HRIC with a wide network of contacts on Capitol Hill and at the White House. It is regularly consulted by the State Department, as are NGOs such as Amnesty International and HRW, when it prepares its annual report on Human rights, and by the Congressional Executive Commission on China which was created after the granting of PNTR to the PRC. It was especially so during the first year after Bill Clinton won his first mandate in 1992. As he had emphasized that his policy toward China would be very different from what had been Bush's, "human rights advocates were given unprecedented visibility in the State Department, and the Clinton administration appeared prepared to use the theme not only to campaign, but to govern"⁹. Shattuck, then assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs, met every week with representatives of AI, Freedom house and other such NGOs.

d) Keeping out of Chinese dissident movement bickering: Although mainly manned by Chinese dissidents, HRIC, on the impetus of its president Liu Qing, has kept from being caught into dissident in-fighting. Therefore, it enjoys reasonably good relations with the various opposition organisations and is fed with information from their networks.

e) Human rights as an area of Foreign policy: HRIC's growing influence can be explained by the fact that concern for Human Rights violations has become an area of Foreign policy. When American politicians visit China, when Chinese politicians visit the US, the American side hands a list of political prisoners that it would like to see freed. Before every important

⁹ Dittmer, Lowell, « Chinese Human Rights and American Foreign Policy », *The Review of Politics*, Summer 2001, Vol.63, n°3, pp.437.

visit, human rights organisations are consulted by the State Department. Human Rights in China is considered a credible NGO, and its input enjoys a high degree of esteem.

2) China Labour Bulletin

Building upon his experience as the leader of the Beijing Workers Autonomous Federation during the Tiananmen pro-democracy movement, Han Dongfang, who emigrated to the US in 1992, has been working to help protect workers' interests in China. Helped by Human rights watch, which had worked at his liberation, Han has been presented as China's Lech Walesa.

In 1993, he tried to go back to the PRC, but was arrested in Canton and sent to Hong Kong. He then founded the *China Labour Bulletin* with the help of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions and the support of AFL-CIO. Since 1996, he has been working simultaneously for Radio Free Asia. Han's is very much a one man show, but the extent of his network in China, his fame among workers thanks to his radio program, make him the destination of very valuable first hand information on workers conditions, and on workers' movement. Han also helps Chinese workers push for the implementation of Chinese law.

Although he is based in Hong Kong, Han's work is largely recognized in the United States, and besides the support of AFL-CIO, he is often consulted by Congressional committees, and displays a great efficiency at the UN Commission of Human Rights. Besides, he has been able to abort attempts by some leaders of the AFL-CIO at establishing relations with the official All Chinese Federation of Trade Unions.

3) The Laogai foundation

Thanks to his knowledge of the American political system and to his extensive network in the world of politics and the trade unions, Harry Wu has been able to raise a number of specific issues with the media, which have been relayed by politicians. Harry Wu became famous for a film he shot in China's Reform through Labor camps. He obtained the support of CBS and his program had a large echo. Having himself spent nineteen years in a labor camp, he has dedicated his life to the struggle against "laogai" (in Chinese: reform through labor).

His action concentrates mainly on specific issues, for which he lobbys intensely. His links with Senator Jesse Helms have allowed him to have the question of prison labor made goods raised in Senate. He won his major successes with the Customs Department who in 1992 refused the entry on US soil of imported Diesel from the Yunnan Jinma factory, which is

actually a laogai camp. The administration went to court and in 1994, the Judge declared that the motors had in effect been made by prison labor¹⁰.

He has also launched a campaign against the trafficking of organs of executed prisoners by the Chinese government. The Laogai foundation that he founded is regularly consulted by the US congress, and sends information to the various branches of the American administration.

III. SOME CASES OF EMIGRÉ INTERVENTIONS

1) Granting of MFN or PNTR

As we have seen above, in the latter half of the 1990s, the dissident community has had difficulty to adopt a unified position on the need to grant MFN to China or not. However, the whole community has seized the opportunity of the annual debate in Congress to raise the question of China's human rights situation. Every year in late May and early June, dissidents were able to testify, organize demonstrations, and lobby representatives in order to put pressure on the administration so that it raised the question of human rights in its dialogue with China. They also lobbied hard with the media. With the help of the labor unions, which - - worried by the threat that the influx of Chinese cheap goods was putting on American labor -- were increasingly hostile to the granting of MFN to China, the dissidents were vocal in their condemnation of Big Business attitudes. Some representatives, such as Nancy Pelosi, who often seeks out the opinion of overseas dissidents, put a strong case for the linkage of MFN to an improvement in the human rights situation. It would be excessive to say that the dissidents alone succeeded in obliging the various administrations to demand prisoners' liberations as a show of goodwill by the Chinese authorities, but they have played their part. They have used the American forces hostile to MFN (or PNTR, or entry into WTO) to advance their agenda, but it is also undeniable that they have been used by these forces to strengthen their position. In these cases, they are presented as the voice of the Chinese people.

2) The UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva

Every March, all the groups of Chinese overseas dissidents are present at the session of the UN Human Rights Commission which takes place in Geneva : HRIC, Wei Jingsheng, the

¹⁰ Wu, Harry, *Retour au laogai*, Paris, Bellefond, 1997, p.227.

Laogai Foundation, etc. They are very active in the corridors, trying to persuade the US administration to sponsor a motion condemning China's human rights records, and lobbying various countries' delegations to vote in favor. On this occasion, most dissidents have usually been able to achieve a minimum degree of collaboration. The radical discourse of Wei Jingsheng usefully shoulders Han Dongfang's more moderate behavior; NGOs such as HRIC or the Laogai Foundation try to convince delegates by providing reliable information on Human rights violations. In some cases, the dissidents' discourse has a considerable impact on US delegate's behaviour. For example, in 1999 in Geneva, the US delegate to the Commission echoed a declaration Wei Jingsheng had made in 1998 in the same setting. Then, he had declared: "this is precisely the time when support from our friends is most needed". The Ambassador, as if echoing his words, declared: "When Chinese dissidents have the courage to stand alone, we must have the courage to stand with them. We urge China to engage in genuine dialogue with its dissidents and the Dalai lama, not just members of this Commission"¹¹. This shows that, although they cannot exert a constant pressure on the administration, their ideas can help shape some aspects of American Foreign policy.

Of course, theirs is simply one voice among others, but it carries some weight in the field of Human rights.

3) The creation of Radio Free Asia

The crumbling of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War have shown the importance of the diffusion of information. Many observers have emphasized the role of Radio Free Europe in the delegitimation of the European Communist regimes. This idea has been pursued by Chinese dissidents, and many well known individuals, as well as the Federation for a Democratic China, during its years of existence, have been lobbying for the creation of a free Radio Station which would broadcast to China. Their preoccupation met with some Congressmen's who thought that the end of the communist regime in China was a prerequisite for the emergence of a new international order. Members of the emigré Chinese community actively liaised with these concerned politicians. As soon as 1991, President Bush endorsed the project, but it took until 1996 to set up the station. As Nancy Pelosi said, an independent radio station was deemed necessary to break the stranglehold of dictatorship: "The vast majority of people in China still only hear what China's government wants them to hear, they only see what the government wants them to see, they only read what the government allows them to read...Those who speak out are arrested, exiled or killed.". RFA

¹¹ Rosemary Foot, *Rights Beyond Borders*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.243.

is funded by Congress but is completely autonomous. Many of the regular chronicles are manned by dissidents such as journalist Liu Binyan, a founding member of the FDC, Han Dongfang, head of the *China Labour Bulletin*. It constitutes a forum for the Overseas dissident movement, and allows it to broadcast its ideas in China. The creation of RFA shows that the US government believes that the dissidents represent a voice which deserves to be heard.

4) Obtaining American media coverage

As we have noted earlier, the Tiananmen pro-democracy movement of 1989 enjoyed very extensive media coverage, and the student leaders became stars of the day. After they arrived in the United States, they were regularly interviewed by the major networks and their opinion was sought out by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, etc. Until the mid 90s, every time a major event took place in China, or when there was a Sino-American meeting, papers carried declarations by major dissidents. It was also the case during the protracted negotiations which led to China's entry in the WTO. The overseas dissidents' status has evolved from "voice of the Chinese opposition, of the silenced Chinese people", to that of providers of expert opinions. Wang Dan, who has earned a reputation of moderation, is particularly appreciated by journalists, whereas Wei Jingsheng's positions, which tend toward extremism, are still sought out out of respect for his personal experience.

Famous dissidents' opinion is regularly quoted on issues such as repression of dissent, the death penalty, and the surge of nationalism in the PRC. Although no organisation is ever consulted as such, dissident personalities have been able to build upon the capital of sympathy they enjoy, and, despite the versatility of media attention, are now regarded as a permanent resource to be used, much in the way as are academics. This continuation of media coverage helps the overseas dissident Chinese community to remain an actor on the Sino-US political scene, a fact regularly denounced by the official Chinese press.

CONCLUSION

In the last decade, the US Chinese NGOs have won a status and are now regularly consulted by Congress and by the Executive on bilateral Sino-American issues. With the exception of HRIC, they are mostly one-man shows, and their influence is very much dependent on the credibility of their operators. On the contrary, the influence of political

organizations has been waning, and since the 1994 de-linkage of MFN and human rights, they have not been consulted by the American authorities. Factional in-fighting has prevented Chinese dissidents to maximize the efficiency of their pressure. The inability of their political organizations to unite and define a common agenda, their isolation from the political situation in China, and the tendency of their leaders to put personal feuds ahead of the interest of the cause have seriously hampered the emergence of a Chinese emigré lobby. Chinese dissident political organizations have become almost insignificant: they have lost all kind of influence in the motherland, and are unable to exert any pressure whether in the realm of the media or in politics. They are not consulted as such by the administration, and when some individuals are sometimes sought out, it is just to know their personal position. The various political parties programs are not considered relevant either by the media or by decision makers, and nobody regards them as an alternative to Communist Party Power.

Although Chinese dissidence had a strong capital of goodwill after the Tiananmen massacre, its inability to set up an organised lobby, its tendency to factionalism, have prevented it to become a substantial player in the elaboration of Us policy towards the PRC.

The integration of the human rights factor in Foreign policy during the last decade – a phenomenon which is not linked to Sino-US relations – has made for the emergence of Chinese NGOs which lobby on specific issues. They have become a permanent actor who is regularly consulted, allowing the voice of the Overseas Chinese pro-democracy movement to be heard in the organs of power.

Given the scattered characteristic of the Overseas Chinese community, its scarcity of resources, its small numbers, and its rather recent character, this is not a small achievement. When Chinese dissidents arrived in the United States, they had absolutely no knowledge of the way the American system functioned, they couldn't count on a politicized community of emigrants, and their only capital was the media coverage they had enjoyed during the two months of the Tian'anmen movement. It is well-known that this capital is pretty volatile. The fact that in little more than a decade, they were able to set up human rights organizations, and issue oriented associations which are regularly consulted, even when the international context is not favorable (for example, the concentration of US Foreign policy on the war on terror), must be put to their credit.

However, on the eve of President Jiang Zemin's official trip to the United States in October 2002, not a single Chinese dissident was freed from jail seems to indicate that the safeguarding of dissidents' rights is not a top priority of the Bush administration.