

**Muddled Genesis, Silent Death:
Chinese Students' Reactions to the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign**
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To 1980s Chinese students, the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign represented a deeply destabilizing force in their world; akin to a dangling dagger above their heads. But to the Chinese Communist party, the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign was an integral avenue for stabilizing society and ensuring that Chinese people remained “faithful in socialism and the Party’s leadership”—in other words, strengthening the government’s connections to the Chinese people. This begs the question: How did the Campaign come to be viewed in the opposite light by Chinese students in the 1980s—to the degree that its opposition became a major pillar within the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protests?

Through exploring the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign as a conversation between the Party and Chinese students, this chapter argues that the definitional vagueness of “spiritual pollution,” and the unclear limitations of what the term could or could not encompass throughout the movement’s lifespan rendered the Campaign easily misinterpreted by Chinese students.

In effect, the uncertainty of what “spiritual pollution” encompassed made Chinese students fear that the Campaign was highly likely to target students and cause additional, unknown change in the educational system. Indeed, the Party’s fear that the Campaign would parallel that of Cultural Revolution-era campaigns entrenched the Campaign’s development in unsurety. Ultimately, this thesis asserts that students’ feeling of “control-lessness” wrought by the Campaign was long-lasting, culminating eventually in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protestors’ emphatic demand that the Chinese government admit the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign was “wrong” and to cease the holding of any future “anti-bourgeois” political campaigns.