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THE BEIJING SPRING, 1989

An Eyewitness Account

The climax of China's spring 1989 student protest movement is well known, at least outside of China. Troops acting to clear Tiananmen Square of protesters and enforce martial law succeeded in their charge, firing automatic assault weapons on unarmed citizens and sometimes wildly into neighboring buildings. People were crushed under the tracks of armored personnel carriers as they moved in to smash the statue of the "Goddess of Democracy" that had come almost overnight to symbolize the movement. Some students tried nonviolent protest tactics, sitting in before the troops. They were shot. Eyewitness reports emphasized the frenzied activity of the soldiers, their excessive and sometimes almost aimless violence. But though some may have run amok, there is no doubt that the overall attack was consciously planned.

Some of the soldiers were killed, mainly burned as crowds torched their vehicles. A few were beaten. Though dead students cannot be mourned publicly, China's government has gone to great length to honor the soldiers as martyrs, and to publish graphic accounts of their deaths. Student leaders had urged nonviolence, but the crowds by this point were not composed primarily of students.

Though these stark outlines of the massacre are known, it is much harder to make sense of it. We can only make educated guesses as to what the government was doing. Even harder to ferret out is clear evidence for just who was acting as the government at that point, what combination of the various factions that had used the student movement as an occasion for their own power struggles. We know that Zhao Ziyang and many of his associates and fellow

"liberalizers" were toppled, but we do not know and probably never will know exactly the course of events that brought this about. We know that the government had been almost incapacitated by its internal struggles in the preceding weeks. But we do not know to what extent the events of the night of June 3 and morning of June 4 represented the policy of factions that had already succeeded in gaining power, or to what extent they were themselves tactics in the power struggle. Certainly they eliminated the argument that the Chinese government should use moderation to avoid inflaming world opinion. After the massacre, world opinion was already forfeit.

Since June 4 attention has been focused, ironically, on the killers not the killed, on the Chinese government and not the student protesters. It is important, however, not to let geopolitical considerations or the practical concerns with who has emerged on the top rung of Chinese leadership obscure the movement itself. Even our horror at the massacre should not make us forget just how remarkable an event this protest was. For the Chinese people, it has value as an inspiration, not just a cautionary tale.

I want here to look at some of the conditions and tactics that made the protest movement possible. My comments are based mainly on six weeks of "participant observation." They are not a final evaluation or a comprehensive report. They are an attempt to draw out certain key themes from the vantage point of the student activists. They leave many gaps, but, I hope, add a few points not always made in recent Western discussions. In particular, I do not try here to go very much into the question

of students' ideology or goals in the movement. The present essay is not a comprehensive narrative, or still less analysis, of the student movement as a whole.

A Supportive Structure

The student protest of 1989 was in many ways a tactical triumph. It did not produce the outpouring of new ideas, the creation of newspapers and journals, or the level of reflective thought that had been part of the democracy wall movement of 1979–80. It did give rise to a number of innovations in struggle itself and to the largest popular mobilization independent of the government that the People's Republic has ever seen.

From the beginning, the "Beijing Spring" of 1989 bore testimony to the fact that even a relatively spontaneous movement depends upon organization. Neither feature necessarily contradicts the other. This is partly because spontaneity is not always a radically individual phenomenon, some of the current Western-influenced ideology of Chinese youth notwithstanding. Their spontaneous participation was nurtured in group discussions. They came forward organized by schools and within schools by classes. Small clusters of friends and classmates had discussed their complaints about the government and the state of Chinese culture for months; they had debated various ideas in the privacy of dormitory rooms and in semi-public gatherings at restaurants and campus hangouts. Indeed, one of the striking features of the protest movement from the very beginning was its ability to generate organization without requiring much bureaucratic apparatus or formal hierarchy.

At many levels, this ubiquity of organization was an achievement of Chinese Communism; every class had its monitor, for example, and they were as prepared to organize food for hunger strikers as circulation of course materials. Traditional Chinese culture also encouraged this sense of the primacy of the group. But at its base in 1989 was a more novel feature that helped to change the meaning of the whole process of solidarity. This was a strong ideology and actuality of friendship. Personal ties among individuals, created volun-

tarily rather than by the system, were highly valued and emotionally charged. Students debated, for example, whether the friendship bond—something perhaps closer to the strongest senses of Australian mateship than to the usual American sense of the word—should take primacy over marriage. They stressed high ideals of loyalty. They shared everything. Students well aware that the black-market rate for foreign exchange was some 50 percent above the official rate nonetheless exchanged money among friends at face value—even though foreign exchange was an extremely prized commodity for those who hoped to go abroad since everything from tests to application fees had to be paid for in foreign exchange certificates. One student I knew, eventually a minor leader in the protest, housed a friend in his dormitory room, even providing money for his friend's meals out of his own meager income (a standard tiny stipend augmented by teaching English to students preparing for exams). The friend was a graduate student at another university, but came to think of himself as a "professional revolutionary."

The institution of friendship had not always overridden ascribed group membership—kinship, *danwei* (work unit), class—in China. Previous policies of the Communist regime had in many ways specifically undermined it, calling for a commitment to ideology and party above such personal ties, creating powerful ritual occasions for friends and relatives to betray and criticize each other. Friendship, and also kinship and other directly interpersonal relationships, seemed of central importance to students' lives. Yet they are poorly grasped by either the notions of individualism or the equation of society with the large collectivity and/or the state. Students identified strongly with various bits of individualistic ideology, from Western writings on capitalism and freedom to the simple idea of the primacy of romantic self-expression (personified in China by the poet Xu Zhimo). A vaguely Rousseauian (or Californian) idea of the ultimate value of expressing one's internal feelings was very widely shared. The government's common taunt of "bourgeois individualism" seemed to

hit it rather accurately. But the strong feeling for friendship, practiced with a level of loyalty that put most Westerners to shame, was not individualistic. It was truly social. I wondered how many students thought about whether their own espousal of individualism might be at odds with this other fundamental value. In any case, the resurgence of friendship was one of the most basic manifestations of the emergence of society beyond the reach of the state, and thus of a capacity for genuine insurgency and an independent public sphere.

One could see other manifestations of the development of "civil society," perhaps most notably the growing numbers of small entrepreneurs. Many of these were merchants. Some were to be found filling every free market (and lining quite a few sidewalks), their capital limited to the merchandise they could fit on a single table or the back of a pedicab—pots and pans, books and magazines, belts, bicycle bells, or postcards. A few of these *getihu* (small entrepreneurs) came to be owners of substantial businesses, operating a chain of market stalls, for example, or entering the wholesale trade. Some other kinds of enterprises contributed more directly to the beginnings of a public sphere in Chinese cities.

Restaurants, for example, flourished at all price levels, bringing a range of regional cuisines into Beijing and providing at least partially free public spaces. Some of these were operated on university campuses, using leased buildings. Perhaps not surprisingly, they offered the best, though not the cheapest, food on campus. Others, often much smaller, were located nearby, providing at four or five tables the opportunity for free discussion over Xinjiang noodles or Szechuan soups. Of course still others catered to a more upscale clientele of businesspeople, party officials, and foreigners, and charged prices which meant that most students would never see the inside of them. Owners of all these sorts of businesses contributed money to the protest movement; many joined in the marches of late May.

The spread of a private market in publications was a powerful direct influence on the rise of dissenting, pluralist thought. Gradually, since the early 1980s, independent booksellers had carved a major niche for themselves in

China's intellectual life. To be sure, their most popular publications were sex manuals and salacious or gory novels. On the same tables, however, one could sometimes find such foreign works as Freud's *New Introductory Lectures*, C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite*, or Locke's *Second Treatise*. One could also find, in between the government's periodic efforts to purge the market of counterrevolutionary materials, the publications of Chinese thinkers grappling with questions of national identity, the problems of bureaucratization, and the possible virtues of stock markets and private ownership of industry. The most influential works were probably works of fiction, a genre (or set of genres, from satire to realism) well-suited to raising controversial questions in less than explicit forms, posing problems without having to advocate solutions that might be at variance with party policy, giving expression to individual feelings and thus encouraging the idea of their primacy.

Various journals made a similar impact, both introducing Western ideas (in translation and summary or commentary form) and providing for an independent Chinese discourse. Those that were too independent were often short-lived, flowering mainly during such periods of democratic activity and apparent government openness as the 1979–80 democracy movement. They were especially likely to be suppressed, or to fail of their own internal problems, if they were published without institutional sponsorship and/or aimed at a relatively broad readership. Academic periodicals, on the other hand, were more stable. Though their openness to free expression varied with the political climate, they continued to publish discussions of new and often controversial ideas fairly continuously through the 1980s. Journals of philosophy called tenets of official Marxism into question, encouraging a flowering of interest in Western Marxists and critical theory. Sociological publications examined stratification in Chinese society. Perhaps the most influential were literary journals. These not only reinforced the influence of some fiction writers, they sponsored a discourse on Chinese culture. This was a discourse heavily influenced (in its more academic versions) by Western postmodernists, rhetoricians, and new

wave literary scholars; Jacques Derrida, Wayne Booth, and Frederic Jameson all had Chinese fans, though based generally on a fairly fragmentary understanding of their French or English works and especially of their discursive contexts.

At the same time that it sought currency by international standards (or almost pathologically pursued Western trendiness), however, this discourse also sometimes found new inspiration in older (but for the most part still modern) Chinese writings, most especially those of Laing Qichao, Lu Xun and the protagonists of the May 4th movement. It addressed in original and important ways the problem of how Chinese culture—traditional and Communist—would fare in the twenty-first century. What were the cultural implications of importing Western technology? Was China's generally postulated economic and political backwardness due to fundamental cultural weaknesses? How would Chinese culture have to be strengthened (echoing Kang Youwei and the self-strengtheners of 1895) to provide for modernization, perhaps including democracy? These questions were not always posed straightforwardly, but they were debated by readers.

Perhaps the most striking semipopular manifestation of this was the television series *River Elegy*, shown in the fall of 1988. This was produced by a group of well-educated young men, heavily influenced by this literary-cultural discourse. They took their occasion and a good bit of their footage from a Japanese-produced travelogue about the Yellow River. Adding their own commentary and a wide variety of archival footage, however, they transformed the genre of travelogue into a critical cultural analysis. The Yellow River is traditionally seen as the heart and source of Chinese life. They portrayed it as the focus of an inward-looking culture, characterized by mud and soil erosion, disastrous floods, and unfortunate human interventions. A dominant motif was the challenge posed when the Yellow River met the blue sea; striking aerial cinematography imprinted this visually into the viewers' minds. Chinese culture was compared to that of "primitive" Africa—a shocking statement for

proud and racist Chinese. The heritage of four thousand years of civilization was shown as more a trap than a resource. Mao Zedong was pictured facing the Yellow River but silent; this man who always had so much to say was quiet before the problems it posed.

River Elegy was also technically sophisticated by Chinese standards. It worked mainly through montage, with extremely rapid cuts from scene to scene (influenced I suspect by Hong Kong film fashions and reminiscent of recent trends in American television advertisements and music videos). In the space of a minute, a viewer might see Mao, the river, the Egyptian pyramids, the Great Wall, and a rally of the People's Liberation Army. Intentionally, it purveyed more information than any viewer could take in at one showing, and especially more than he or she could assimilate within received categories. It left the viewer with a welter of unresolved impressions. The voice-over provided only a partial framework for understanding. The film's real message was left just below the explicit, and heavily dependent on the visuals.

The film attracted a remarkably large audience on Chinese television, and was shown a second time before the authorities had second thoughts about allowing it to be shown at all. It also sparked a wide discussion among viewers. This reveals, first of all, that a much larger public than university-trained intellectuals was prepared to engage in a critical discourse about Chinese culture and China's future (though surely many found the film's more unkind comparisons and evaluations shocking, even offensive). In addition, the episode reveals that the government was not united in its stance on either Chinese culture or the limits of permissible public expression. The film could only have been made with the backing of fairly powerful figures, and its repeated showings indicated their strong support. A genuine liberalization in public expression helped to pave the way for the protest movement of Spring 1989. On the other hand, *River Elegy's* third broadcast was stopped (as was a film planned by the same group on the May 4th movement).

River Elegy's popularity dramatized the centrality of the problem of culture for thoughtful Chinese in the late 1980s. Few

doubted the desirability of economic "modernization," though what form it should take was debated. But how was economic change to relate to culture? What did it mean to be Chinese in a world of computers and FAX machines, tourists and joint ventures, the internationalization of commodity flows and culture? Maoist Communism had offered an alternative source of pride and a version of national identity (incorporating some aspects of tradition while rejecting others). What elements of Maoism or Confucianism could provide a vision for the future? Or had both decisively failed the tests of modernity? Did that mean wholesale Westernization or were there still the resources for an authentic Chinese path? In short, all but the most technocratic or cautious and party-loyal Chinese intellectuals, and a good many others besides, felt that China's modernization was in need of a cultural vision. However real the economic gains might be, they were either in jeopardy or even pernicious if not accompanied by a sound vision of Chinese society and culture.

This was the point where most students and intellectuals thought they had a crucial role to play. Some were primarily trained to play technical roles in modernization, as engineers, doctors, or demographers. Even they might have worries about vision. For humanists and the more culturally oriented of social scientists these worries were much more acute. And they were coupled with a sense that the government lacked respect for them and failed to provide for their role in China's modernization. Not all of these students had a strongly political conception of what to do, of how far an insurrection could go, of what role the Communist party might play or whether multiparty elections were possible or good, or of what form decentralization of bureaucratic power should take. But the political ideas of nearly all the active leaders, as well as the sentiments of more "rank-and-file" participants in the protest, were deeply shaped by this sense of cultural crisis and impoverishment. It was at the heart of the students' talk of democracy, at least as centrally as any imported Western specifics about the mechanics of liberal democratic rule.

These ideas and this sense of crisis had been so widely disseminated before the protest movement actually got going in April that they could be taken for granted among the core of student participants. This was simultaneously a strength and a weakness. It helped to make the substantial early mobilization possible. It also impeded the development of both the ability to spread the movement's message beyond its original student base and internal discourse about goals, methods, and priorities. This cultural concern informed both the students' initial very moderate message—essentially "take us and our ideas seriously, give us a voice"—and their subsequent determination to persist, as government recalcitrance made their movement more radical.

An Opportunity for Protest

The immediate occasion for protest was the death of Hu Yaobang. Though some Chinese students, especially in the United States, have since suggested that this was a deep, spontaneous, and heartfelt outpouring of sadness over a beloved leader, I think some skepticism is in order. Hu was indeed a relative liberal, but more important he was a symbol of the party's repression of political reform and his death a pretext for demanding more such reform. Hu, after all, had been no great advocate of free speech as head of the propaganda ministry, and he was ousted as party chief less for befriending students than for failing to contain their prodemocratic protests.

Hu's death, however, provided the students with a splendid opportunity and they made the most of it. It would be awkward if not impossible, they knew, for the government completely to forbid mourning the death of a sitting Politburo member who was also a past General Secretary of the Communist party. Activists decided to see how far they could stretch official tolerance. Their calls for demonstrations drew thousands of students carrying photographs of Hu and wearing signs of mourning. The government recognized the implicit protest but apparently decided to try to appease the students or demonstrate its tolerance by allowing them to carry on. Unappeased, the students added broader slogans to

the signs of mourning and their numbers grew. Every Chinese observer read clearly the echoes of the public demonstrations that followed Zhou Enlai's death in 1976 and produced the notorious Tiananmen incident (the repression of the protest that created popular martyrs and was a key moment in the fall of the Gang of Four and return of Deng Xiaoping). The potential potency of such protests was thus unquestioned.

Hu Yaobang also provided a powerful, multivocal symbol. He was not only a liberal, but a clear Westernizer who had made a stir while I was in China in 1984 by (apparently impulsively) suggesting that chopsticks should be abandoned for forks. He was also Deng Xiaoping's personally picked and publicly designated successor. Deng had made providing for an orderly succession one of the centerpieces of his reform campaign. The sacking of Hu thus suggested that China had not shaken its "feudal" tradition of rule as fully as Deng claimed. Hu was a sponsor as well as a predecessor of Zhao Ziyang, the current party chief. Hu died during a Politburo meeting, apparently suffering a heart attack. This allowed for discreet rumors that he had either been humiliated by his colleagues or shocked by some action they contemplated.

By late April, after nearly two weeks of protest in the guise of mourning, senior officials began to lose patience with the students. Crowds now numbered in the tens of thousands and the use of Hu's death as pretext was wearing thin. A number of students thought the government would probably wait until after the end of the official month of mourning to ban further marches. In fact, those cadres who had already had enough apparently gained the upper hand and secured Deng's approval for a crackdown on April 25. This resulted in the now-infamous *People's Daily* editorial of April 26 which warned students none too delicately to stop creating disorder; the editorial implied that the government was ready to use military force (though as soon as it was published a variety of senior leaders including Zhou Enlai's widow were said to begin lobbying for more restraint).

Far from calling their protests off, students drew new fervor from the government's condemnation, seeing it as provocation rather than warning. They were particularly incensed that their own patriotic inclinations had been called into doubt, that they were being labeled troublemakers rather than good citizens exercising their constitutionally guaranteed rights of remonstrance and free speech. Student leaders feared the worst, however, and several melodramatically made wills the night of April 26. The next morning, they were joined by the largest crowd yet, perhaps a quarter of a million people (though estimates vary widely and extend up to more than half a million). There are at most about 160,000 university students in Beijing, so any numbers beyond that suggest substantial participation from other groups—teachers, secondary school students, and the general public.

The march of April 27 was one of the most remarkable successes in China or elsewhere, and one of the most striking cases of bad government tactics I know of. As the column of marchers approached Tiananmen Square along several routes they met large contingents of military police. Anxiety grew amid the sense that the government meant to crush them. On Chang'an Boulevard, the immediate approach to the Square, protesters confronted blockades of policemen, apparently intending to halt the march. But the policemen were unarmed, and stood only a few rows deep against the massive crowd. They attempted briefly to hold their ground then gave way; a few scuffles followed. The crowd cheered as marchers pushed through. To compound its apparent madness, the government had arrayed several such police blockades a few hundred meters apart along the boulevard. The students pierced each one easily, and each time their confidence and enthusiasm grew. The government's intention may have been to provide a symbolic warning that the protesters were breaking the law. They ended up giving the students the feeling of having won a victory against the military!

As Chinese protesters have done at least since 1919, the students marched in rows with arms linked. But this time they added another bit of organization. Students around the perimeter of each group also linked their arms,

providing a neat definition to each marching unit—class, school, and so on—and simultaneously keeping out *agents provocateurs*. This was not a trivial issue, because disorder of any type would delegitimize the students' cause in the eyes of the public. The government was apt not only to call the protesters hooligans but to employ some real hooligans to lend credence to the charge. This seemed to have happened only days before in Xian where a protest was marred by a small rampage of attacks on property.

The April 27 march galvanized popular attention and brought the first phase of student protest to its climax. This was no longer a protest confined narrowly to university students, nor could it rest any more on the pretext of mourning Hu Yaobang. It had taken on an autonomous significance. And the attention it galvanized was not limited to Beijing or even to China. From this point on, the protest began to be echoed in a growing number of other Chinese cities. Within a week, the first of eventually enormous contingents of students from around the country began to come to Beijing to join the protest. And the April 27 march made front page and first item television news around the world. The students were well aware of this international interest and had organized specifically to turn it to their advantage. They carried signs in English, French, and other Western languages. "Vive la liberté" and "Give me liberty or give me death" established links to the year's two famous bicentennials (albeit loosely in the second case, since the reference was revolutionary and not constitutional). They also, and perhaps more important, gave foreign photographers shots that were more likely to hold the attention of folks back home than were signs in Chinese. At this point too, at least some student leaders began to become much more visible in the press, precisely because they made themselves accessible to the press. Thus Wu'erkaixi's dormitory room at Beijing Normal University became a regular stop for journalists. But at the same time a few leaders from smaller schools—including the very active University of Politics and Law—began to chafe a little at the appropriation of this

aspect of the leadership role by leaders at Beijing Normal and Beijing Universities.

The next big event was a march on May 4, the anniversary of the 1919 student movement. Though the government again brought out the military police, this time it had them discreetly withdraw to the sides of the streets rather than challenge the students directly. Deprived of the drama of breaking through police lines, the occasion was curiously anticlimactic. The demonstration was as large as on April 27, and the crowd of bystanders larger, but there was no tension and there were no events, music, or even major speeches to hold people's attention once they made it to Tiananmen Square. For a week afterward, students watched the protests dwindle as they waited to see what response the government would make to their demands. Most returned briefly to classes. The protest was a constant topic of discussion on campuses, but no one seemed to know what the next move was.

Leadership

The next move was unclear for three main reasons. First, the protest had moved beyond the range of lessons available from experience. Although protesters had posed implicit challenges to the government before, none had ever acted against direct instructions—backed apparently by military force—and gotten away with it. Students talked frequently with teachers and others who remembered earlier movements and who had thought at length about possible courses of action; they gave advice, but this mobilization escaped both their expectations and experience. Second, it was not clear what the government was going to do. The possibilities the students saw ranged from harsh crackdown to taking the students seriously and massively accelerating reform. Uncertainty about the government's actions stemmed from lack of knowledge of which factions in the government were in the ascendant, though most students did not yet know just how deeply divided the government was. It seems that some partisans of the reform faction may have talked with student leaders, or informed them of their views indirectly through senior intellectuals (and on the other side, Li Peng met with

senior professors to try to get them to encourage calm and faith in the government on campuses). But though this may have affected actions at various points it does not seem to have been extensive enough to say that the movement was either substantially encouraged by any party faction or helped by access to much significant inside information. Third, the student leadership was itself both somewhat amorphous and unable to make and communicate decisions except by word of mouth and *dazibao* (large character posters).

Students had initially become leaders primarily by leading. That is, there was no prior stage of selection, a procedure by which individuals became officially sanctioned leaders. On a few occasions formal elections were held, but they were not the primary source of authority for leaders. Most were after-the-fact ratifications of leaders who had emerged in the course of practical activity. Some involved more or less fanciful positions—like the election of Beijing Normal University student Chai Ling as “Commander of Tiananmen Square.” In the case of this election as of most others in China (whether as part of government officialdom or in a protest movement) the outcome was not in doubt when the voting took place; the vote-count ratified a decision that had already become more or less consensual. And being nominal “Commander” for a moment gave Chai Ling little opportunity to command, for the movement was not organized in a hierarchy of ranks.

Not only were leaders less official than Western media reports have frequently suggested, leadership was spread much more widely through the movement. Many different groups of students made innovations in protest simply by deciding that some particular slogan or line of action was a good idea and then putting it into practice. Others might copy or not. Important decisions were often taken by small groups; they did not all percolate up from the “masses.” But the small groups were not always identical to or part of a centralized leadership. It is important to realize how rapidly the movement developed from bases on campuses of about ten thousand or fewer

students to include hundreds of thousands of participants coming from various backgrounds with varying degrees of knowledge and commitment. The level of organization achieved was quite remarkable. Marches were orderly, not rag-tag affairs; in mid-May there was a notable increase in pageantry, with new banners and flags and matching T-shirts for a few groups. In the Square itself crowds were orderly, there was virtually no crime, health services were set up and when it became necessary, paths were made for ambulances. A system of passes was devised and enforced fairly effectively by student guards. But though linked, leadership and organization are not exactly the same. A lot of this organization came through the borrowing of templates from other settings (as with the role of class monitors) and from lateral interactions among groups. Only a portion was centrally initiated. As time went on, however, leadership became simultaneously more important and harder to organize and provide.

In late May, for example, leaders tried repeatedly to move slogans from an almost exclusive preoccupation with persons—“Down with Li Peng,” “Deng Xiaoping step down”—to a renewed emphasis on democracy as such and other systemic changes. They failed. The earlier emphasis on systemic rather than personnel changes in government was all but lost as the movement broadened, anger grew, and confrontation intensified.* At the same

*An aspect of this that struck me especially forcefully was the students' refusal to use Marxist and/or Maoist rhetoric in any of their slogans. Even students who did use some Marxist categories in their analyses during small group discussions, and who might acknowledge abstractly the rhetorical force of using the government's own language against it, never made any effort to develop this in their public pronouncements. Whether this was simply because Marxism had been made boring by mandatory political study classes taught from translated Soviet manuals, or because it had been deradicalized by its use as an official ideology, or because it had been more deeply discredited by its role in Maoist rule I was never certain. But protesters did not accuse elites of class rule. Students who in the classroom were keen to discuss Marx's writings on alienation (and who regarded the government's dismissal of these “immature works” as merely an attempt to avoid the charge that alienation continued under socialism) did not use this language in movement gatherings. In this, the 1989 protesters differed substantially from those of 1979–80

Beijing Spring

time that such ideological leadership was relatively ineffective, organization remained fairly strong. There was a crisis over managing and accounting for donations from abroad, but considering the pressure students were under, the fact that they could not even open a bank account, and that the sums were huge by the standards of their daily lives, this was minor. Supplies that arrived were circulated effectively. Tents from Hong Kong were distributed and arranged in orderly ranks. Couriers maintained contacts between students in the Square and their home campuses. Loudspeakers were set up. Troop movements were monitored.

There were two great triumphs of inspirational leadership. The first was the decision of May 12 to begin a hunger strike; the second was that which resulted in the erection of the statue of the "Goddess of Democracy" exactly two weeks later. Each involved an interaction between (a) a widespread sense that something needed to be done, (b) initiative from some particular individuals and/or small groups, and (c) a sort of ratification by the core leadership of the movement. In the case of the hunger strike, the initiating and ratifying groups were more closely linked, indeed heavily overlapping at the major universities—Beijing, Beijing Normal, People's, and Qinghua. With regard to the statue, however, the key role was played by students at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, people for the most part outside the "established" core of student leadership.

Both the hunger strike and the statue, however, were successful symbolic acts. They bolstered the enthusiasm and commitment of student activists when these were flagging, and they communicated about the movement to far-flung audiences. Each brought a new period of exhilaration to a movement that swung rapidly between emotional highs and lows.

The hunger strike was the more important, though the statue became an enduring symbol.

who made considerable use of Marxist texts, including Marx's writings on the Paris Commune, as a basis for conceptualizing democracy. Perhaps the most important reason was simply the much readier availability of other languages of discourse after a decade of Western influence and internal reform.

Several tactical considerations guided the hunger strike, though it also followed some historical examples and was based in emotional expression. Most obviously, perhaps, those who planned the hunger strike were well aware of the impending visit of Soviet Premier Gorbachev. Not only would his visit inhibit the Chinese government from taking overt repressive action, it would bring an even larger flock of international reporters and focus more media attention on China. The protesters' message would be heard (and seen) more widely, and that itself would have an impact, perhaps, on the Chinese regime. But the students had to offer the reporters newsworthy events; the hunger strike provided both a focus of attention and numerous concrete events and photo opportunities as students collapsed and were carried unconscious to hospitals while others rallied to their support. And it was during the hunger strike that the largest of all the protest marches was held. More than a million people converged on Tiananmen Square on May 17. The impact of sheer scale was multiplied by the diversity of banners proclaiming the different units in attendance or offering witty or piercing slogans. And the marchers wore a rainbow of colors, one of the most visible signs of the freedom people felt in the midst of this brief relaxation of government control being a delight in more expressive clothing.

The hunger strike also aroused enormous sympathy on the part of ordinary people who heard of it. This meant at least most of the residents of China's larger cities and probably a fair part of the rest of the country. Scenes from the hunger strike were broadcast on Chinese Central Television and printed in *People's Daily*, but it cannot simply be assumed that these sources reached the whole of their routine audiences throughout the country. Constant reporting was also beamed back via the BBC and Voice of America, both of which can be heard widely in China (although the government jammed them with at least middling efficacy for some of this time).

Ordinary people felt drawn to and protective of the hunger strikers; they were prepared to see the latter as suffering on their behalf. This was partly because they were moved by the spectacle of relatively privileged university

students worrying not only about their personal careers but about China's future, putting their health, future prospects, and possibly lives at risk. It was also because they could identify readily with some of the students' complaints—notably about corruption. And while political democracy was apparently a less pressing concern outside intellectual ranks, other people were prepared to see the student protest as speaking also for their more economic anxieties and demands.

The hunger strike quickly turned into an occupation of Tiananmen Square. This ultimately became problematic, as student leaders found that they could not end the occupation in a way that saved face, satisfied the full range of participants, and still avoided an intolerable confrontation with the government. But at the start it was a fine tactical move. Aside from the strike's successful communication to the Chinese people and abroad, the occupation of Tiananmen Square gave the movement a focal point. This was important not just for those reporting on it from outside but for the protesters themselves. Previously there had been no "neutral" turf on which activists from all the different universities gathered to discuss their plans and ideas. Now the Square became not only a symbol of success and an object of defense, it became the scene of nightly meetings of the student leadership.

Occupying the Square

On May 22, I sat in Tiananmen Square with a group of the occupying students. The sun was mercilessly hot and the pavement absorbed the heat and radiated it back at us. The Square had been occupied for ten days, and garbage disposal was a problem (though students worked hard to keep it under control). Banners that had been bright and fresh a week before were a little bedraggled. So were the students. On the other hand, the chronic water shortage was lessening. Pedicabs were wheeled around the Square with barrels on the back; protesters came and filled their own bottles, usually one- or two-liter plastic drink bottles of a sort that had only arrived in China during the last five

years. Merchants were now donating food in more than ample supplies. I ate steamed rolls with my student friends and then shared their disappointment when a more tempting meal of sliced pork over rice arrived, just after we had taken the edge off our appetites. The pork dishes came in styrofoam containers, just as they might from any Chinese take-out restaurant in the United States, fifty at a time. Only three days before, many of these same students had ended a week-long hunger strike. One had made six round-trips to a hospital to be revived by intravenous drip and back to the Square to continue his fast.

Now he ate well, but talked of disarray and discouragement in the leadership. The previous day had seen crisis at the top, even while the "broad masses" of students were still savoring the support of Beijing's ordinary people and the government's inability to impose martial law. The three most prominent leaders, Wu'erkaixi, Wang Dan, and Chai Ling, had differences of their own (notably a clash of male egos between the first two) but had agreed that it was time to call for a withdrawal from Tiananmen Square. From the massive and festive May 4 demonstration, just a week after the April 27 triumph, to just before the massacre a month later, students occasionally suggested, "It's time to consolidate our gains; let's declare victory and return to classes." They didn't mean to give up, of course, only to step back from the most provocative tactics, and to put the ball in the government's court for a response to the democratic challenge.

At first this suggestion came mainly from older graduate students, somewhat less radical and more cautious in their overall approach. By the end of May, it had been voiced by key leaders of the student movement. Some thought a declaration of victory and organized withdrawal would bolster Communist party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang's chances to stay in power, and thus enhance the forces of liberal reform. Others worried that if the occupation were too prolonged, crowds would grow smaller and the movement would look gradually weaker. Still others simply wanted to avoid violent repression. By June 4 it looked like the last argument, at least, had had significant merits.

Nonetheless, in the May 21 midnight caucus of the leadership, the leaders sharing this view were outvoted by a substantial majority. Wu'erkaixi had retreated to collect his thoughts and recover his strength. Wang Dan sat for hours with his head in his hands, sometimes crying in frustration. The problem was not just that the occupying students were not following his leadership but that there was no coherent alternative. The decision had been made, it seemed, to stay in the Square. But there was no alternative organization to that which seemed to be losing its efficacy and no particular plan about what to do while the occupation was continued.

What would the American Students for a Democratic Society have done under similar circumstances, asked my friend, the main student leader of one of the smaller but prestigious Beijing universities? I wasn't sure, I said. In retrospect, however, it seems to me that the SDS quite likely would have done, and over the long run did do, pretty much the same thing. Though comparisons with the Western student movement of the 1960s were often misleading about the Chinese students' struggles in 1989, there was a striking similarity here. The SDS (and more generally the leadership of the sixties struggles) dissolved in factional fighting (even before one faction launched a takeover) and lost its ability to lead a movement that had grown rapidly both beyond the core that had been a part of the long discussions leading up to it, and beyond the movement's organizational capacity. So too in Beijing. There were clashes of egos and ideologies among the leaders. Protesters who came from outside of Beijing now rivalled and would soon pass the numbers of those from the capital's universities. Those who came later often felt a need to demonstrate their own commitment to the struggle by taking stronger positions or engaging in more extreme tactics than those who began the fight. At the same time, their understanding of the slogans and goals that guided the movement was often fuzzier and shallower.

At various points, some students tried to push the movement ahead by more radical

measures. The most striking of these was the declaration of a handful of hunger strikers that they planned to burn themselves to death if the government did not meet key student demands. This threat was made repeatedly during the week after May 13. On at least one occasion the would-be martyrs got so far as dousing themselves with kerosene before they were prevented by other protesters from completing their threatened immolation.

This incident made me think of the comments Lu Xun (China's greatest modern writer) made on the death of Qiu Jin some eighty years before. Qiu Jin had been one of the first women to rise to importance among China's radical modernizers, and had studied in Japan at the same time as Lu Xun. There she had developed a reputation as a fiery orator and drew large and admiring crowds. Her fame continued to grow when she returned to China. She played a key role in building a school and joined with her lover and others in planning an insurrection. Eventually their plot was uncovered. She was warned by friends that the army was coming for her but chose to remain at her school, hoping to make a dramatic last stand with the arms which had been stockpiled there. She was captured and ultimately beheaded. Lu Xun wrote, however, that she had been "clapped" to death. In other words, the crowds that had urged on her speeches and applauded her protestations against the government had implicitly pushed her to ever more radical positions. She could neither pause to consolidate her gains nor escape when the troops came without humiliation and betrayal of her own sense of direction. The complicity of the crowd in her death went further. Their applause was not just the product of agreement with her complaints, but of a pleasure in the entertainment her protest provided. A crowd would also gawk at her execution.

So too in the "Beijing Spring" of 1989 and in varying degrees—so too always. A crowd of a quarter of a million people is impressive when observers and participants expected only a hundred thousand. But it quickly establishes a new norm. To maintain a sense of momentum, to remain newsworthy, activists must increase the numbers in the crowd. Or they must do

something more dramatic than merely marching. Attention will always be focused on the apparent leaders and the core activists, but the crowd on the fringes shares implicitly in responsibility for the actions taken. Those who cheer encourage those who demonstrate. Those who merely watch still swell the crowd counts. Simply by attending, every one of us, Chinese or foreign, upped the ante for the protesting students.

So, almost invisibly, the stakes kept being raised throughout the month of May and the first two days of June. The government tried concessions. State Council spokesman Yuan Mu, for example, met with some students for a televised dialogue. It was not open enough and he was not senior enough (or forthcoming enough) to satisfy many people. It encouraged further action, however, not just by failing to satisfy but by seeming to prove that protest could bring results. The government tried condemnation and the imposition of martial law. Li Peng's speech declaring martial law was like gasoline on a fire; students who previously were unsure of how far to go or whether some moderation might bolster the cause of reform immediately took to the streets, insulted by his tone and angered by his denial of everything they called for. And of course the imposition of martial law failed, at least for two weeks, with troops stalled on the periphery of Beijing. The soldiers' inability or unwillingness to enforce martial law was widely felt as another triumph. But just as it prevented short term repression it raised the stakes of action yet again. However orderly they might be, the students and their allies among the citizens of Beijing were now engaged in what the government would clearly see as a sort of illegal occupation of the city.

The flow of students from outside of Beijing into Tiananmen Square contributed to a sort of radicalization in a different way. These students had started coming in large numbers and to stay for an extended period of time shortly after the hunger strike began. They established camps under the banners of their various schools. They had not been involved in the early stages of protest, and so may have felt an

extra need to prove their commitment to the cause, to match or top the actions taken by the Beijing students. They were also cut off from various potentially moderating influences. Only those most committed to the struggle had made the trip to Beijing. Where local students constantly mingled with less committed or less radical classmates, and thus were reminded that their views were particularly strong, those from outside Beijing had few such contacts. Local students also talked more often to family members and to teachers. Perhaps most important, the students from outside of Beijing were not well integrated into the leadership of the movement. They had no voice in the most prominent ranks of leaders, and there were fewer strands of communication spreading information, views, and instructions among them.

These students from outside Beijing played a central role in the decision not to withdraw from Tiananmen Square at the very end of May, a few days before the massacre. They had not been in the protest as long, and so were perhaps not as tired of it. More to the point, withdrawing from the Square meant returning to their own homes or campuses. This might expose them to retaliation from local officials (many of whom were less sympathetic to the protests than were leaders of some of the Beijing campuses, nearly all of which had at least large and powerful proreform factions). It would also cut them off from the center of protest. Beijing students could stay intensively involved after a withdrawal; at best those from other cities could try to carry on with local protests but out of both the limelight and the main lines of communication.

Many of the non-Beijing students did leave during the first three days of June, but this may have meant that those who stayed were all the more determined. In any case, on the fateful night of June 3, as the army approached Tiananmen Square, the students from outside Beijing are reputed to have decided for the most part to stay put while large numbers of local students withdrew to the south.

Leaving Tiananmen Square was important not just to avoid a massacre. At the time, no one expected a massacre of the sort wrought June 3 and 4. Students expected tear gas and

rubber bullets. Rather, the issue was how to reorient the movement towards long-term struggle rather than short-term protest. Even among those who shared this view, there were reasonable arguments for staying in Tiananmen Square—the need for a focal point, for example, and for continuing to show the citizens of Beijing that their support was necessary. The point is not to judge whether withdrawal would have been the right move or wrong. Rather, it is to see how hard it is for a movement like this to transform itself into the sort of organization that can carry out a long-term struggle, shifting as necessary from what Gramsci would call the war of position to the war of maneuver—or in this case back again.

One of the difficulties faced by the Chinese student protesters in 1989 was that they lacked the luxury of building a movement gradually, carrying on discussions, and building solidarities over a period of months or years. It is true that the movement had grown out of months of complaint about China's current situation, not sprung full blown into action after Hu Yaobang's death. It is true also that it is not an isolated event but the latest in a series of prodemocratic protests including those of 1979–80 and 1986–87—and stretching back also to the mourning of Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Revolution of 1949, the May 4th movement of 1919, the Republican Revolution of 1911, and the examination candidates' remonstrance and repression of 1895. Nonetheless, at least in recent years, prodemocracy protests have been relatively brief incidents, not long-term movements. The government has repeatedly shown its capacity to stifle public discussion. China is remarkably lacking in free spaces for such discourse. Compared even to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, China is short on institutions of "society" separate from the state, and short on privacy. A bit more of either of these would allow more publication of an unofficial press, for example, or more links to be forged between members of different potentially oppositional groups, such as workers and students.

Without either free public spaces or privacy, democracy is unlikely to get very far. It is

possible that reform will bring more of each to China over the next few years. It is likely that there will be more flowerings of dissent like the student movement of this past spring. But until deeper roots are laid, such protests will continue to echo the old Confucian idea of the people (or the intellectuals) remonstrating with the ruler. They will not be manifestations of alternative bases for government so much as attempts to remind those in power of their responsibilities. One of the main significances of the tactical difficulties I have described, and of the particular pattern of success the movement achieved, is that they do not suggest a capacity to supplant the government so much as to deliver it a kick in the rear. The government has responded so far mainly by kicking back. It may also try to clean up its act, for example by policing corruption more closely. This kind of popular movement can hope mainly for concessions. Its strengths are its ability to make life difficult for leaders, and especially to play leaders off against each other.

The long scope of Chinese history can breed depression over the slow pace of progress or optimism because martyrs are not forgotten. In trying to further the cause for which people died this year, a key issue will be whether ties can be forged among different groups—intellectuals, students, workers, entrepreneurs, officials, and peasants. For all but the last there were at least the beginnings of joint efforts in this spring's protest. If these can begin to be secured, or even institutionalized, then there will be a stronger basis next time. That there will be a next time seems almost certain. Whether it will be in two years, five years, or ten is less clear. At some point in the not too distant future, Deng Xiaoping will die; at that time a new power struggle within the government will quite likely create an opening for protest from without. In the meantime, the way will be paved for the next struggle if discussion improves ideas, if associational links are strengthened, and if the memory of this movement is kept alive. None of these, however, is an easy task. □