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Revolution and repression in Tiananmen square

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III

PROTEST IN BEIJING: THE CONDITIONS AND IMPORTANCE OF THE CHINESE STUDENT MOVEMENT OF 1989

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Echoes of the past figured prominently in the Chinese student movement of 1989. Students began to take to the streets in growing numbers after the death of Hu Yaobang, the reform-oriented Communist Party General Secretary who had lost his post during the repression of the 1986-87 student protest. *Dazibao* (large character posters) mounted on the walls of Beijing University's "triangle area" listed key dates from the May 4th movement of 1919, China's first major student protest movement. The seventieth anniversary of May 4th itself was the occasion of the second really large march of 1989. 1989 was also the tenth anniversary of the "democracy wall" movement which had brought the first massive voice for democratization in post-Mao China. And the anniversaries went on and on. On May 3 I sat with a handful of graduate students on the Beijing University campus musing on the fact that their movement, which already was beginning to make them feel part of a historical struggle, came in the year of the fortieth anniversary of the culmination of China's communist revolution in the creation of the People's Republic, the 200th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, and perhaps most potently of all, the bicentennial of the French Revolution.

The very scene of this conversation said something about the background to the protest. Of all Chinese universities, Beijing University is perhaps the one which feels most familiar to an American. Its campus was originally that of Harvard's Beijing outreach effort, and it is laid out with quadrangles, spacious lawns, rolling hills, and even a pretty lake. No American arriving there would need more than a moment to realize that he was on a university campus. And in 1989 it looked more familiar than ever. Snazzy ten speed bicycles were cropping up among the more traditional utilitarian Chinese designs. Students wore polo shirts with brand name logos splashed across their chests. Men and women walked hand in hand. One could buy Coke as well as the local orange sodas. A good number of students had earphones on their heads and "Walkman" stereos at their belts. Oddly, the first thing that struck me as really unfamiliar was the very high percentage of students who smoked--even though many favored brands from my home state of North Carolina.

But there were also subtler changes at work. Beijing University had previously been home to one of my favorite statues of Mao Zedong. In front of a central building he had stood, his hands clasped behind his back, facing into the wind, perhaps the wind of change. Though Mao was already dead when I first visited Beijing University, it hadn't occurred to me that this statue would have been toppled by the time I returned. I rather imagined that at worst Mao would

simply lose his currency, but his statue remain a landmark--a bit like the Confederate soldier on the front quad of my own university in Chapel Hill. Mao's statue was a casualty, however, not just of shifting political currents but of a deep-seated ambivalence on the part of young Chinese intellectuals towards their past. Not only recent symbols such as Mao but ancient figures of Chinese culture were subject to attack. Students grappled with the challenge of figuring out just what it did and should mean to be Chinese even while accepting certain Western influences and proposing innovations of their own. They had not lost their pride in being Chinese, but it was coupled paradoxically with a humiliation at whatever seemed to have made China weak in the modern world.

Among the bits of Western influence at work in China, of course, were partial stirrings of capitalism. When I gathered with my student friends to talk about the prospects for democracy it was in a privately owned and operated restaurant housed on the University campus. And though there was talk of inflation overall, this restaurant drew praise for providing us more good food than we could eat, and quite enough beer to drink, for the equivalent of a little over a dollar a head. Of course even that was an expensive meal for Chinese students who would ordinarily pay fifty cents or less for a dining hall meal, carrying their own metal dishes with them, and using a spoon rather than chopsticks because it meant a single implement would do for soup and other dishes, and because it wouldn't fall through a mesh bag.

Around the table, my new friends (I had met only one of the students there before) praised my handling of chopsticks--a routine sort of compliment for a Chinese to pay a foreigner. They deferentially asked my opinion of and advice for the Chinese student movement though I had but recently arrived. And gradually, after a little prodding, they began to tell me more of what they thought lay ahead. Some expected real democracy in a year or so, others wondered whether they would see it in their lifetime. All did think it inevitable, a matter simultaneously of historical necessity and popular will. They told me that intellectuals had a central role to play as conscience of the nation and as source of a new vision of Chinese culture. They relived inspiring moments from the April 27th march when students had broken through ranks of unarmed military police to reach Tiananmen Square, revealing the government to be unwilling to enforce the threats of violent repression it had made the day before. They speculated on tactical questions: Should the planned May 4th march be the last before a consolidation of gains or one moment in a rising wave of protest? Would the return of Zhao Ziyang from North Korea bring them an important friend in power or end the apparent indecision of the government? How could the ideas of the students best be spread to other sections of the population? They argued amongst themselves over theoretical questions. They joked about the danger of repression, laughing at the undergraduates who had made wills before marching on Tiananmen against government orders April 27th.

Within six weeks, these students would have experienced peaks of exhilaration as their movement grew beyond the scale of their short term hopes, troughs of depression as it seemed to falter, lacking strong leadership or sense of direction, and rage as soldiers following government orders killed thousands of fellow protesters. By mid-June, some of these students would have fled Beijing to the relative safety of family and friends in smaller towns. Others would be attending hours of "political study" sessions each week, confessing the number of

times they had joined demonstrations, resisting calls to inform on friends, studying the speeches of Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng. All would have been silenced, at least for the near future.

In this essay, I want to look briefly at some of the underlying conditions which gave rise to the protest movement, then summarize the narrative development of the six weeks which brought such exhilaration and disaster to China. After that, I will address three questions: (1) what did the protesters want? (2) what may turn out to be the historical achievement and importance of this protest? And (3) what are the limits or weaknesses which inhibited it and will need to be confronted as Chinese people push for democracy in the future? I will offer only a brief narrative recapitulation of the movement itself, both because I have published a narrative elsewhere and because space is limited.³

UNDERLYING CONDITIONS

SUCCESSION CRISIS: Chinese critics of the communist regime are fond of comparing it to its imperial predecessors, pointing out what they call its 'feudal' aspects. This is in some ways a problematic characterization, born largely of a crude appropriation of the already simplified historical categories of *The Communist Manifesto*. The particularities of traditional China are poorly grasped by lumping it together with medieval Europe, and feudalism was only an aspect, however important, of European social organization. It had seemed both a cheap shot and an analytic error for people to say (as the Taiwanese government was especially fond of claiming) that Mao was just China's newest emperor. Blaming the communist system's current difficulties on lingering feudalism was also a version of critical analysis which parts of the government could endorse, as it challenged not their policy declarations but only premature claims of success. Blaming feudalism actually shifted critique away from a more fundamental analysis of the problems in the current regime.

Nonetheless, in 1989 the government did seem to share a good many continuities with traditional China. Students pointed, for example, to the old men struggling to cling to power. Crises of imperial succession were the bane of traditional China. Because each emperor ruled until his death, nearly every transition was marked by a power struggle. As a ruler grew old, his generals, staff and potential heirs began jockeying for position, usually creating a period of increasing instability which often culminated in a full scale crisis after the emperor's death. Deng Xiaoping had made avoiding this pattern one of his main goals in the late 1980s. He had maneuvered his fellow octogenarians into full or partial retirement, elevating a 'younger' generation (mainly in its 60s) to power. But when push came to shove, he appeared unwilling to give up having the final say on every important policy decision. In 1987 he had engineered the removal of his long-time protege and designated heir, Hu Yaobang when the later had acted too independently and with too much willingness to see economic reform extended into the political arena. Of course he was to do the same in 1989.

Beyond the specifics of Deng's power, students commented on the average age of the party elite as itself an indication of China's failure to modernize. They felt this keenly, as it meant that they would have to wait decades--decades spent in following the dictates of their elders rather than their hearts or minds--before

3. See "Democracy and Science, 1989: A Report from Beijing," in *Transaction/SOCIETY*, September/October 1989; I have also written on organizational, leadership and tactical considerations in "The Beijing Spring, 1989: Notes of the Making of a Protest," *Dissent*, Fall, 1989.

they could have a substantial voice in the highest levels of policy-making. This was one of the sources of Gorbachev's popularity. Not only was the Soviet leader relatively young, he appeared to listen to and promote still younger voices. A bit of the same had happened in China, to be sure. A few younger economists, especially, had been catapulted to great prominence. A Western graduate education in some cases helped to overcome youth and give rapid acceleration to a career. But the role of the party elders was felt as a drag on China's progress and even as a source of embarrassment, since it was seen as a sign of backwardness itself.

In the spring of 1989, a few people went beyond raising questions about the age of party leaders, and beyond wondering about who would succeed Deng. Perhaps, they suggested, China was experiencing not just a succession of emperors but of dynasties. Perhaps the communist regime would turn out just to be one of China's short-lived dynasties, a reign of decades like the Sui or Yuan rather than of a thousand-years as the traditional benediction has it. Chinese dynasties are thought to have a natural life course: strong and sometimes expanding in their youth, stable and peaceful in middle age, increasingly prone to crises and instability as they grow old. Was communism growing old?

Most students had little sense that any short term changes were going to end the People's Republic of China. The majority did not even contemplate overturning the Communist Party. They did however see the government as weakening. And whether the succession crisis was large or small, it seemed to play a significant role. The ordinary work of the government was hampered by loss of discipline, increasing corruption and the distraction of factional struggles. The latter were not just between "hard-liners" and "reformers" but among a wide range of different groups. While most such groups had ideological positions, these were not necessarily their basis. Many were constructed out of personal loyalties, including kinship, while others were marriages of convenience. Alliances cross-cut each other and boundaries shifted. Little of this struggle went on in public--or even in the full view of the party elite. While it consumed more and more attention, thus, it also made even highly placed people more and more uneasy and uncertain of just what sort of government--and ideological line--would prevail.

The divisions in government did not all come from the succession crisis, of course; that merely made it difficult to resolve them or paper them over. Differing views of the economic reforms of the past decade, the struggle among generations, relations between military and civilian leaders, debate over the extent of permissible Westernization and attempts to stem some of the high level corruption which ran rampant were all factors undermining government unity.

Whatever the outcome, a key impact of the growing concern over succession was the near incapacitation of the government when faced with the growing student protest and the evident sympathy much of the broader public felt for it. The movement cannot be understood simply in terms of its own grievances or organizational strengths. It has to be seen as flowering in an opening provided for it by the internal divisions and relative weakness of the government.

MATERIAL GAINS: In the spring of 1989, Chinese people frequently pointed out the various shortcomings of their economy: inflation was growing, there were periodic shortages of important products, some goods and services could only be secured through bribery, wages were inequitable at best and often low in absolute terms. Students repeatedly bemoaned their own poverty, which was very real by American standards, and pointed out that even the most senior professors (along with engineers, doctors and other intellectuals and professionals) made but a

fraction of what a taxi driver received. At the same time, though the students did not always recognize it, their material situation was noticeable better than that of students only a few years before. Bicycles were not a short supply item, though most students had rather beat up bikes (a couple told me they had left their fancier ten speeds at home because they would stand out at the university and be stolen in Beijing). Most students at the major Beijing universities had radios, many had stereos, a few had televisions in their dormitory rooms. Undergraduates were crowded four to six to a room, but nearly all ate adequately and owned a few books. A good many had cameras with which to photograph their favorite *dazibao* (some had quite fancy Japanese 35mm SLRs); this was a far cry from the China of the early 1980s, when a tourist might draw a crowd just by changing film. Students also had tape recorders to preserve memorable speeches during the demonstrations and leaders found it easy to buy battery-operated megaphones to make their speeches audible. In short, even students, who had not shared much in China's economic gains of the last decade, were noticeably better off than they had been five years before.

The gains were much more pronounced for other groups. There were the *getihu*, the small entrepreneurs whose stalls filled free markets and a good many sidewalks, and some of whom made enough money to be well above manning a stall anymore. Some, indeed, became quite rich, owners of motorcycles and patrons of the better restaurants. Of course, some also failed, though this side of capitalism did not seem to be clear to all Chinese yet, and many assumed that simply to be an entrepreneur meant to be wealthy. There were the employees of joint venture companies from hotels to textile factories to electronics assembly plants. Nearly all could expect to earn a wage at least double the national average. Peasants had benefited most famously, largely from the right to raise some animals and market some crops for themselves. There were also an increasing number of millionaires and some well paid senior managers in a growing 'big business' sector, like the founders of the Stone Computer Corporation, China's largest privately owned company, which even operated its own think tank and publications. Deng Xiaoping's slogan, "to get rich is glorious" had not been ignored.

In the last two years, however, many of the gains had been eroded. The economy had stagnated. Peasants had been paid for their main crops (still purchased by the government) only partly in cash and partly in a not immediately negotiable scrip. Inflation had eaten up much of the extra earnings of urban workers. The implementation of market prices in some areas while trying to regulate prices in others was responsible for numerous imbalances. Lightbulbs were in short supply, for example, because tungsten was sold at (relatively high) market prices while lightbulbs themselves had to be sold at a low regulated price; firms could not make a profit manufacturing them. In the countryside, the rush to purchase consumer goods had reportedly slowed. The government scrip and consequent shortage of cash was not the only reason. Peasants had also begun to save for traditional purposes such as weddings and funerals. [In July 1989 the government would launch a crackdown on such practices, ostensibly because of their "superstitious" religious foundations but also substantially because of the economic impact of holding large amounts of money out of circulation.]

Even though recent years had brought more problems along with economic growth, the student and popular protest of Spring 1989 cannot be understood without noting that economic gains were genuine. Firstly, many of the popular complaints, including most notably corruption, inflation and inequities in

income distribution, were products of the economic reforms. Secondly, the economic changes helped to propel the more general opening of possibilities in China. Economic motives had helped to engender growing Western influences through tourism (hard currency), joint ventures (capital and technology), and education abroad (skills). Beyond this, economic reforms had fueled a burgeoning market in publications, for example, and a sense that opportunities to advance one's career were not limited to currying favor with the Communist Party or one's immediate supervisors (though there were still sharp limits to how free from one's *danwei* or unit one could become). Thirdly, and centrally, the very economic ambitions of the Party and government made them newly reliant on highly educated workers, professionals, scientists and scholars.

A NEW PROMINENCE FOR INTELLECTUALS: A very wide range of educated people are categorized by the Chinese term translated as "intellectuals." Not only people who live by creating, criticizing or disseminating knowledge, but nearly everyone with a university education is considered an intellectual in China. These were people which Deng Xiaoping and other proponents of economic 'modernization' realized they needed. This realization had to contend, however, with the ambivalence which the leadership of the Communist Party and for that matter the people of China had always shown towards intellectuals.

In the first place, intellectuals were respected in traditional China as masters of Confucian thought, calligraphy and classical Chinese style. At the same time, scholars were either local gentry or imperial bureaucrats or both. Westernization perpetuated this ambivalence. Intellectual ranks grew, but the role of many intellectuals as purveyors of Western culture made others uneasy. The struggle to respond to the challenge of Western economic and military power helped to rouse reform-oriented intellectual movements which might be seen as the first stirrings of the formation of a nationwide intellectual class independent of the government; on the other hand, the official intellectuals of the bureaucracy by and large proved themselves inadequate to the challenge of reforming their own administration and strengthening China. Thousands of intellectuals returned from study abroad to help build a new China after the 1949 revolution. Most, however, were treated with suspicion from the start and attacked repeatedly in campaigns of rectification and anti-rightism and ultimately the Cultural Revolution. Though Mao himself was an intellectual of a sort, a proud author of classical poetry, he was unwilling to encourage similar occupations in others.

Deng Xiaoping, by contrast, had fewer intellectual pretensions but was much readier to grant intellectuals an important place in Chinese society. As the main agent in ending and undoing the Cultural Revolution he was deeply revered by many Chinese intellectuals. Students told me in 1984, for example, how he had personally saved them from bleak years of working with (and in some cases being tormented by) the peasants, how he had brought a large dose of meritocratic decision-making to a university admissions process which had been dominated by political, class and other non-intellectual criteria. Hundreds of professors had been restored to their senior university positions; writers had been able to publish again; scientists returned to their laboratories.

But as the 1980s and the reforms progressed, two partially correlated tensions began to develop. The first was a split between intellectuals of two different sorts. On the one side were technocrats who worked in engineering, demography, econometrics or other applied sciences to try to make China's modernization happen. On the other side were more "humanistic" or "cultural"

scholars whose concern was increasingly with what they perceived to be the absence of a real vision of what it would mean to be Chinese in this era of reform. The government, of course, was much more interested in the first group, many members of which made astonishingly rapid rises in the academic hierarchy. This left the second group not only more concerned than ever for China's soul and future direction, but more and more unhappy with its own position and level of influence.

The second tension was with the government itself. As intellectuals gained in stature and numbers, they began to gain confidence and to push for further liberalizations or even to attack the government. Scientists as well as humanists were in the forefront of this; one of the most visible figures was the astrophysicist and university administrator Fang Lizhi. But a central role was played by writers, literary scholars and others who engaged in a massive rethinking of China's history and culture. Some, like the prominent journalist Liu Binyan, tried hard to stay within the bounds of party loyalty; others did not.

Fang Lizhi and other dissidents spoke directly of democracy and civil liberties. Many cultural thinkers addressed the sense of national humiliation, lack of direction and "malaise" they identified in China. Both sorts of writings and teachings helped to pave the way for the student protest movement. In the minds of many students they blurred together. Democracy was not just a preferable form of government but the symbolic answer to China's wounded cultural pride and economic backwardness.

By 1989, students' attention was focused in this as in other areas on the negative. But it does need to be noted that a genuine liberalization had taken place. The repression of the 1986-87 dissent had been mild. Publishing was still far more open than it had been during the first three decades of the People's Republic. Above all, it was partly because there was an increasingly vital intellectual life in China that students began to see more urgently a role for themselves and more senior intellectuals as guides and consciences for the country.

The student protest movement of April to June began with a central focus on issues of concern to intellectuals. In a sense, it was part of a process of intellectual class formation begun at the turn of the century, pushed forward especially in 1919, and interrupted by the communist revolution. The student protest movement eventually made connections to a much wider range of people, however, through its condemnation of corruption. And people whose concerns were primarily economic nonetheless responded to the students' initiative in confronting the government. At its core, however, this remained a student movement, framed primarily in terms of the specific concerns of intellectuals, especially such civil liberties as freedom of speech, publication and assembly. These were sought not just out of selfishness, though, but out of a sense that China needed the advice which intellectuals had to offer.

NARRATIVE

The immediate occasion for the movement was the death of Hu Yaobang on April 15th. Hu had been head of the Communist Party during the last Chinese student protests of 1986-7, and had been dismissed for not controlling the movement more forcefully. This had made him a sort of martyr to the movement, even though he was by no means an advocate of everything the students had stood for. Rather, somewhat like Zhao Ziyang, he was simply a reformer and a proponent of changes which depended on the good will and participation of China's intellectuals. Hu was not mourned with a deep outpouring of sentiment, like Zhao Enlai; rather, his death provided a pretext for demonstrations which

had their roots elsewhere. Students carried pictures of Hu, and no doubt there were sincere regrets at his death, and some suspicion about its causes (he died of a heart attack during a politburo meeting) but the signs are better understood as part of a carefully aimed message for Deng Xiaoping and the 'hard-liners' of the Communist Party.

As students took to the streets in growing numbers after April 15, this message was heard quite clearly by Deng and the other leaders. Students were telling them they disapproved of their leadership and particularly of their failure to listen more to students and intellectuals. The pictures of Hu disappeared from the student demonstrations, for the most part, after May 4. The messages of disapproval and the demand for a public voice became ever stronger.

May 4th itself had been touted as a major demonstration, but though large it was lacking in novelty and drama. There was neither the confrontation of the 27th nor the focal point of hunger strikers or statue of liberty. Before these were introduced, the movement went briefly into low gear. Students returned to classes for a week, celebrating their success and waiting to see what the government would do. The government offered a dialogue with Yuan Mu, spokesman for the Council of State. This was an achievement, because the government was not in the habit of discussing policy issues with students or other non-officials, let alone of televising such discussions. But Yuan Mu was not very senior, rather too smooth for most tastes (partly because he was a better TV performer than his interlocutors), and unwilling to get very deeply into what the students considered the key issues.

Things started to heat up again with the start of the hunger strike (May 12-13) and Gorbachev's visit (May 15-18 in Beijing). The largest of all the demonstrations was held May 17th, with more than a million people crowding Tiananmen Square and lining the approach roads. At midnight on May 19th, after Gorbachev had left for Shanghai, the government declared martial law, with Li Peng making the announcement in a particularly poorly delivered (and received) speech. Ironically, student leaders had that very evening decided to end the hunger strike; some were even calling for withdrawing from the Square. Had the government waited a few hours, confrontation might have been avoided. That it occurred is testimony to the lack of communication between the two sides.

As heavy news coverage showed the world, the imposition of martial law was a failure. Troops were met on the periphery of Beijing by "ordinary people" (*laobaixing*) who took it upon themselves to act as citizens rather than the government's masses. As the story was repeated by surprised and deeply moved students, it seemed that in every neighborhood it was an old woman who placed herself in front of troop trucks, saying they would have to run over her if they were to move against the protesting students. Buses and bicycle barriers were drawn across the road to make barricades; troops were at least unwilling if not precisely unable to move forward against such opposition. Having been kept in the dark about the nature of events in Beijing and apparently the purpose of their own maneuvers, they seemed bewildered and chagrined by the popular resistance. They were greeted as friends by the crowds, but denied privacy and subjected to never-ending "education" about the current situation.

From May 20th to June 2nd, to live in Beijing was to ride an emotional roller-coaster. Popular participation in protest ebbed and flowed. At first, people stayed up all night on barricades, waiting to defend the city against the army. The Paris Commune sprang not only to my mind but to those of locals, especially older ones who had read a bit more Marx than today's students. Of

course people grew tired, and the immediate military threat seemed to pass. Rumors spread of both popular victory and an immanent crackdown; a military coup and a siege of the city. As the apparent stalemate continued, eyes turned towards the internal power struggles of the government. Would Zhao Ziyang lead reformers to a new and secure dominance? Or would the old guard and its proteges like Premier Li Peng oust the others as too sympathetic to students, capitalism and the West? As crowds shrank, the movement looked to be weakening. Leaders discussed, as they had before, the possibility of unilaterally declaring victory and putting the strategic ball back in the government's court. They could not reach agreement on this however, perhaps because there seemed no way to withdraw from the Square without appearing to have weakened or lost resolve. On May 26th the erection of the "Goddess of Democracy" statue gave the movement a new focal point and new energy.

By this point also, students from outside Beijing had come to outnumber those from the cities own universities in the occupation of Tiananmen Square. And much of the time, especially in the final couple of days before the massacre, students of any sort were outnumbered by other people, mostly young male workers, many (I am told) unemployed. These gave the crowd a much surlier tone, and greatly diminished the student activists' ability to maintain order and a peaceful response to military provocation.

New troops had been brought to Beijing; the rumor spread that they were from Inner Mongolia and spoke little or no *putonghua* ('common people's language', Mandarin, or standard dialect). Be that as it may, those face to face with students outside Zhongnanhai compound or the railroad station showed little interest in talking--or in being harangued by the protesters. The government succeeded in getting a substantial number to at least three locations in proximity to the Square: Zhongnanhai (the capacious official residence of most top party leaders, though these had apparently left Beijing during the period of attempted imposition of martial law), the central railroad station, and the old Imperial Palace museum--the Forbidden City. On the mornings of June 2nd and 3rd troops went jogging around the Square and otherwise advertised their presence. Later on the 3rd, a few thousand advanced on the crowd, but without firing guns. They were repulsed with light fighting; skirmishes continued throughout the day. Tear gas was used at least once, at the gate to Zhongnanhai, but certainly not widely. Troops beat protesters with belts and truncheons; the crowd fought back with limbs pulled from the trees along Chang'an Boulevard. Though violence never entirely subsided, the troops were kept at bay (to what must have been their growing frustration) and the conflicts were confined enough that families came out to enjoy a popsicle and the entertainment the fighting offered. Around 7 p.m., I myself bought a crepe from a street vendor less than three hundred yards from a barricade behind the Great Hall of the People where troops still challenged protesters, occasionally flailing away with their belts.

Around 8:30 that night, troops quartered in the Southwest of Beijing began to move towards Tiananmen Square. They encountered strong resistance along Fuxingmen and Chang'an Boulevards (different sections of the same street), especially in the Muxudi district about two miles from the Square. They fired on demonstrators and drove their vehicles into crowds and over barricades. Occasionally, when a tank was stuck struggling over a bicycle barrier that had been pulled into the road, protesters ran out and stuck iron bars into its tracks; those which were disabled were often torched, usually after the occupants had been given a chance to escape (though this did not necessarily spare them a

beating). From the best of eye witness accounts it seems that thousands had already been killed before these troops, or the other column moving in from the East, reached Tiananmen Square. There the advancing troops were joined by those from the Forbidden City in completing a route of the remainder of the occupying students and other protesters.

For two days after this massacre, students and other citizens moved about in a state of shock. Some retreated to their homes. Others scurried about the town trying to get a clearer sense of what had happened. Hospitals were overflowing with wounded. Sporadic shooting continued. Throughout an unusually hazy Sunday afternoon and much of Monday, columns of smoke rose from burning vehicles; occasionally an explosion indicated that another had been set alight. We were all uncertain what would happen next. The possibility of civil war was discussed, particularly as it appeared that the 38th army might oppose the 27th which had perpetrated the massacre. By late on the 7th it was clear that this was not going to happen. The government began to recompose itself, the 'hard-liners' and their associates to consolidate their victory over more liberal Party forces.

The writing of an official history began with the transformation of soldiers who had died during the invasion into martyrs. It was variously declared that no students had been killed or that the number was small; carefully phrased statements indicated that no one had been shot in Tiananmen Square; dead protesters were described as hooligans, thugs and troublemakers, not students. Pressure was placed on the public to identify and turn in protest leaders who had gone into hiding, and ordinary people who had been identified as telling foreign reporters what they thought had actually happened. At least once of these has since been convicted of "rumor-mongering" and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. Never has the Orwellian imagery of 1984 seemed more apt. China has both versions of Winston Smith: those who send historical knowledge down the 'memory hole' in the service of bureaucratic truth, and those who try to keep alive the simple message that two plus two equals four. This movement has blessed the latter with first-hand knowledge among a much wider segment of China's urban population, and with a much more substantial documentary record, though this is primarily held abroad and not currently available to the Chinese people.

WHAT DID THE PROTESTERS WANT?

The 1989 student protest lasted only six weeks. Though its roots were old, and some of its ideas had been under intensive discussion for months, its great accomplishment was massive mobilization, not theoretical deepening of Chinese democracy. Protesters pursued essentially three sorts of goals: democracy, economic improvement and an end to corruption. The three were not equal priorities for everyone, however. Democracy was the main concern of university students and intellectuals, but not of most workers. Ordinary people were more interested in economic issues. Complaints about corruption were shared widely in both groups.

When students talked about democracy, they often disappointed Westerners who expected them to place multiparty elections at the top of their priorities. But though many students thought such elections a good thing, civil liberties loomed much larger in their immediate vision of democracy. They were struggling for freedom of expression through speech and the press, freedom of association, especially in their independent students' association, and ultimately for a greater freedom in conducting the affairs of their own lives. As budding intellectuals, they sought to carry on a discourse about the future of China and especially to offer the government advice and have the government listen.

Democracy was spoken of, I thought, more as something that people might *have*, than as something people might *do*. That is, democracy meant having a government which took the interests of its people seriously, acted to their benefit rather than that of its cadres, listened to expressions of popular opinion and was fair in its dealings with ordinary people. The idea of democracy as a form of political participation was much less well developed. The crucial participations which the students' sought to guarantee were extensions of the traditional idea of officials' (and to a lesser extent ordinary people) remonstrating with the emperor, holding him to his responsibilities and telling him what he needed to know in order to be a good ruler. Thus a greater role for intellectuals was central to their vision of democracy. We in America sometimes emphasize the role of elections to the point of forgetting the importance of social movements and other less mechanical forms of democratic participation, particularly in determining which issues will be on the agenda of policymakers and behind the decisions made in elections. Chinese thinkers have often pointed to both the weaknesses of electoral democracy in the West and the problems of reliance on elections in a backward, under-educated country. Students implicitly postponed universal suffrage elections to a later stage, after popular consciousness had been raised. They tended to conceive of education as something which they as intellectuals would do *to* the people, rather than as a direct outgrowth of a participatory political process.

As to the ordinary people, they certainly declared themselves to be in favor of democracy when asked. But if pressed as to their grievances they would stress economic issues and corruption. They wanted an end to the inflation which ate away at the purchasing power of their relatively fixed salaries. Though not high by third world standards, this inflation was unprecedented in the People's Republic of China. People also talked about a rationalization of the distribution of wealth. The government had implemented reforms which enabled some people to get rich, and had praised the idea of getting rich, but had not offered a broadly understood rationale for why some would enjoy this opportunity and others would not. Why should entrepreneurs become millionaires and doctors not? Why should taxi drivers make several times the income of engineers? Why should teenagers lucky enough to get jobs in a joint venture hotel make more than the most senior university professors? In short, the economy seemed to lack order; its results did not make sense to ordinary people. This may well have unsettled them even if growth were continuous and inflation non-existent. But growth had stagnated during the last two years, while inflation grew substantially. At one level, of course, people simply wanted more wealth, but they also wanted the distribution of wealth to make sense. The Party had abandoned the extreme but clear egalitarianism of its earlier policies, but not come up with a new legitimating message. In one sense this was ironic, for it is not clear that the popular perception that inequality had increased was accurate. The rise of rural incomes relative to urban had probably reduced overall inequality during the last decade of reform. But changing relations among economic sectors, and the visibility of new displays of substantial wealth, made people feel inequality acutely.

The sense of economic injustice merged with the complaint of corruption. There were several senses to this complaint. First there was the radical extension and transformation of the traditional reliance on *guanxi* or connections. Here the issue was not just that people relied on connections more, but that these connections were becoming commodified, reduced to cash transactions. It had always

been easier to get an airplane ticket, say, if you knew someone with a relative in the airline's office. Now people claimed that seats were being held back by strategically placed clerks so that their relatives could act as brokers. Moreover, the payment was cash on the spot, not the expectation that the favor would be returned (perhaps to one's kin, not one's self) or the satisfaction of not being a debtor in this system of cultural credit. The traditional idea of connections was giving way to simple bribery. By far the most frequently complained about version of *guanxi* was the placement of high party officials' children in the most desirable jobs. It seemed no accident that both Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng had sons working as executives on Hainan Island, one of the new enterprise zones; nearly everyone assumed that these young men not only had good jobs thanks to their fathers but impunity from prosecution as they skimmed money from local ventures.

This crossed the border to the second form of corruption which involved much larger transactions. It was practiced by official units as well as private businessmen. It involved a variety of under the table *quid pro quos*--padded payrolls, attempted price manipulations, toleration for inferior quality cement in return for a bribe, demanding foreign exchange certificates for work which should have been paid in domestic currency. This kind of problem corresponded to that with which people the world over are unfortunately familiar. It is hard to know if its extent was unusually high, though everyone seemed sure that it had grown. The high proportion of government businesses made it likely that more of this kind of shady antics would be seen as official corruption rather than simply unsavory capitalism.

The government's economic role also produced the third sort of corruption, a kind of semi-benign version of the second. The policy of reducing but not eliminating detailed central economic planning created a variety of imbalances. Vital goods might be in short supply in one region while another had an excess, but either documents or cash for any transaction was lacking. A number of businessmen moved into the breach as black market deal makers, fixers who helped overcome the contradiction of the system. They might organize a barter arrangement which linked three regions each with too much of something another wanted. They might arrange the sale of a good at a price triple the official one, with only the controlled price reported. Though people resented the fortunes made in this way, this was not the sort of corruption on which they focused. They did, however, tend to see the whole mercantile practice of buying cheap and selling dear as shady in much the same way.

One of the problems the protest movement might have faced had it not been crushed was to develop an analysis of China's current situation which would link the democratic concerns of students to the more narrowly economic ones of other people. It is not obvious that democracy by itself will lessen corruption, though the student had faith that it would. It is not obvious either, that a democratic transition in China could be managed without serious economic problems--an issue the student leaders had not really addressed.

LIMITS AND WEAKNESSES

As exhilarating and unexpected as the success of the student protest movement was, it is important to recognize some of the issues which were inadequately faced and problems which remained unsolved. The first and most important was simply that this was a movement of urban people with almost no resonance in or connections to the countryside. This is not to say that China's rural population is without grievances or uncritically supportive of all government policy. It is not.

But word of this protest spread in the countryside much less extensively than in the cities, and primarily through official government media. It is still the case that few peasant children go to universities, and so the informal communications network which spread unofficial and 'insider' views of the protest did not work effectively in rural areas. Links between students and peasants also were inhibited by class bias. Students in the April 27th march shouted to soldiers: "Farmers go home; you have no business here." Farmers in China as elsewhere have suspicions about "city slickers." Moreover, some of the complaints and interests of urban and rural populations pitted them at least superficially against each other as consumers vs. producers. Higher food prices (even in the form of an end to the scrip payments by which peasants were forced to loan money to the government) would have furthered the inflation which worried urban folks.

Students and urban workers found common cause in the protests, but this should not obscure the fact that few organizational linkages united them. Though the ideas of sending delegations to visit factories, or of forming a joint student-worker committee, were sometimes mentioned, little action was taken on this front. The split between political and economic goals made creation of such linkages particularly important. Occasionally activists mentioned the model of Poland's "Solidarity" movement. This was a popular idea, but it faces several hurdles in China. Solidarity was rooted in stronger, more independent workplace organizations than exist in China. It was enhanced by linkages between intellectuals and the workers' movement in which the intellectuals did not completely pre-empt the leadership positions. Polish society, as suggested previously, had more social arenas free from close state supervision than China. And in China there was no institution like the Polish Catholic Church to link together urban and rural populations.

The student movement was also hampered by some internal difficulties. One was a weakness of decision-making capacity. Western reporters (like the Chinese government in the course of its repression) often exaggerated the role of centralized leadership in organizing the movement. Leadership, however, was very diffuse. Different contingents of demonstrators acted with some autonomy, guided by constant observation of each other and lateral flow of information as by any directives from a hierarchy of top leaders. This did not prevent a high level of organization in the protests, but it made certain difficult decisions almost impossible to make and implement. This became especially apparent during the occupation of Tiananmen Square.

The occupation had provided the movement with a setting at once neutral (not any one campus) and central. It became a forum for discourse, and every night leaders met to discuss tactical and logistic issues. But those discussions were hampered by a problem almost endemic to student movements--the attempt to make decisions by consensus. This became a major issue when proposals to withdraw from Tiananmen Square began to be put forward by the most prominent leaders of the movement. Accounts differ on whether majority opinion actually favored staying when Wu'erkaixi, Wang Dan and Chai Ling were voted down May 21st, or whether a substantial minority simply indicated that it would not leave. In any case, it was clear that a complete and orderly withdrawal could not be achieved. For a rump occupation to be left behind could only weaken the movement, and so the students stayed (ostensibly all of them, though in fact a good many simply drifted away until the statue of the Goddess of Democracy rekindled enthusiasm a few days later). On all sorts of occasions different student groups spent hours in debate about the right course of action, with

little clear mechanism for making decisions and moving ahead. I had to remind myself that they had not been ingrained with the two hundred years of experience of majority votes which has made that procedure almost second nature to us.

Closely related to this was the fact that the students generally did not have a strong conception, still less a habit of, pluralistic public discourse. They favored pluralism in the sense that they wanted their voices to be heard and not squashed by the government. But internally they felt a strong need to speak unanimously. They sought to be the "voice of the people" and understood themselves as speaking ideally for the country as a whole. They did not consider that there might be competing but equally right views of a situation or solutions to a problem. Though they tried to respect minorities, they did not see the nurturance of an internal discourse across lines of significant difference as itself one of the goals of their movement. As a result, student activists occasionally complained that movement leaders behaved towards them just as the government behaved towards the people. Certainly leaders made no systematic effort to ascertain the views of ordinary movement participants. They reached their own conclusions, announced them, and then hoped that they would be followed. When they were not, they felt abandoned and tended to withdraw.

Finally, the movement was weakened by its lack of communications media. This was both an internal problem and especially a limit to the movement's ability to reach the country as a whole. Most information flowed by word of mouth. Students used telephones and printed handbills, but they did not have their own newspaper or journals. For an exhilarating week in mid-to-late May the Chinese newspapers and TV began to report events as they happened. The BBC and Voice of America broadcasts were a crucial source of news on China. But the students lacked the capacity to disseminate very widely their own version of events in Beijing. And equally they lacked the institutional capacity for an internal discourse beyond the face-to-face level. Though some student groups, sensitive to the historic importance of these events, tried systematically to keep archives, the movement did not generate directly a mass of documentation. Journalists and other observers, overseas Chinese, and activists who escaped will play the most important role in recording what went on. This is a key advantage to the government in its effort to rewrite history--or rather, to write it with an eye not to accuracy but to the best didactic message.

HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE

Ironically, it is perhaps easier to sum up the movement's accomplishments than to note its weaknesses and limits. Certainly it feels better. Future movements will have to contend with the issues this one found difficult to resolve. But whatever its shortcomings, the student protest movement of 1989 did score startling successes.

It will play a continuing role in Chinese history, I think, simply through the inspiration offered by the scale of protest. This will be augmented by the sense that workers and students and intellectuals found a sense of common cause. Moreover, the growth of the movement and the failure of the government's initial attempt to impose martial law combine to show that the Chinese government is not all-powerful. However severe the government's repression in the coming months, the movement revealed that the government could suffer at least temporary weakness and vulnerability. Ideological and factional disunity, the imminence of a succession crisis, and the absence of a clear vision of where it should head all made it hard for the government to take effective action. People will look for such opportunities in the future.

The success of the movement showed also that however "totalitarian" the Chinese government might aspire to be (and the label fit the first three decades of the PRC better than it fit most of Eastern Europe) it did not succeed completely in removing the distinction between state and society. Even in 1976 and 1979-80 some dissenting public action had been possible. In 1989, after a decade of reform, the action was of enormous magnitude. It is unlikely that all the institutions which have begun to emerge as civil society's basis for a public sphere will be eliminated during the current repression. Indeed, the dominant factions in the government seem intent enough on pursuing economic modernization (however much it may wish to minimize the possibility of accompanying political change) that it probably will not even try.

Finally, the effects of repression itself should be chalked up to the historic importance of the student movement. By finding it necessary to act with such force, and to turn back much of the progress of reform, the government revealed the weakness of its own position. Quite likely this weakness stemmed largely from internal divisions. Whatever its source, it led the dominant factions in government to abandon a decade's worth of image polishing, not only abroad but at home. The ferocity of the massacre has acted powerfully to de-legitimize the Chinese government. Perhaps almost as significantly, the People's Liberation Army has been tarred with the same brush. Until the very end of the protest, students chanted "the People's Liberation Army loves the people, the people love the People's Liberation Army." Over and again I was told, "the army will not fire on the Chinese people." This is a message the people will not find it easy to believe again.

The Chinese government has found it necessary to rule its own capital city and the elite of its own children substantially by force rather than consent. This does not mean that its grip on the nation as a whole is so weak that its demise is imminent. It does mean that its legitimacy and strength are seriously damaged. It will have to repair them, or govern less, or devote more resources to the mere maintenance of control.