

CHINA AFTER TIANANMEN

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HOW OFTEN has it been said about China that the only thing that is permanent is change itself? From the first feudal empire of Shi Huang Di two centuries B.C., through Mongol conquest, through the millenarian anti-Manchu and anti-imperialist movements of the 19th century, through the birth pangs of an infant Republic torn by civil war and foreign aggression, metamorphosis into the largest socialist nation in the world has been a process pervaded at every twist and turn by upheaval and revolution.

No one, witnessing mass starvation and child-selling for survival in the 1940s, could have anticipated that forty years hence China would be able to feed and clothe a population of one billion, much less develop nuclear capability and be wooed by the two superpowers of this era. No one, suffering Gang of Four persecution for unproletarian origins in the late 60s, could have imagined Coca Cola and Western rock music invited in by the Communist Party a mere two decades later. None would envisage the brutality of units of the People's Liberation Army, unleashed upon young students and workers who many times past had emulated their spirit of heroism, service and sacrifice.

Change has not only been a permanent feature of Chinese history, it has also been unpredictable. And yet, given this unpredictability, China has attained such importance that we can not equivocate examination of the question: whither China from here? Ergo this attempt to forward this "fearful forecast", fearful only because of its tentativeness given the very short time that has elapsed since a new situation has developed in Beijing, but not necessarily because its projections for China are bleak.

THE WHY'S AND WHEREFORE'S of the protest movement in China have been discussed in many public fora. The bigger issue that has remained unaddressed is — why did the Deng Xiaoping regime react as it did — using artillery against a basically peaceful, unarmed civilian throng in a manner unprecedented in Chinese communist history?

How an individual or a government behaves under intensely critical conditions can perhaps be more clearly explained by studying its possible perceptions rather than the hard facts or circumstances. The protest movement began as a crusade for political reforms, led by intellectuals demanding freedom of expression and greater transparency and accountability of government. It snowballed into an outpouring of grievances by other sectors of society, scoring official corruption and inflation as threats to the prosperity they had only begun to taste or had yet to enjoy under China's economic liberalization program. Eventually the demonstrations involved not only students or intellectuals but groups representing various occupations and work units that had in recent periods been relatively politically dormant.

At that very moment, a historic meeting was taking place — the first Sino-Soviet summit since the fateful Mao-Khrushchev split that heralded the collapse of monolithic international communism. The Chinese communists would have proudly underscored the significance of the Deng-Gorbachev encounter as a watershed in history, an end to the divisions wracking the socialist world, a signal achievement for the once-belittled Asian socialists and a fitting apex of Deng's career. But Tiananmen was bursting with even greater drama, the student hunger-strikers capturing the admiration of the public and the attention of the international press. Deng's moment of glory was turning into a circus of humiliation — and the policy of restraint which had prematurely drawn praise and which may have greatly encouraged the demonstrators was challenged by hardliners within the leadership, resulting in the bloodbath.

FACTIONAL STRIFE

BY LOOKING at the factional struggles within the Party we can under-

stand why the crackdown took place. For years since the ascendancy of Deng, the Communist Party had struggled to establish inner-Party unity behind the economic liberalization program. There were differences of opinion on the pace and emphasis of economic decentralization reforms, with the highly innovative experiments in market regulation, stocks, coastal development and China's "Great Leap Outward" reflecting the Zhao Ziyang line while conservatives like Chen Yun pushed for a more cautious approach to the open-door policy, favoring readjustment of existing production systems with less new capital construction and prescribing strict financial controls to keep down trade deficits and price increases. Zhao, a protege of strongman Deng Xiaoping, was the chief architect of the bold reforms implemented over the last decade, with Chen Yun playing the role of conservative fiscalizer putting on the brakes when he felt things were getting out of hand. The rapid and reckless implementation of even the most prudent reform policies did begin to take its toll as inflation grew and corruption and income differentials became widespread. The conservatives in the Party put the blame on the reforms, particularly the open-door policy, while the reformers said it was precisely because the reforms were as yet "unfinished" that these problems came about.

An attempt to partially correct the situation was made when the September 1988 CPC Third Plenary Session resolved to "rectify the economic environment ... (and) promote planned, comprehensive and coordinated reform," indicating retrenchment of reforms by a sadder but wiser leadership. A consensus appeared to have been reached on more sober directions and a more realistic velocity for economic development, the cornerstone of the Deng government.

The issue of political *glasnost*, or *toumingdu* (transparency) as the Chinese would have it, proved to be far more contentious for the communist party. Hu Yaobang's dismissal was a warning to those inclined to tolerate "bourgeois liberalism" (which appears to refer to Western concepts of democratic freedoms based on individualism as opposed to concepts of socialist democracy emphasizing the common good and proletarian welfare above all). The fact that the Tiananmen protests precipitated intensification of the inner-Party struggle over political liberalization became more evident later with the dismissal of Zhao Ziyang and the appointment of Jiang Zemin, an economic pragmatist but political conservative.

Against this context, the students dug their own graves when they erected and installed in Tiananmen their "Goddess of Democracy", whose likeness to New York's "Liberty Enlightening the World" may actually have been more imagined than intended. Nevertheless, when western media and perhaps even China's top communists did in fact interpret it for what the Mother of Exiles symbolized, it was the final affront, the ultimate outrage, the last painful straw for the patriarchs, "old foggies" they may now be, but fervent nationalists and once upon a time valiant revolutionaries all.

Were the students and intellectuals so organized and unequivocally counter-revolutionary that the authorities explored no other, more moderate means to disperse them? The movement was largely spontaneous, had little organization and therefore lacked the strength to overthrow the Party, even if they had had the intentions to do so, which they did not. Clearly it was the prospect of workers organizing in sympathy and perhaps later to push for their own demands that had petrified the old communists. The experiences of Solidarity and Poland were historically too close for comfort. The ghosts of past "counter-revolutionaries", as well as the threat of Cultural Revolution-style extreme "left" adventurism, rose up to haunt the helmsmen at that moment. Thus the authorities initially labelled what was obviously a patriotic student movement as no more than a "turbulence" created by a "handful of hooligans"; then later as "counter-revolutionary", no less.

The greatest humiliation was that Tiananmen was happening on the front pages of newspapers, in radio broadcasts and on television screens all over the world. Did international media coverage embolden the protesters and strengthen their hand in dealing with the authorities? Or did it contribute to their Waterloo by painting a portrait of official weakness in the face of political chaos, thus forcing the regime to take drastic action in order to prevent loss of face?

From the perspective of the key decision-makers, we have this much to conjecture. At that critical moment, when the first shots were fired, the hardliners within the Party did not see the protagonists as helpless students versus soldiers and tanks. No. They saw it as a struggle between a stable, carefully planned course of socialist modernization, that can only be led by a united and respected communist party (if somewhat tainted by corruption and handicapped by geriatric orthodoxy) versus a freer, more open, and likely more precarious society.

A more open society would inevitably be more vulnerable to internal subversion as well as foreign pressure. In a more open society, the agenda of socialist modernization would be in danger of being transformed either by newly emergent alternative sources of power (such as, perhaps, an independent workers union) or by new cliques springing from intense factional strife within the Party itself. Then the visions of a modern and powerful China, which Mao Zedong and Zhou En-lai dreamed of and which Deng Xiaoping has come closest to achieving, would move farther and farther away from realization. The stakes were too high, and the communist party would not gamble on greater freedom and democracy.

AFTER TIANANMEN

WHAT, THEN, can we expect of China after Tiananmen?

Unpredictability, as stated earlier, is the only unchanging factor in Chinese history. Everything else seems variable. So then, let us defy the natural laws of Chinese history and try to forecast the future for China, using our tools of political analysis.

First of all, socialist modernization will continue to be the strategic objective of the Chinese Communist Party, post-Deng Xiaoping and certainly post-Tiananmen. From the perspective of the highly patriarchal leadership, the violent crackdown was a necessary measure undertaken precisely to preserve their power, and with power lies the capability of the Party to lead the struggle for socialist modernization. From their point of view, the momentum and widespread support of the demonstrations already constituted a threat to both the strategic goals of the Four Modernizations (modernization of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense) as well as to the tactical readjustment period during which they hoped to curb both inflation and corruption as well as set up new outlines for more moderate reform.

Economic reforms will therefore stay, but be subjected to stricter assessment, periodic readjustments and renewed stress on planning. If it were up to the Chinese, the open-door and coastal development policies or special economic zones (SEZs) would also continue, albeit with more discriminate selection of joint venture partners and investment areas. Better incentives for foreign investment may even be

offered, including implementation of a provision proposed earlier granting foreign corporations insurance against political change.

The anti-corruption campaign will go on, this time with a vengeance. It might have some effects on the operation of joint ventures in SEZs, since so far a great number of offenders that have been punished seem to come from Guangzhou and these areas.

Moreover, the door remains open for foreign capital and technology but not for "decadent bourgeois" ideas. Contacts with the West may be further restricted to official representatives, with students and other citizens discouraged from befriending foreigners. Since the government is attempting to portray the Tiananmen condemnations as "anti-Chinese" expressions, they may well have created the rationale for an "anti-foreign" campaign among their people.

The Chinese are seething over so-called "foreign interference" in their internal affairs, referring to the condemnations and sanctions imposed by the United States and the EEC following Tiananmen. They might rely more on Japan for capital and technology or try to further utilize other sources of capital, including overseas Chinese communities and even Taiwan. Economic as well as political cooperation with the Third World is likely to increase as China has traditionally used its respected status among developing nations to help neutralize domestic dissent as well as Western pressure.

As the governments of US and the EEC try to distance themselves from China temporarily, China's cooperation with the Soviet Union on international issues (disarmament, environment, Asia-Pacific peace and security—including Kampuchea, Afghanistan and Korean Peninsula concerns) may increase. However, China realizes the relative unimportance of the USSR in the immediate term insofar as China's own modernization program is concerned. The Soviet Union is faced with similar problems, although its leaders have chosen to approach reform from the political angle first. Being in the same tempest-ridden boat, they cannot bail each other out.

But when the US and EEC have done with their customary expressions of horror at the human rights violations committed by the Chinese authorities, and when the realization sets in that they stand more to lose than to gain by alienating China at this point in time, they will hurry back to business with the Chinese. Perhaps there will be a more circumspect partnership between China and the West, but a partner-

ship nonetheless.

The best thing that can be said about the Chinese is that they know their history flawlessly and they learn its lessons well. If they feared a repetition of the chaotic and anarchic Cultural Revolution, they also know the inevitability of the struggle for a more meaningful people's democracy in China, and therefore the inevitability of political reform. Before Tiananmen, as early as 1987, the framework for political reforms had in fact already been laid by Zhao Ziyang. His report to the 13th National People's Congress outlined the blueprint for China's political reforms, including the following broad objectives: separation of Party and government; delegation of powers to the lower levels, change of functions and reform of the departments of government; establishment of a career public service; and improvement of the socialist legal system.

Moreover, delegates to the National Peoples' Congress were elected by secret ballot in 1988, the first such elections since 1949. The long-overdue transition to the "rule of law" was also underway, as evidenced by reports of foreign legal scholars invited to observe the institution of new legal processes in China. Meanwhile, dissident leader Fang Lizhi was allowed to leave for speaking engagements in Hongkong and Australia, although he was subsequently prevented from going on a similar trip to the United States.

We note that the political reforms were approached through organizational modifications rather than being doctrinal in nature. No mention is made of restoring "bourgeois" freedoms such as those demanded by the intellectuals, although these may be presumed included in the goal of "improving the socialist legal system". Thus the blueprint does not have to be incompatible with the goals of the new hardline dispensation. However, should the Party decide to pursue such a program even after Tiananmen, it will have to be at a much slower pace, instituting guarantees every step of the way that the Party's line will continue to be respected. We predict that there will be greater emphasis on developing the superstructural aspects of Chinese socialism, meaning more ideological and propaganda work, and more political study meetings especially for Communist Party members. As in the Soviet Union, any initiatives toward liberalization will come from and be wielded by the Center. No grassroots democracy movement as in South Korea or in Poland, or like what Tiananmen in fact presaged,

will be tolerated. "Transparency" such as in disclosing private bank accounts of government and party officials and their close relatives, will be long in coming, not because it is against socialist theories of government so much as because it is antithetical to Chinese feudal-authoritarian culture.

Will the democracy movement regroup and prepare for a bigger challenge to the Communist Party next time around? It is a distinct possibility, but more likely they will conduct clandestine political operations planned and led from outside Chinese borders, given the very repressive environment in China today.

Will they mobilize enough support from the Chinese workers and peasants to significantly threaten the faction in power? Not if the leadership convincingly succeeds in wiping out corruption, redressing imbalances in incomes and expenditures at both macro and microeconomic levels, instilling greater Party discipline, providing enrichment of culture and recreation, and reviving socialist consciousness among the Chinese people.

For in the ultimate analysis, what is the freedom to criticize but a figment of the imagination of poets and philosophers, finding no sympathy nor solace for as long as the stomach is content and the higher sensibilities appeased.