

BEIJING . . . THE OTHER VIEW

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NO, THERE WAS NO MASSACRE IN BEIJING. It was a most ordinary spring.

Springtime in Beijing was a real marvel. Early April saw the poplar trees lining the boulevards still in their hibernal state. Bare of leaves since October, they still carry their eerie look. Their flowers borne in catkins looked like worms, nibbling at the gnarled branches.

As usual, On April 15, the sun greeted the bare trees in the morning. At noon, the leaves popped out, as big as a child's palm. In the afternoon, Beijing was covered with green. Peach, apple and apricot blossoms, pink, red and white, competed with emerald willows. No one ever died on April 15. It was, in fact, traditionally celebrated as a day of birth. It was believed that on that day of spring in 563 B.C. Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, was born in China's neighboring Nepal.

Springtime was the time to fly kites. People from all over carried their kites to Tiananmen, the Gate of Heavenly Peace. Children with their dragonfly kites. Teenagers with their goldfish kites, The middle-aged with their eagle kites. The old with their dragon kites. Even some girls flew their butterfly kites.

Historically, of course, kites were flown in China, not for leisure but for war. It was said that during the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 B.C.) a carpenter named Gong Shuban mounted himself on a wooden kite to reconnoiter the capital of the kingdom of Song.

When Liu Bang of the Han kingdom and Xiangyu of the Kingdom of Chu were at war in the 3rd century, B.C., Liu Bang's general, Han Xin ordered that a big kite be made. One dark night, a man rode the kite flying over the barracks of Xiang Yu's troops. The man played a flute. He played melodies of the kingdom of Chu. The Chu soldiers felt

homesick upon hearing the music from their native land. They lost the will to fight. The Han army then attacked. The Chus were defeated.

During the Tang period (618-907), kites were used to send letters asking for reinforcement of troops.

But now was a time of peace. And kites were just for flying.

No one could remember exactly who started flying kites at Tiananmen this year. Perhaps, no particular person did. People just came, one after another. At Tiananmen, they discovered their single purpose. To fly kites. Flying kites was exhilarating. It made one feel like flying. And flying made one free.

And so they came. Hundreds. Thousands. Ten thousands.

Summer came a bit early. Each year, when the hot season came, people brought their mats and beds outside. They slept on the sidewalks, along Chang An—the Avenue of Eternal Peace, and at Tiananmen Square. They played cards before they slept. They sang songs. They told stories.

"I am the most proletarian of all," said one. "I live in a nine square meter flat, with my grandpa, grandma, father, mother, and a younger sister."

"Then I am more proletarian than you," said another. "I live in an eight square meter flat, with my grandparents and my parents. I have no sister and no brother."

"What made you more proletarian?"

"I have no sister, and no brother. My mother was called to the office when she was three months pregnant. They operated on her. And now I have no sister, and no brother."

"I am most proletarian, then," cried another. "I have no room of my own. I live in a crowded dorm. My wife lives in a woman's crowded dorm. We meet once a week in the park. And the police came when they saw us making love. Now I am jobless. And my wife is jobless, too."

"No, you are not proletarian. My family is the most proletarian of all. We live in a mansion. My father goes to office in his chauffeured limousine. My mother goes to the special supermarket in our other car, her maidservant at her beck and call."

"You say you are proletarian?"

"Why, yes. Both my parents are officials of the most advanced party of the proletariat."

"You're not one among us, then."

“But I want to be one. That’s why I came.”

And many more came. Hundreds. Thousands. Hundred thousands. Each one had a story to tell. Telling stories made them feel better. And feeling better made them free.

But freedom needed to be guarded. Anywhere. Anytime. If it was a most ordinary spring. If it was an early summer. In spring, rain never failed to come. In summer, thunderstorms. Indeed, they came again this year.

Lightning struck and burned the kites. Burning kites were always horrible to look at. They looked like tanks crushing at one another. They did not make one free.

Rain drenched the sidewalks, the avenue and the square. People scampered for shelter, trampling on the mats and beds. Trampled beds were often a terrible sight. They looked like corpses in an overstuffed morgue. They did not make people free.

And people who were not free often imagined more horrifying, terrifying things. Like there was a carnage at Tiananmen. The fact was that between 3:30 and 5:00 a.m. of June 4, when the people’s army came to clear the square, there was no living soul in sight in its 40-hectare expanse. How could the army kill non-living souls? No one, but no one, was there anymore to kill. What they saw were only carcasses of kites. What they heard were only the moans of storytellers. It was a time of peace.

Indeed it was a heavenly dawn that greeted everyone.

Waking up from this nightmare of peace, I returned to the real month of June.

SOME QUESTIONS, SOME ANSWERS, ABOUT THE CHINESE STRUGGLE

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(The following questions are the ones most commonly asked about the events in China. The publishers of *Echoes from Tiananmen*, who call themselves Friends of Chinese Minzhu, posed these questions to two activists of the democracy movement who choose to remain anonymous for obvious reasons — Ed.)

You say that you oppose the present regime in China, but does the democracy movement have a clear or unified picture of what form of government to put in its place which would be able to run such a huge country?

The question implies that the present structure of government in China is a somehow perfect, static formula which cannot be improved. It also suggests that the democracy movement wished to sweep away the old systems entirely and start building new political models from scratch.

Neither assumption is true.

A leadership which massacres unarmed, popular demonstrators who are voicing legitimate grievances and calling for peaceful change is not fit to rule any country. It is therefore legitimate to oppose such a leadership and to demand the removal and trial of those who committed crimes against the people, and to call for effective changes in the system of government that would prevent such a massacre from taking place ever again.

But it is not true that the demonstrators did not have concrete and