

# **The Impact of Western Economy on Chinese Culture, or, How to Throw Peace in the Rubbish for Nike Shoes**

**Written by  
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In the summer of 1989, Western journalists traveled to China to cover Gorbachev's visit and literally stumbled into a massive demonstration by university students in Beijing's Tiananmen Square and the surrounding streets. To people in the United States, the most popular video shot of the event is the young man placing himself in front of a tank in order to prevent the tank from approaching the demonstrators. Culturally, the student's action is deeply meaningful to us, for he portrayed a fundamental American cultural value – individualism. Moreover, he portrayed individualism confronting grave military danger that connects to our definition of courage. But while we imbued his actions as a positive attribute, Chinese government officials saw this incident as an example of a fundamental danger to China's political structure. To refocus away from the student's actions, the government praised the restraint exhibited by the driver of the tank.

To the Chinese people, especially government officials, individualism holds the heart of democracy. Furthermore, common people and intellectuals<sup>1</sup> seemed to turn to the idea of democracy more and more frequently as an answer to solve China's economic problems and reform the country. Herein lies the cultural schism as well as government concerns: Economic problems climaxed in late 1988 and early 1989. Government officials engaged in corruption that caused people to relate governmental corruption with economic problems. China saw her neighbors rise politically because of their use of Western economic principles and consequently relates economy with

political power. Students, intellectuals, and some politicians wanted to implement Western economic principles to reform the country. China equates Western economy with democracy. The foundation of democracy, in the Chinese mind, is individualism. While students and some intellectuals wanted to practice individualism, the government officials saw individualism as a major threat to their culture, and, more importantly, to their own political power.

The 1989 incident at Tiananmen Square can be seen as a microcosm of this phenomenon. However, the underlying sustained provocateur of the demonstration was neither economy, democracy nor political power, but a conflict of culture. As Strand points out, "it was as if social and cultural forces beyond the conscious direction of the organizers and participants were shaping events in the square."<sup>2</sup> While economic and political policies spurred the demonstration, China's own culture and consequent behavioral expectations generated by culture fed the conflict leading to slogans of democracy, demands for economic reforms and an end to officials' corruption, that ended with the reassertion of political power purchased with human life. This paper attempts to identify the cultural conflict involving how Western economy related to the students' idea of democracy and the consequent threat to the government.

### **Western Economy and Chinese Culture**

Culture is a set of attitudes, values, and beliefs adopted by a group of people. Culture is generated by a people's geography, history, and the need to solve life's problems and challenges and is adopted as a way for a people to live successfully together with a guide to handle conflict. While all peoples have developed technologically (such as science and the making of tools), have developed a system of law and custom, have developed a religious system (such as mystery or ritual or magic

or theology), and have developed systems to actualize thought (such as art, education, and philosophy), how these developments have been realized have been determined by cultural attributes. A people's set of attitudes, values, and beliefs literally shape their development.

For instance, democracy is not a cultural attribute; it's a system that falls under law and custom as a way to solve certain governmental and economic challenges related to how a group of people choose to live together. The cultural attributes that drive democracy are individualism and freedom which are values held by the group of people. In other words, because a group of people highly value individualism and freedom, they choose to live together under a democratic system. Indeed, the democratic system was founded on the principles of individual freedom. To them, then, the democratic system is the most successful system under which to live together most successfully (i.e., most peacefully that generates the most acceptable conditions of living).

The Chinese equate democracy with the Western world, specifically the United States, and relate Western economy with democracy. But they also connect democracy and Western economy with Western culture, and the attitudes, beliefs, and values associated with Western culture. In 1989, the Chinese students wanted democracy, but had no real grasp of the system itself.<sup>3</sup> They saw the results of Western economy, not the process, and certainly not the role democracy has on a peoples' freedom to implement Western economy within its boundaries of custom and law. The government officials, on the other hand, felt threatened by the values associated with democracy and Western principles of economic reform.

## **Prelude to the Square**

Despite the fears and hopes associated with accepting Western economic practices, China saw the relationship among democracy, economy, and political power. In a nutshell, China seemed to equate economic power with global power, and China did not have the kind of global power that she seemed to want.

By observing neighbors, China saw the relationship between economic growth and global political power. During the 1989 demonstrations in China, a symposium of Chinese intellectuals was taking place in the United States to discuss concerns. Besides discussing the current events in their home country, they also pondered on causes and solutions. On discussing the connection between economy and power, one person pointed to China's neighbors.

"Japan is a small country. It was defeated in 1945 and its national strength exhausted. But 40 years later it has become an economic giant, boasting the largest currency reserves in the world. People say China's backwardness is due to its large population. But Japan's population density is far greater. Why is China, one of the victorious nations in the last war, still in such a sorry state? As I stood there, I also reflected on Taiwan. In 1949 Chiang Kai-shek fled to that small island, and now its currency reserves have jumped to the second place in the world. Taiwan's currency can be changed for American dollars in New York. Taiwan people go to Hong Kong and spend money as if things were for the taking. But outside its borders China's currency is a mere scrap of paper. Why? Let's compare Hong Kong and Shanghai. In 1949, Shanghai was the premier cosmopolitan city of Asia. Today, 40 years later, it is a shell of its former self, while Hong Kong has leapt way ahead. Why? It hurts even to ask the question. But my simple conclusion is: while they have been working hard building up their economy and their competitive enterprises, we have been busily engaged in power struggles, pitting people against people, killing each other. China's economic system is

characterized as "ownership by the whole people". But this means, in fact, that the people own nothing. Ownership is by a privileged group. True, their salaries are not much more than ours, but everything they want is "supplied" to them: sumptuous food, expensive cars, luxurious housing. In Shaanxi I once visited a hotel specially built for top leaders from Beijing. Each suite had two huge bedrooms, two extravagant sitting rooms, and two bathrooms outfitted with bathing pools, Jacuzzis, and the like. Needless to say, those parts of the hotel were strictly off limits to ordinary people."<sup>4</sup>

That global power, a growing economy, and democracy interrelate could not help but be recognized. They saw that the rise of Western society connects to the development of science and technology which seems to drive a growing economy.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it seemed clear that the United States had a hand in helping China's neighbors. China, on the other hand, seemed to see herself as backward. To China, democracy begins with the individual person.<sup>6</sup> Fang in "Democracy, Reform, and Modernization" points out that in democratic countries, people pay taxes in return for services. The government depends on people's taxes and therefore must be responsible to its citizens. But in China, the problem lies with an overall cultural attitude. People pay taxes, but when the government returns a service, people are not only surprised, but commend the government for providing the service.<sup>7</sup> Fang asserts that it's necessary to know who supports whom economically in order to reform China. And to reform China economically, people need to adopt the culture of democracy, "to have a democratic mentality and a democratic spirit."<sup>8</sup> To adopt democracy requires a cultural shift to individualism.<sup>9</sup>

Despite government officials' stance, student demonstrations are an established political phenomenon in China. As early as 1919, Chinese students have been

concerned with the roles of traditional Chinese culture, modern science, and Western style democracy. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, students protested the terms of the Versailles Treaty which gave German territories to Japan instead of returning them to China after World War I.<sup>10</sup> The May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement in 1919 signifies the beginning of an era of intense debate concerning culture and democracy.

In October of 1949, Mao Tzedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China. While Mao called the ten-year period between 1966 and 1976 the "Cultural Revolution," since his death it has often been referred to as the "ten years of turmoil." During these ten years, the government engaged in power struggles, the "Red Guards" and "revolutionary rebels" formed, and China experienced extensive political persecutions. In January of 1976, Premier Zhou Enlai died and in April people gathered in Tiananmen Square to mourn his death as well as to criticize Mao's closest associates. At this demonstration, students and police clashed, resulting in the "Tiananmen Incident". The government, however, called it a counter-revolutionary event.

During the ten years between 1966 and 1976, Deng Xiaoping fell from power but gradually rose in power after Mao's death in September of 1976. Two years later, Deng Xiaoping launched a system of economic reforms in industry, agriculture, science and defense called the "Four Modernizations". He attempted a consistent rise in living standards by placing more goods on the store shelves. He also introduced measures to ensure the betterment of intellectuals' prestige and material conditions.<sup>11</sup>

In 1978, also, a stretch of construction wall near a busy commercial district in Beijing became well-known as the "Democracy Wall" where people put up posters to voice their criticism of the government. January 1, 1979, the United States and the People's Republic of China formally established diplomatic relations. The Vice Premier, Deng Xiaoping, made the first official visit by a Chinese official to the U.S. Also during

this year, the government suppressed the Democracy Wall and arrested several activists. Two years later in 1981, Hu Yaobang became the Party General Secretary. By this time, Deng Xiaoping's "Four Modernizations" began to fall apart and students and intellectuals began to fall behind in terms of material conditions.<sup>12</sup> Late fall in 1986, students in several cities demonstrated to demand political reform. Because the government thought Hu Yaobang to be too soft on the student protests and on what the government considered "bourgeois liberalism, Hu was forced to resign early in 1987. Because he was considered to be the most important patron of intellectuals within the top leadership, and also because he supported economic and political reform, Hu's dismissal was a major turning point for many intellectuals.<sup>13</sup> Because the government officials used the student demonstration as a pretext to dismiss Hu, and because the students were intending to demonstrate in support of Deng's reforms, the students felt that Deng Xiaoping was not to be trusted.<sup>14</sup> Later that year, Zhao Ziyang became the General Secretary of the Communist Party and Li Peng the Premier. The next year, in 1988, the Central Committee accepted Premier Li Peng's policy to slow the country's economic reforms.

Meanwhile, the government was beginning to moderate the individual freedoms of students, artists, and other intellectuals. Sullivan explains when he writes:

The animosity of conservative party leaders toward Western culture and general intellectual freedom was abundantly clear from their recent denunciations of Chinese avant-garde culture, such as *He shang* and the prize-winning film *Hong gaoliang* (Red sorghum). Cultural and ideological retrenchment had, in fact, already occurred prior to Hu's death in government education policy, where changes formulated in December 1988 aimed at restricting study abroad to more politically reliable students and to countries other than the United States. With Hu's demise, the

linkage between high-level political developments and a student's personal and intellectual life was now abundantly clear.<sup>15</sup>

On April 15, 1989, the former Party General Secretary, Hu Yaobang, died of a massive heart attack. People gathered in Tiananmen Square to commemorate Hu as well as to voice their dissatisfactions with government policies. From this time on, the demonstration rocketed out of control. Caught up in the spirit of the 1989 demonstration, the "Department of Theory and Information Dissemination Committee" from Beijing University wrote that the purpose of the student demonstration was "to hasten the democratization of China and to promote reforms in the political system; to wipe out official corruption; and to allow intellectuals, workers, and peasants to benefit from the realization of national prosperity and strength brought forth by the real reforms."<sup>16</sup> But, as Fang points out, Chinese government bureaucrats do not have the theoretical grasp to implement a democratic type of economic system within China.<sup>17</sup> Between 1986 and 1988, the working class lost faith in the economic practices by the government. The government offered them a deal that "involved giving up their secure subsidy-supported low-wage lifestyle for a risky contract-based system that might entail higher wages at the possible price of rising costs and unemployment."<sup>18</sup> The economic reforms after 1986 resulted in a spiraling inflation without improvement in living standards. In mid-1988, Zhao Ziyang attempted, with Deng Xiaoping's support, to create a rapid economic gain that resulted in the inflation of 1988 and 1989 that threatened people on fixed incomes. Saich points out that

The rise in tensions in the urban areas was a result of the failure of Zhao Ziyang's economic reform program. Zhao had consistently applied macro-economic policy incorrectly. He appeared to be trying to expand



the economy rapidly to win his own political legitimacy as a way of justifying further reforms.<sup>19</sup>

People of China also connected economic woes to government corruption. Not only did government officials manipulate the system so that they would enjoy luxuries others could not, they also engaged in nepotism and in gilding their own pockets. Unger points out that people across China were angry about inflation and government corruption. He says that

when inflation in 1988 began to overtake wage rises in the state sector, frustrations sharpened. Workers who had been willing to countenance the corruption of cadres when their own wage packets were growing healthily became resentful in 1988 and 1989 when they saw that the close kin of officials were cutting themselves an undue share of the pie while their own slices shrank.<sup>20</sup>

The students during the demonstrations offered a solution to the flagrant corruption. In "The Crisis in Moral Values Is a Crisis in Human Values: We Must Establish Behavioral Ethics Suited to a Commodity Economy," students wrote that "Through developing a commodity economy and a system of regulation and supervision of the exercise of power under a system that has been made democratic, we can establish the basis for blocking off the sources of corruption."<sup>21</sup>

China's economic and political problems were deeply known and felt by Beijing's students. But the response by both students and government officials during the demonstration portrayed a fundamental crisis underneath the country's economic and political problems. The students called for democracy, but did not know the democratic system. The students' world view came from their own experiences while the government officials attempted to maintain power without causing a national upheaval. Wuer Kaixi, a student from Beijing Normal University and a main force behind the

beginning of the student demonstration<sup>22</sup>, summed up what the students wanted. He said:

We don't have the goals our parents had. We don't have the fanatical idealism our older brothers and sisters once had.

So what do we want?

Nike shoes. Lots of free time to take our girlfriends to a bar. The freedom to discuss an issue with someone. And to get a little respect from society.<sup>23</sup>

### **Culture Unfulfilled**

Hu Yaobang died April 15<sup>th</sup> of a massive heart attack. The next day, about 300 students from Beijing University came to the square to commemorate Hu by laying wreaths on the Monument to the People's Heroes. Hu had been forced to resign from office two years earlier, but continued to be highly respected by students and intellectuals. The government, however, considered Hu an outcast and did not honor him the way that students thought he deserved. White paper flowers are used for mourning in Chinese culture, and the authorities did not place them on the monument.<sup>24</sup> While such an act as failing to place white paper flowers on the monument may seem to be trivial, to us it is not. Cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes generate very clear expectations concerning how a person or a group of people behave. That government officials did not place white flowers spoke their minds concerning Hu very pointedly to the students, and sparked the demonstration.

Students placed a wreath on the monument. The next day, April 17<sup>th</sup>, students placed more wreaths and a memorial picture on the monument. Lao Gui, a leading novelist and author of the novel, *Bloody Sunset*, wrote:

Then, in the afternoon, I felt the atmosphere begin to change. People started pouring in from all directions. White paper flowers appeared on the hedges, and students from Beid [Beijing University] put a huge banner around the base of the monument. It said: "The soul of the nation."<sup>25</sup>

By Tuesday, April 18<sup>th</sup> the square was full of people. As Strand points out, the demonstration erupted without organization or an organized leadership that followed a past cultural logic of protest.<sup>26</sup>

Very quickly, the demonstration became a power struggle between the various student factions and between students and government officials. Wuer Kaixi and Wang Dan, a student leader from Beijing University, had already talked about a demonstration for the purpose of changing the governmental system. They saw this incident as an opportunity and they quickly became the early leaders of the demonstration. While Wuer Kaixi admitted his regard for Hu Yaobang, he identified his main motivation as the "general craving for the democracy and openness that Hu Yaobang had promoted."<sup>27</sup> Wuer Kaixi gave his first speech in Tiananmen Square on April 16<sup>th</sup> and gained leadership by connecting his name with the demonstration. At that time, such an act was quite a risk, and consequently students quickly regarded him as leader.<sup>28</sup> On April 21<sup>st</sup>, Wuer Kaixi put up posters at every university in Beijing that declared the establishment of "The Beijing Provisional Student Union." He then put up other posters telling students to obey the Provisional Student Union leadership, with himself as "Provisional Chairman." Wuer admits that:

Actually, at that time, there were no departments registered at all, and the Provisional Student Union had only one member – me. I knew that the student movement had reached a critical point and that all it needed was one spark for it to catch fire.<sup>29</sup>

Very early in the demonstration, due to their anger at government officials for shirking the merits of Hu Yaobang's contributions to China, students approached government officials with demands and used the word "Democracy" to rally their ideals. Several times, they spoke of their day's society as a "feudal" system and wanted to change it to a democratic system in order to reform the country. The feudal system they referred to was the period during the sixth century B.C. During this period, Confucius, attempting to gain order in society, developed the core values that culturally drive the behaviors of Chinese people today.

The most lasting cultural value set by Confucius is the principle of filial piety. In *The Origins of Cultural Differences and Their Impact on Management*, Jack Scarborough writes that Confucius

believed that an orderly society required peace and harmony, which, in turn, depended ultimately on the absolute right of parents, especially the father, to exert total control over and to expect total obedience and respect from their children in return for paternal benevolence and teaching of virtue and proper behavior. . . . By extension, all relationships among people could be structured along hierarchical lines based on age, gender, and learning. . . . Education in proper behavior was thus thought to be man's highest calling, the bedrock of an orderly society, and the first obligation of government and family. Those most worthy of respect and authority were those who exhibited virtue and who had acquired sufficient wisdom and experience to teach proper behavior to the young.<sup>30</sup>

Not only were children expected to respect and obey parents, but parents were expected to demonstrate virtue and wisdom. Furthermore, as an extension of filial piety, the people of China expected the same relationship with their government. China expected citizens to respect and obey government officials and also expected government officials to demonstrate virtue and wisdom.

Students rejected filial piety several ways, but even so, they continued to be caught in its cultural value. To the government officials, students did not fulfill their cultural expectations. At the same time, government officials would, under no circumstances, allow the cultural value of filial piety to be compromised, and yet government officials did not fulfill their cultural expectations to students. Add into the mix several student power struggles, the rally of democracy with all that individualism implies to the government, the impetus of experiencing the results of past economic failures, with an uncontrollable number of emotional students, and cultural confusion persisted. While students shouted "Democracy" and "Freedom," government officials labeled the demonstration as counter-revolutionary "turmoil" (dongluan)<sup>31</sup> and therefore criminal in intent.<sup>32</sup>

Students took the concept of equality under democracy and used it to try to disarm the government. Throughout the weeks of demonstration, students demanded that the government recognize them as an equal organization. Yuan Mu, the spokesman for the State Council, which is the highest position of state administration and the executive body of the National People's Congress (a government official), writes that the purpose of students "was to force the government to recognize them as an equal political force, which, of course, we could not accept."<sup>33</sup>

April 18<sup>th</sup>, some students thought to storm the gate of the leadership compound in Zhongnanhai, but other students talked them out of it. Two days later, military police beat students during the night, some quite severely. As Sullivan points out, "the government deepened the conflict by unleashing club-wielding police against young college students."<sup>34</sup> On April 22<sup>nd</sup>, the official memorial service for Hu Yaobang was held in the Great Hall of the People. According to Chen Mingyuan, former professor at Beijing University where he taught Chinese to foreigners, he and several others

suggested that the hearse carrying Hu's body should circle Tiananmen Square in keeping with custom, but the government officials refused.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Petition**

On April 22<sup>nd</sup>, students committed themselves to using nonviolent and legal tactics to demonstrate.<sup>36</sup> Angry at police beating students and the government shirking cultural expectations concerning Hu Yaobang's memorial, the students developed a petition to the government:

1. Reevaluate Comrade Hu Yaobang's rights and wrongs, achievements and errors. Affirm Hu's views favoring "democracy, freedom, loosening [of controls], and harmony."
2. Severely punish the assailants who beat up the students and masses. Demand compensation and an apology to the victims from those responsible.
3. Promulgate the press law as soon as possible to allow the publication of private newspapers and assure freedom of the press.
4. Demand that state leaders publicly reveal ... their own and their children's sources of income and property. Investigate and deal with official profiteering and publicize details of the investigation.
5. Demand that relevant state leaders make formal self-criticism to the people of the whole country for mistakes in education policy, and seek out those responsible. Demand a big increase in the education budget and improve the treatment of teachers.
6. Reevaluate the [1987] "anti-bourgeois liberalization" campaign, and rehabilitate those citizens who were incorrectly denounced.
7. Strongly demand fair and faithful news coverage of this patriotic democracy movement.<sup>37</sup>

While the petition seems to be reasonable, it fails to follow the established cultural values of filial piety that the government insisted be followed. To reevaluate Hu's achievements and errors is culturally acceptable, but to demand that the government affirm democracy was a political impossibility. Furthermore, students connected democracy and freedom with harmony, which is a cultural goal in China. Doing so told government officials that without democracy and freedom there was no harmony, which was a cultural insult. Most of the petition, however, focused on what the students considered to be government officials' errors or a reference to corruption, or as one student stated, the "autocracy, dictatorship, corruption, and official profiteering in the party and government"<sup>38</sup>. From this point on, students continued to demonstrate a blatant lack of filial piety, but blamed the government officials by indicating that officials did not warrant filial piety.

Immediately after Hu's memorial ceremony, students called for a dialogue with Li Peng. Early afternoon, they were told that the government would make a response in fifteen minutes. An hour later, there was no sign of Li Peng, and four students walked up onto the stairs with the petition. Three of them "knelt down below the national emblem to present a petition, holding high the petition letter."<sup>39</sup> The fourth student leader, Wuer Kaixi, opposed the "feudal method of kneeling down" but the others did so in order to demonstrate their fundamental loyalty to the state and their willingness to demonstrate their adherence to cultural values. Government officials completely ignored the students. Sullivan points out that to the Chinese, "even an autocratic emperor would have sent an emissary to receive the petition."<sup>40</sup> One student wrote that "we now know that we are facing cold-blooded animals who are not even worth a straw."<sup>41</sup>

This student act turned the sentiment of the ordinary Chinese person in favor of the demonstration. If the government was worthy of filial piety, then officials would have recognized the act of kneeling, although not necessarily the demands, of the students. That students were in a deep emotional crisis was clear, but government officials did not behave as expected under Chinese decorum. And because ordinary people were currently feeling the effects of government economic and political policy, they tended to believe in the validity of the demonstration. Sullivan writes that the "effects of economic reform, interaction with Western and recently modernized Asian nations, greater internal mobility, and a relatively relaxed social and political atmosphere had all forged a social cohesion antithetical to the Leninist structure and Maoist paternalism still defended" by government officials.<sup>42</sup> The Chinese population became receptive to the student pro-democracy movement.

An April 26<sup>th</sup> editorial in the *People's Daily*, inspired by Deng Xiaoping's speech the day before, provoked the largest demonstration since 1949.<sup>43</sup> The article employed cultural revolutionary rhetoric and throughout the text used terms such as "beating," "smashing," "looting," and "burning" to describe the students' actions. The article also stated that the demonstrators were "an extremely small number" of students and compared them with Red Guards when the editorial accused them of "going to factories, rural areas, and schools to establish ties." The article accused students of attacking party and state leaders and called the demonstration a "planned conspiracy and a turmoil" whose purpose was to "sow dissension among the people, plunge the whole country into chaos, and sabotage the political situation of stability and unity." The article threatened the student demonstrators with "positive action."<sup>44</sup> None of these accusations were true. That students reacted to this editorial is an understatement. Any kind of reconciliation was not possible.



## The Hunger Strike

One cultural expectation resulting from filial piety is caring. On a deeply cultural level, Chinese people expect government officials to care about their youth. Despite the events preceding the hunger strike, the students still based their hopes on this cultural attribute not just for political gain, but for a recognition of their wants. The students wanted government officials to care about them and about what they were demanding. One letter from students asks, "Where is the sympathy for the people from those in power?"<sup>45</sup> Some were willing to sacrifice their lives, but discovered that officials did not care. Zweig points out that only "leaders alienated from the people and driven by powerful self-interest could have remained unresponsive to the people and allowed young people to edge toward the brink of death."<sup>46</sup>

For the May 13<sup>th</sup> hunger strike, student demands changed somewhat. They stated that they were engaging in a hunger strike in order:

1. To protest the government's indifference to the student demonstrations;
2. To protest the government's failure to enter into a dialogue with students;
3. To protest the government's unfair characterization of the student democratic movement as "turmoil" and the further distortion of it in newspaper coverage.

They requested:

1. An immediate dialogue between the government and the students on substantial topics with equal status;
2. An acknowledgment by the government of the legitimacy of the student democratic movement.<sup>47</sup>

Students recognized that their requests conflicted with their own culture. As part of this declaration, they asked parents to "please forgive your children who cannot be loyal to their country and act with filial piety at the same time."<sup>48</sup> The government would not, could not allow the demonstrators to stand on an equal basis with government officials.

At this point, the student leadership changed. A highly emotional and naïve graduate student in psychology at Beijing Normal University named Chai Ling became head leader of the demonstration.<sup>49</sup> Her advisor was Li Lu who was a student at Nanjing University. Her emotional stance seemed to mirror the students' emotional energy and hope. Secretly, however, she wanted to push the government far enough to shed blood in order to begin a revolution to overthrow the government. She thought that her country would not change unless her fellow students actually did die.<sup>50</sup>

Students constantly insisted on finding ways to exhibit their contempt for government officials as well as insisting on standing as equals. Blatantly critical comments flew in the face of government officials. In a "Letter to the Party Central Committee by Party Members in Shanghai," students wrote that one reason economic and political mistakes "are not prevented is the abnormal political life within the party."<sup>51</sup> Students called the government leaders hypocritical,<sup>52</sup> decrepit and muddleheaded,<sup>53</sup> "clumsy, ... rigid and uncompromising," who engage in "abominable attitudes"<sup>54</sup> as well as "ineffectiveness, incompetence, and inefficiency."<sup>55</sup> In an open letter to Deng Xiaoping, students addressed him as Xiaoping, our equivalent of a first name. By addressing Deng by his first or given name, students were in effect claiming the status of close friends, but without the appellation "comrade" commonly used by officials when addressing each other by their given name.<sup>56</sup>

On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, Li Peng agreed to meet with student leaders. Chai Ling did not attend, but the older student leaders met with the Premier. Wuer Kaixi, weakened by hunger, was carried from the hospital to attend. He describes the meeting:

Upon entering, I saw nearly a company of fully armed soldiers guarding the meeting room. I just greeted the soldiers and walked right in. I also wanted to slight Li Peng, so I didn't stand up until he was in front of me. He stretched out his hand, and then I offered mine. Before he turned around, I had already sat down. My anger only increased at the sight of the man. Since April 22, we had been pleading for a meeting with Li Peng, and it was not until May 22, exactly one month later, that a meeting was allowed

Li Peng told us that he had come "a little late." I interrupted him, and said, "Not a little late, but *much* too late." He knew this was true and didn't reply. I was really very upset, thinking that for too long China's leaders have continued to behave as emperors who could lord over us. Chinese sometimes say, "To be met by the premier is the happiest moment in one's life." It is so difficult for the Chinese to give up their habit of thanking the "emperor" for his noblesse oblige. I didn't feel thankful to Li Peng. I felt that our respect for him should depend on his abilities, not on his official title.

People throughout the country were still able to see for themselves how a twenty-one-year-old man spoke as an equal, and spoke critically no less, to the premier of the nation. We had the guts to do so because we had the truth on our side. People liked what we said because in it they heard an expression of their own anger at the government. If Zhao Ziyang had been there, I would have said the same thing. If Deng Xiaoping had come, we would have been even harsher in our criticism.

At the end of the meeting, I told Li, "You are not sincere at all. The government obviously does not want to talk to us either. Therefore, there is no point in our sitting here anymore."<sup>57</sup>

Later, Wuer Kaixi seemed to give up. Wuer, sensing a government crackdown, did not want the students to be hurt. On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, Wuer Kaixi told the students that the demonstration was over, to evacuate the square, and to go home. Because he tried to end the demonstration, students no longer considered Wuer Kaixi their leader.<sup>58</sup> Despite his part in the demonstration, Wuer Kaixi was not the single mastermind, the "Black Hand," behind the movement.

Again, on May 27<sup>th</sup>, Wuer Kaixi and Wang Dan told students that the demonstration would end on May 30<sup>th</sup>, with the intent that students would return to campuses and discuss the movement's experiences.<sup>59</sup> The students would not listen to them. On May 28<sup>th</sup>, student leaders met (without Wuer or Wang) and, with Chai Ling's approval, voted to end the demonstration on May 30<sup>th</sup>. After talking with Li Lu, who was furious with her decision, Chai Ling changed her mind and rallied the students to continue the hunger strike and fight for democracy.<sup>60</sup>

### **Martial Law**

Li Peng authorized the use of lethal force against the students June 3<sup>rd</sup>. On June 4<sup>th</sup>, the army attacked. During the early morning hours of June 4<sup>th</sup>, most of the students left the square. The students who remained on the square faced the inevitable. Chai Ling was willing for people to die for the cause. Li Lu, however, proposed a final vote. While the outcome of the vote is not clear, Li Lu announced the end to the demonstration.<sup>61</sup>

Most of the bloodshed occurred on the streets surrounding the square. Nearly all of the people killed were not on the square, but in the streets. Because of conflicting evidence, it is difficult to know how many people were killed or wounded. That

students were killed and wounded, however, is undeniable. One tank veered off of the street into a small crowd of students and killed over a dozen people. Sullivan writes:

The most startling aspect of the crackdown was the troops' indiscriminate firing and outright savagery against an unarmed populace. "[S]tudents and city residents who were trying to hide in lanes" were fired at. So, too, were crowds who taunted the troops as "bandits," as were individuals attempting to aid the wounded (docs. 183, 195). Tanks and APCs sprayed bullets into buildings and down alleyways, taking a heavy toll of citizens, especially in Muxudi (west of the square), where, it is claimed, "four hundred people [were] instantly killed or wounded" (Doc. 183). Victims included children and the elderly who remained in their homes that came under indiscriminate fire. . . . Most shocking was the use of highly destructive explosive shells and dum dum bullets outlawed by international conventions governing war.... And in a pattern repeating the April 20 clash outside Zhongnanhai, security forces once again engaged in flagrant assaults on women. Medical personnel in Beijing and Chengdu were also shot, apparently causing the death of several doctors (docs. 185, 197).<sup>62</sup>

That night, Chinese government officials began China's cultural change with the blood of their youth and their innocent.

## **Conclusion**

The Tiananmen Square Demonstration was as significant to citizens of China as was Watergate to citizens of the United States. The students never wanted a political coup, "but to challenge the ineffective policies and corruption of the central party leaders."<sup>63</sup> Spurred by past economic failures, government corruption, an acute awareness of the relationship between Western economic policy and global political power, a need for freedom of voice, and a desire for Western style goods, the Chinese students attempted to change their society. But while students chanted "Democracy"

and government officials feared the advent of individualism, both sides continued to be bound by their own cultural values and cultural behavioral expectations resulting from those values.

The demonstration on Tiananmen Square ended on June 4<sup>th</sup>, but the movement did not end.<sup>64</sup> A cultural value in China is national dignity. Since 1989, people have changed and China's culture is slowly changing. Perhaps China will find her own definition of individualism, of democracy, and of economic policy. Perhaps the Western world will recognize that there is more than one definition. By acknowledging that our own economic and political systems can be qualified and defined in accordance with another's cultural values, we will recognize China with the dignity she deserves.

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<sup>1</sup> As a cultural attribute, the Chinese people highly regard education and educated people. The "intellectuals," as the Chinese call them, therefore hold power in society, which, if put to the test, is a source of political concern for Chinese government officials.

<sup>2</sup> David Strand, "Protest in Beijing: Civil Society and Public Sphere in China," *Problems of Communism* vol. 39, May-June 1990: 2.

<sup>3</sup> Xie Xiaoqing observed that students' behavior resembled a Jacobin dictatorship. George Black and Robin Munro, *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1993) 208.

<sup>4</sup> Perry Link, "Backwardness: Session I: Morning, Thursday, April 27, 1989" *On The Eve: China Symposium '89, Bolinas, California, 27-29 April, 1989*. Edited and annotated by Geremie R. Barmé.  
<http://www.tsquare.tv/film/Bolinas4link.html>

<sup>5</sup> Fang Lizhi, "Thoughts on Reform" in his *Bringing Down the Great Wall: Writings on Science, Culture, and Democracy in China* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991) 103. Fang tries to point out that China must look beyond economic growth (p. 102), but this 1985 speech was criticized by Communist Party officials for his suggestions that Marxist economic beliefs be reappraised. (p. 95)

<sup>6</sup> Fang, "Democracy, Reform, and Modernization" 169. This 1986 speech was criticized by officials as an example of bourgeois liberal thought. (p. 157).

<sup>7</sup> See Strand, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Fang, "Democracy, Reform, and Modernization" 169.

<sup>9</sup> Fang, "Democracy, Reform, and Modernization" 166.

<sup>10</sup> Strand, 1.

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- <sup>11</sup> Tony Saich, "The Rise and Fall of the Beijing People's Movement," in *The Pro-Democracy Protests in China: Reports from the Provinces*, edited by Jonathan Unger (Armonk, New York & London, England: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., An East Gate Book, 1991) 9. Also see Strand, 15.
- <sup>12</sup> Saich, 9.
- <sup>13</sup> Saich, 10.
- <sup>14</sup> Saich, 11.
- <sup>15</sup> Lawrence R. Sullivan, "April 15 – April 27: The Movement Begins: Hu Yaobang's Death Sparks Mass Demonstrations," in *China's Search for Democracy: The Student and the Mass Movement of 1989*, edited by Suzanne Ogden, Kathleen Hartford, Lawrence Sullivan, and David Zweig (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., An East Gate Book, 1992) 74-75.
- <sup>16</sup> Department of Theory and Information Dissemination Committee, Beijing University, "China's Patriotic Democracy Movement and the Cultural Revolution," in *China's Search for Democracy*, 163. Source: Appeared in *ORSD*, 1:66. This translation is by Nicki Croghan, P.K. Chen, and M. Zhang and was published in *Radical America* 22:4 (July-August 1989): 16-17. I doubt that the "Department of Theory and Information Dissemination Committee" was an officially recognized committee or organization.
- <sup>17</sup> Fang, "Thoughts on Reform" 117.
- <sup>18</sup> Saich, 11.
- <sup>19</sup> Saich, 12.
- <sup>20</sup> Jonathan Unger, "Introduction" in *The Pro-Democracy Protests in China: Reports from the Provinces*, 3.
- <sup>21</sup> "The Crisis in Moral Values Is a Crisis in Human Values: We Must Establish Behavioral Ethics Suited to a Commodity Economy," in *China's Search for Democracy*, 55.
- <sup>22</sup> While Wuer Kaixi was a main force behind the demonstration, he was not a "Black Hand" or the impetus behind these events. The Chinese government has since attempted to find a mastermind behind the demonstration and have failed. The demonstration was spurred by events and policies in China. I used Wuer Kaixi because he was an early leader and he portrayed common student attitudes.
- <sup>23</sup> From the transcript of the film, *Gate of Heavenly Peace*. To see this quote from the transcript, internet to: <http://www.tsquare.tv/film/transhs.html>.
- <sup>24</sup> Lao Gui in *Children of the Dragon: The Story of Tiananmen Square by Human Rights in China* (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Company, London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1990) 45.
- <sup>25</sup> Lao, 45.
- <sup>26</sup> Strand, 18.
- <sup>27</sup> Wuer Kaixi, in *Children of the Dragon*, 46.
- <sup>28</sup> Wuer Kaixi, in *Children of the Dragon*, 48-49.
- <sup>29</sup> Wuer Kaixi, in *Children of the Dragon*, 53.
- <sup>30</sup> Jack Scarborough, *The Origins of Cultural Differences and Their Impact on Management* (Westport, Connecticut & London: Quorum Books, 2001) 50-51.
- <sup>31</sup> Sullivan, 69.

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<sup>32</sup> Suzanne Ogden, "April 28 – May 12: The Conflict Escalates as the Students Defend Their Patriotism," in *China's Search for Democracy*, 127.

<sup>33</sup> Yuan Mu, in *Children of the Dragon*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Sullivan, 73.

<sup>35</sup> Chen Mingyuan, "A Speech Given by Prof. Chen Mingyuan at Beijing University on April 23, 1989," in *Children of the Dragon*, 54.

<sup>36</sup> General Headquarters of the Demonstration, "Urgent Announcement about May 17 Demonstration," May 17, 1989, in *China's Search for Democracy*, 226. Source: Mimeograph, in *Tiananmen 1989*, p. 293.

This document reads:

To consolidate and defend this great student movement's achievements and ensure that today's demonstration goes well, we announce the following points to be observed during the demonstration:

1. Extremist slogans that violate the constitution are strictly forbidden.
2. Violence and illegal actions are strictly forbidden.
3. Assaults on government institutions, stores, and public facilities are strictly forbidden.
4. Entry into downtown commercial districts, such as Wangfujing, Xidan, and Qianmen, is strictly forbidden.
5. All groups participating in the demonstration must organize their own pickets.
6. All people must guard against trouble-makers and saboteurs with ulterior motives.
7. The demonstration will proceed along the Second Ring Road, and people should join the demonstration at a nearby location.

The prime task of the teachers and students of all the colleges and universities is to make sure the demonstration proceeds smoothly.

<sup>37</sup> Beijing University Students' Preparatory Committee, "A Peaceful Petition of Seven Demands," in *China's Search for Democracy*, 91. April 21, 1989. Source: ORSI, p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous, "The Whole Story of the 'April 22 Incident'", in *China's Search for Democracy*, 95. Source: ORSI, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> "The Whole Story of the 'April 22 Incident'", 95.

<sup>40</sup> Sullivan, 76.

<sup>41</sup> A Graduate Student in the Law Department Who Was Humiliated into Tears for the First Time Since Becoming an Adult, "Our Humiliation Must Be Wiped Out!" April 23, 1989, in *China's Search for Democracy*, 105. Source: ORSI, p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> Sullivan, 80.

<sup>43</sup> Sullivan, 69.

<sup>44</sup> "It is Necessary to Take a Clear-Cut Stand Against Turmoil: Editorial, *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), April 26, 1989, in *China's Search for Democracy*, 116-118. Source: Beijing Domestic Service, April 25, 1989, in FBIS, *Daily Report: China*, April 25, 1989, pp. 23 – 24.

<sup>45</sup> Qinghua University Students, "Open Letter to the People's Soldiers," Mid-May 1989, in *China's Search for Democracy*, 255. Source: ORSD, 1:39.

<sup>46</sup> David Zweig, "May 12 – May 19: The Hunger Strike: From Protest to Uprising," in *China's Search for Democracy*, 200.



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- <sup>47</sup> The Hunger Strike Volunteers, in *Children of the Dragon*, 68-70.
- <sup>48</sup> All the Students of the Beijing University Hunger Strike Group, "Hunger Strike Declaration of May 13," in *China's Search for Democracy*, 213 – 214. Source: *Xinwen daobao, haowai* (News herald, extra), HKFS.
- <sup>49</sup> For a description of Chai Ling, see Black, 208 – 209.
- <sup>50</sup> From the transcript of the film, *Gate of Heavenly Peace*. To see this quote from the transcript, internet to: <http://www.tsquare.tv/film/transmay27.html>
- <sup>51</sup> About 500 Party Members in Shanghai's [Municipal Communist Party Organization Bureau], "Letter to the Party Central Committee by Party Members in Shanghai," May 22, 1989, in *China's Search for Democracy*, 285. Source: *Tiananmen 1989*, pp. 338 – 339.
- <sup>52</sup> Printed and Distributed by Beijing Normal University, "The Crimes of the Government," May 20, 1989, in *China's Search for Democracy*, 259. Source: Courtesy of HKFS.
- <sup>53</sup> People of Beijing Normal University, "Denounce the [April 26 Editorial of the] *People's Daily*," End of April 1989, in *China's Search for Democracy*, 118. Source: Transcript from a [Student] Broadcasting Station of Beijing Normal University, courtesy of HKFS.
- <sup>54</sup> Autonomous Student Union of People's University, "The Authorities Have Completely Broken Their Promises: A Statement about the Government's Response to the Student's Demands for a Dialogue," May 13, 1989, in *China's Search for Democracy*, 212. Source: *Tiananmen 1989*, pp. 346 – 347.
- <sup>55</sup> Two Hundred Intellectuals, "Open Letter to the Party Central Committee, Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and State Council," April 21-25, 1989, in *China's Search for Democracy*, 89. Source: *Tiananmen 1989*, pp. 328 – 329.
- <sup>56</sup> Command Center for Tiananmen Square, Recovered Hunger-Strike Leaders, ASUCUB, and the Command Center of College Students from Other Provinces, "Open Letter to Den Xiaoping: Concerning the Good Thing You Did for the Nation Last Year," May 22, 1989, in *China's Search for Democracy*, 283. Source: *Tiananmen 1989*, pp. 337 – 338.
- <sup>57</sup> Wuer Kaixi, in *Children of the Dragon*, 93.
- <sup>58</sup> Black, 210.
- <sup>59</sup> Kathleen Hartford, "May 19 – June 3: Sliding Toward Tragedy: Martial Law," in *China's Search for Democracy*, 246.
- <sup>60</sup> Black, 217 – 218.
- <sup>61</sup> Black, 245 – 246.
- <sup>62</sup> Lawrence R. Sullivan, "June 3 – 4: The Beijing Massacre and Its Aftermath," in *China's Search for Democracy*, 375.
- <sup>63</sup> Ogden, 125.
- <sup>64</sup> Feigon sees a shift in attitudes by women about their societal roles due to the demonstration. Lee Feigon, "Gender and the Chinese Student movement," in *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China*, ed. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom and Elizabeth J. Perry, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1992) 134.