

## Tiananmen Square: briefly, anything seemed possible by Tania Branigan

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*Guardian Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2009*

It is 20 years since Ding Zilin stood by her gate and waited for her son. "What came were students with tattered clothes and dishevelled hair, shouting 'they are killing people, they are shooting at people,'" she recalled. "The more we watched, the more terrified and desperate we felt ... At about five in the morning we saw a car with a flat wooden board on it and a child's body on the board. When I saw the body of that child I felt my son's fate was the same, and he would not come back again." Her son, Jiang Jielian, 17, was one of hundreds who died that day, shot dead by the People's Liberation Army on the streets of Beijing.



Some believe the death toll in the crackdown on the Tiananmen Square democracy protests stretches into thousands. But no one knows for sure, and Ding's attempts to list the dead have resulted in two decades of harassment. Security officials have repeatedly prevented her from marking her son's death. "You killed my son and you're stopping me going to commemorate him? You didn't do enough?" was her incredulous comment about them to the Guardian earlier this year.

Today police again arrived to blockade her home amid a broad security clampdown. Other dissidents have been detained or invited on "holidays" by security officials this week. Plainclothes and uniformed officers have flooded Tiananmen Square. Popular online services including Twitter and Flickr and bulletin boards have been blocked. BBC broadcasts on the anniversary are blacked out and pages of imported newspapers are cut out or glued together.

Tonight an exiled student leader trying to return to [China](#) was refused entry to the territory of Macau, where he has not seen his parents for two decades. An arrest warrant for Wuerkaixi has been in force since 1989, when he was second on China's "most wanted" list. Like the peaceful activities of Ding - a 73-year-old retired philosopher and grieving mother - Wuerkaixi's presence is unacceptable to a state determined to suppress memory of the Tiananmen protests.

Bao Tong, a chief aide to the reformist former general secretary of the Communist party, Zhao Ziyang, who was purged for his sympathy towards the students, said: "A lot of people have forgotten; foreign people forgot; many Chinese young people forgot too. But as long as China is still under one-party leadership...you can't avoid talking about 4 June, because it was a turning point. It's the key turning point, when it could have gone in the right direction, but went in the wrong direction instead." His remarks emphasise the double amnesia surrounding the summer of 1989. The demonstrations' bloody ending has largely erased memories of the carnival of [protest](#) that preceded it: an astonishing uprising which lasted six weeks and drew in millions of people from around the country, threatening an end to communist rule. Anything seemed possible. Ten years of reform had created an appetite for freedom, but also new economic pressures such as rampant inflation, leaving many anxious and insecure. The party's paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping, tacked between reform and party orthodoxy as he tried to hold the leadership together.

Then, in April 1989, came the death of purged reformist leader Hu Yaobang. It sparked student protests with modest demands: greater freedom of speech, economic freedoms, curbs on corruption. "The top leadership was very divided over what it meant. One view was that the students were patriotic...The other was that they were challenging the leadership of the party and that [would lead] to chaos," said Professor Andrew Nathan, editor of The Tiananmen Papers. Bao said: "When protests began, I was at that time very optimistic. I thought students raised anti-corruption issues, and asked for democracy. It was an opportunity to make progress." But while his boss was pressing for dialogue with students, others were pushing Deng to crack down.

"What happened later was not the students increasing their level of activity, but Deng irritating them," Bao said. Riven, the leadership swung between tolerance and suppression: one side emboldened the protesters, the other appeared to inflame them. As the demonstrations spread to hundreds of cities, primary school teachers took their charges to the square. Police, judges and naval officers marched to support the students. Even the city's pickpockets were said to have stopped work in sympathy. The explosion of dissent took demonstrators as well as the government by surprise. Students found themselves heroes to thousands. Workers were drawn in almost by accident.

"It was not that on the first day I knew what my agenda was, that I was fighting for democracy. I was not there for that – I was there just for fun ... curiosity," said Han Dongfang, now director of China Labour Bulletin, who was passing on a bus when he first spotted the demonstrations. His decision to get off at the next stop would transform his life, resulting first in leadership, then jail, then exile.

"To me that was a fast growing period mentally, ideologically, politically," he said. "As a human being, as an activist, I grew really fast in this six weeks, from zero to a spokesman of my organisation - the only workers' organisation in the square – and then into a wanted person."

But what exhilarated participants terrified leaders who had lived through the chaos of the cultural revolution, when young people turned on their elders. The participation of workers was particularly frightening for the government. "Their logic was very simple: We took power with the ideology of a workers' movement, therefore, if others are starting a labour movement not under our control, it will one day take away our power," said Han.

The movement's demands were growing bolder and more fractured as students flooded in from the provinces and new leaders emerged, scorning suggestions of compromise. That was inevitable in a state which had never tolerated alternative organisations, said Chen Ziming, one of the intellectuals who attempted to mediate. For his pains would serve 13 years as a "black hand" behind the events. There was simply no way of channelling or shaping such dissent. "Students who didn't compromise cannot be described as hostile to the government. It was more like children talking to their parents," Chen said. "They think because they are children they can show their temper and parents won't treat them that badly and will in the end step back and agree with whatever they ask," Chen said.

"Fate was against the reformers," said Nathan. "Zhao Ziyang was suggesting a softer line that isn't in the DNA of the CCP ... Deng had been through the [communist] revolution, through the cultural revolution. I think it was in his nature to crack down eventually." Zhao refused to support the use of troops and was purged; he died years later under house arrest, while Bao served seven years in jail. But when the government declared martial law, the unthinkable happened.

"I waited all night on the monument of the people's heroes in the middle of the square for troops to arrive – and they didn't," recalled Robin Munro, then a human rights activist in Beijing and now at China Labour Bulletin. "The student loudspeakers burst into life and someone announced 'the great Beijing people have blocked the advance of the army' – and this roar went up. It was an extraordinary moment that no one had believed would be possible. Beijing citizens, ordinary people, had all turned out and physically stood in front of tanks to stop them coming into their city. And the troop columns halted." Unlike many of the celebrating students, Munro correctly read the brief triumph as the beginning of the end. "I felt it was huge loss of face for the authorities. They will not accept it. They will have to end it their way," he said.

Two weeks later, Deng's patience ran out. Troops were ordered to clear the square by dawn. "They woke me up and said tonight, army really, really will break in; we have to get prepared," said Han. "I still did not believe it - I had been in the army for three years. We were educated that the only aim as a soldier was serving the people." Jielian, pushing his way through the crowd in a Beijing suburb, was hit almost as soon as the firing started. "Even after they were shot, they thought it was rubber bullets, so they tried running away," said Ding. "After he ran a few steps he said to his friend, I may be shot - you run fast; don't wait for me. And after he finished the sentence he knelt down and then fell forward."

Munro thinks the authorities had never expected that citizens would dare to defy the state en masse for a second time. Yet they sent their troops in with tanks and live ammunition. "I believe what probably tilted the balance was this point: that it would shock and awe the Beijing citizenry into submission for the far foreseeable future," he said. "And terror works. That's the awful thing." He watched as troops fired on civilians and an armoured personnel carrier rammed a truck, sending it crashing on to the crowd. "There was one poor man who had been crushed underneath it and his brains were lying outside of his head – squashed out," Munro said. "It was literally 'over our dead bodies will they go in and kill our students'. It was a very heroic moment for the people of Beijing - and they paid the price. They were the ones who were slaughtered."

Amid the chaos, some soldiers were set upon, beaten and killed by angry citizens. Officials would cite this as proof of "a counter-revolutionary riot". "It was a one-way shooting massacre," said Wuerkaixi, who left the square on the last ambulance to arrive in hospital awash with blood: "Darker, fresher, lighter, red. And the awful smell."

In Tiananmen Square, as the dawn approached, troops were massing in their thousands. "The students left it till the very last minute - and many were determined to stay and sacrifice their lives. They were writing their wills on the monument," said Munro. In the end they walked away, minutes from the deadline. Some would flee into exile, where many remain; others were caught and jailed. Across the city, hundreds lay dead, among them Jielian. "The last time I kissed him was two days after his death," said Ding. "He was so cold. So cold, I can never, ever forget his cold cheek."

## **The True Story of Tiananmen Square by William Shepherd**

In 1989 history was taking an exhilarating turn, entering a period of genuine openness and possibility. So it was no coincidence that Francis Fukuyama from his perch at the US State Department, chose precisely that moment to attempt to slam the history book shut. Nor was it a coincidence that the World Bank and the IMF chose that same volatile year to unveil the Washington Consensus...a clear effort to halt all discussion and debate about any economic ideas outside the free-market lockbox.

These were democracy-containment strategies, designed to undercut the kind of unscripted self-determination that was, and always had been, the greatest single threat to the Milton Friedman doctrine and the Chicago School's global crusade to impose this everywhere as the foundations of a new world order managed and controlled by corporate governance.

One place where Fukuyama's bold pronouncement came in for early discrediting was China. Fukuyama's speech took place in February 1989; two months later, a pro-democracy movement exploded in Beijing, with mass protests and sit-ins in Tiananmen Square. Fukuyama had claimed that democratic and 'free market reforms' were a twin process, impossible to pry apart.

Yet in China, the government had done precisely that: it was pushing hard to deregulate wages and prices and expand the reach of the market...but it was fiercely determined to resist calls for elections and civil liberties. The demonstrators, on the other hand, demanded democracy, but many opposed the government's moves toward unregulated capitalism, a fact largely left out of the coverage of the movement in the Western press. In China, democracy and the Chicago School economics were not proceeding hand in hand; they were on opposite sides of the barricades surrounding Tiananmen Square.

In the early 1980s, the Chinese government, then led by Deng Xiaoping, was obsessed with avoiding a repeat of what had just happened in Poland, where workers had been allowed to form an independent movement that challenged the party's monopoly hold on power. It was not that China's leaders were committed to protecting the state-owned factories and farm communes that formed the foundation of the Communist state.

In fact, Deng was enthusiastically committed to converting to a corporate-based economy...so committed that, in 1989, his government invited Milton Friedman to come to China and tutor hundreds of top-level civil servants, professors and party economists in the fundamentals of free-market theory. 'All were invited guests, who had to show a ticket of invitation to attend,' Friedman recalled of his audiences in Beijing and Shanghai. His central message was 'how much better ordinary people lived in capitalist than in communist countries.'

The example Friedman held up was Hong Kong, a zone of pure capitalism that Friedman had long admired for its 'dynamic, innovative character that has been produced by personal liberty, free trade, low taxes, and minimal government intervention.' He claimed that Hong Kong, despite having no democracy, was freer than the United States, since its government participated less in the economy.

Friedman's definition of freedom, in which political freedom of unrestricted commerce, conformed nicely with the vision taking shape in the Chinese Politburo. The party wanted to open the economy to private ownership and consumerism while maintaining its own grip on power...a plan that ensured that once the assets of the state were auctioned off, party officials and their relatives would snap up the best deals and be first in line for the biggest profits.

According to this version of 'transition', the same people who controlled the state under Communism would control it under capitalism, while enjoying a substantial upgrade in lifestyle. The model the Chinese government intended to emulate was not the United States but something much closer to Chile under Pinochet: free markets combined with authoritarian political control, enforced by iron-fisted repression.

From the start, Deng clearly understood that repression would be crucial. Under Mao, the Chinese state had exerted brutal control over the people, dispensing with opponents and sending dissidents for re-education. But Mao's repression took place in the name of the workers and against the bourgeoisie; now the party was going to launch its own counterrevolution and ask workers to give up many of their benefits and security so that a minority could collect huge profits. It was not going to be an easy task. So in 1983 as Deng opened up the country to foreign investment and reduced protections for workers, he also ordered the creation of the 400,000-strong People's Armed Police, a new roving riot squad charged with quashing all signs of 'economic crimes' (ie. Strikes and protests). According to the China historian Maurice Meisner, 'The People's Armed Police kept American helicopters and electric cattle prods in its arsenal.' And 'several units were sent to Poland for anti-riot training'...where they studied the tactics that had been used against Solidarity during Poland's period of martial law.

Many of Deng's reforms were successful and popular...farmers had more control over their lives, and commerce returned to the cities. But in the late eighties, Deng began introducing measures that were distinctly unpopular,

particularly among workers in the cities...price controls were lifted, sending prices soaring; job security was eliminated, creating waves of unemployment; and deep inequalities were opening up between the winners and losers in the new China.

By 1988 the party was confronting a powerful backlash and was forced to reverse some of its price deregulation. Outrage was also mounting in the face of the party's defiant corruption and nepotism. Many Chinese citizens wanted more freedom in the market, but 'reform' increasingly looked like code for party officials turning into business tycoons, as many illegally took possession of the assets they had previously managed as bureaucrats.

With the free-market experiment in peril, Milton Friedman was once again invited to pay a visit to China...much as the Chicago Boys and the piranhas had enlisted his help in 1975, when their programme had sparked an internal revolt in Chile. A high-profile visit from the world-famous guru of capitalism was just the boost China's 'reformers' needed.

When Friedman arrived in Shanghai in September 1988, they were dazzled by how quickly mainland China was beginning to look and feel like Hong Kong. Despite the rage simmering at the grass roots, everything they saw served to confirm 'our faith in the power of free markets'. Friedman described this moment as 'the most hopeful period of the Chinese experiment.'

In the presence of official state media, Friedman met for two hours with Zhao Ziyang, general secretary of the Communist Party, as well as with Jiang Zemin, then party secretary of the Shanghai Committee and the future Chinese president. Friedman's message to Jiang echoed the advice he had given to Pinochet when the Chilean project was on the skids: don't bow to the pressure and don't blink. 'I emphasized the importance of privatization and free markets, and of liberalizing at one fell stroke,' Friedman recalled. In a memo to the general secretary of the Communist Party, Friedman stressed that more, not less, shock therapy was needed. 'China's initial steps of reform have been dramatically successful. China can make further dramatic progress by placing still further reliance on *free private markets*.'

Shortly after his return to the US Friedman, remembering the heat he had taken for advising Pinochet, wrote 'out of sheer devilry' a letter to the editor of a student newspaper, denouncing his critics for their double standards. He explained that he had just spent twelve days in China, where 'I was mostly the guest of government entities,' and had met with Communist party officials at the highest level. Yet these meetings had provoked no human rights outcry on American university campuses, Friedman pointed out. 'Incidentally, I gave precisely the same advice to both Chile and China.' He concluded by asking sarcastically, 'Should I prepare myself for an avalanche of protests for having been willing to give advice to so evil a government?' A few months later, that devilish letter took on sinister overtones, as the Chinese government began to emulate many of Pinochet's most infamous tactics.

Friedman's trip did not have the desired results. The pictures in the official papers of the professor offering his blessing to party bureaucrats did not succeed in bringing the public onside. In subsequent months, protests grew more determined and radical. The most visible symbols of the opposition were the demonstrations by student strikers in Tiananmen Square. These historic protests were almost universally portrayed in the international media as a clash between modern idealistic students who wanted Western-style democratic freedoms and old-guard authoritarians who wanted to protect the Communist state.

Recently another analysis of the meaning of Tiananmen Square has emerged, one that challenges the mainstream version while putting Friedmanism at the heart of the story. This alternative narrative is being advanced by, among others, Wang Hui, one of the organisers of the 1989 protests, and now a leading Chinese intellectual of what is known as China's 'New Left'. In his 2003 book *China's New Order* Wang explains that the protesters spanned a huge range of Chinese society...not just elite university students but also factory workers, small entrepreneurs and teachers. What ignited the protests, he recalls, was popular discontent in the face of Deng's 'revolutionary' economic changes, which were lowering wages, raising prices and causing 'a crisis of layoffs and unemployment'. According to Wang, 'These changes were the catalyst for the 1989 social mobilization'.

The demonstrators were not against economic reform per se; they were against the specific Friedmanite nature of the reforms...their speed, ruthlessness and the fact that the process was highly antidemocratic. Wang says that the protesters' call for elections and free speech were intimately connected to this economic dissent. What drove the demand for democracy was the fact that the party was pushing through changes that were revolutionary in scope, entirely without popular consent. There was, he writes, 'a general request for democratic means to supervise the fairness of the reform process and the reorganization of social benefits.'

These demands forced the Politburo to make a definite choice. The choice was not, as was so often claimed, between democracy and Communism, or 'reform' versus the 'old guard'. It was a more complex calculation: Should the party bulldoze over the bodies of the protesters? Or should it bow to the protesters' demands for democracy, cede its monopoly on power and risk a major setback to the economic project?

Some of the free-market reformers within the party, most notably General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, appeared willing to gamble on democracy, convinced that economic and political reform could still be compatible. More powerful elements in the party were not willing to take the risk. The verdict came down: the state would protect its economic 'reform' programme by crushing the demonstrators.

That was the clear message when on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1989 the government of the People's Republic of China declared martial law. On 3<sup>rd</sup> June the tanks of the People's Liberation Army rolled into the protests, shooting indiscriminately into the crowds. Soldiers stormed onto buses where student demonstrators were taking cover and beat them with sticks; more troops broke through the barricades protecting Tiananmen Square, where students had erected a Goddess of Democracy statue, and rounded up the organizers. Similar crackdowns took place simultaneously across the country.

There will never be reliable estimates for how many people were killed and injured in those days. The party admits to hundreds, and eyewitness reports at the time put the number of dead at between two thousand and seven thousand and the number of injured as high as thirty thousand.

The protests were followed by a national witch hunt against all regime critics and opponents. Some forty thousand were arrested, thousands were jailed and many...possibly hundreds...were executed. As in Latin America, the government reserved its harshest repression for the factory workers, who represented the most direct threat to deregulated capitalism. 'Most of those arrested, and virtually all who were executed, were workers. With the obvious aim of terrorizing the population, it became a well-publicized policy to systematically subject arrested individuals to beatings and torture,' writes Maurice Meisner.

For the most part, the massacre was covered in the Western press as another example of Communist brutality: just as Mao had wiped out his opponents during the Cultural revolution, now Deng, 'the Butcher of Beijing', crushed his critics under the watchful eye of Mao's giant portrait. A *Wall Street Journal* headline claimed that 'China's Harshest Actions Threaten to Set Back [the] 10-Year Reform Drive'...as if Deng was an enemy of those reforms and not their most committed defender, determined to take them into bold new territory.

Five days after the bloody crackdown, Deng addressed the nation and made it perfectly clear that it wasn't Communism he was protecting with his crackdown, but capitalism. After dismissing the protesters as 'a large quantity of the dregs of society,' China's president reaffirmed the party's commitment to economic shock therapy. 'In a word, this was a test, and we passed,' Deng said, adding, 'perhaps this bad thing will enable us to go ahead with reform and the open-door policy at a more steady, better, even a faster pace...We haven't been wrong. There's nothing wrong with the four cardinal principles [of economic reform]. If there is anything amiss, it's that these principles haven't been thoroughly implemented.'

Orville Schell, a China scholar and journalist, summarized Deng Xiaoping's choice: 'After the massacre of 1989, he in effect said we will not stop economic reform; we will in effect halt political reform.' For Deng and the rest of the Politburo, the free-market possibilities were now limitless. Just as Pinochet's terror had cleared the streets for revolutionary change, so Tiananmen paved the way for a radical transformation free from fear of rebellion. If life grew harder for peasants and workers, they would either have to accept it quietly or face the wrath of the army and the secret police. And so, with the public in a state of raw terror, Deng rammed through his most sweeping reforms yet.

Before Tiananmen he had been forced to ease off some of the more painful measures; three months after the massacre, he brought them back, and he implemented several of Friedman's other recommendations, including price deregulation. For Wang Hui, there is an obvious reason why 'market reforms that had failed to be implemented in the late 1980s just happened to have been completed in the post-1989 environment'; the reason, he writes, 'is that the violence of 1989 served to check the social upheaval brought about by this process, and the new pricing system finally took shape.' The shock of the massacre, in other words, made shock therapy possible.

In the three years immediately following the bloodbath, China was cracked open to foreign investment, with special export zones constructed throughout the country. As he announced these new initiatives, Deng reminded his country that 'if necessary, every possible means will be adopted to eliminate any turmoil in the future as soon as it appeared. Martial law, or even more severe methods, may be introduced.'

It was this wave of reforms that turned China into the sweatshop of the world, the preferred location for contract factories for virtually every multinational on the planet. No country offered more lucrative conditions than China: low taxes and tariffs, corruptible officials and, most of all, a plentiful low-wage workforce that for many years would be unwilling to risk demanding decent salaries or the most basic workplace protections for fear of the most violent reprisals.

For foreign investors and the party, it had been a win-win arrangement. According to a 2006 study, 90 percent of China's billionaires (calculated in Chinese yuan) are the children of Communist Party officials. Roughly twenty-nine hundred of these party scions...known as 'the princelings'...control \$260 billion. It is a mirror of the corporatist state

first pioneered in Chile under Pinochet: a revolving door between the corporate and political elites who combine their power to eliminate workers as an organized political force...

Today this collaborative arrangement can be seen in the way that foreign multinational media and technology companies help the Chinese state to spy on its citizens, and to make sure that when students do Web searches on phrases like 'Tiananmen Square Massacre', or even 'democracy', no documents turn up. 'The creation of today's market society was not the result of a sequence of spontaneous events,' writes Wang Hui, 'but rather of state interference and violence.'

One of the truths revealed by Tiananmen was the stark similarity between the tactics of authoritarian Communism and Chicago School capitalism...a shared willingness to disappear opponents, to blank the slate of all resistance and begin anew.

Despite the fact that the massacre happened just months after he had encouraged Chinese officials to push forward with painful and unpopular free-market policies, Friedman never did face 'an avalanche of protests for having been willing to give advice to so evil a government'. And as usual he saw no connection between the advice he had given and the violence required to enforce it. While condemning China's use of repression, Friedman continued to hold it up as an example of 'the efficiency of free-market arrangements in promoting both prosperity and freedom.'

But shock's wear off. Naomi Kline believes either that a new massacre is brewing or that the Chinese Communist party's power monopoly may be crumbling, although she omits to say so in as many words. 'For many years,' she writes in her 2007 *The Shock Doctrine*, 'the raw terror of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre succeeded in suppressing popular anger at the erosion of workers' rights and deepening rural poverty. Not anymore. According to official government sources, in 2005 there was a staggering eighty-seven thousand large protests in China, involving more than four million workers and peasants.'

In China where the drive for free-wheeling capitalism rolled over democracy in Tiananmen Square, shock and terror unleashed one of the most lucrative and sustained investor booms in modern history. Another miracle born of a massacre. The result of the state's use of the gloves-off methods of terror, torture and assassination was from a market perspective, an unqualified success.

China's activist wave has been met with the most extreme state repression since 1989, but it has also resulted in several concrete victories: major new spending in rural areas, better health care, pledges to eliminate education fees. China is coming out of shock.

#### **Identity and fate of Tank Man**

Little is publicly known of the man's identity or that of the commander of the lead tank. Shortly after the incident, British tabloid the *Sunday Express* named the man as Wang Weilin(王维林), a 19-year-old student who was later charged with "political hooliganism" and "attempting to subvert members of the People's Liberation Army"; however, the veracity of this claim is dubious. Numerous rumours have sprung up as to the man's identity and current whereabouts, but none are backed by hard evidence.

There are several conflicting stories about what happened to him after the demonstration. In a speech to the President's Club in 1999, Bruce Herschensohn - former deputy special assistant to President of the United States Richard Nixon - reported that he was executed 14 days later; other sources say he was killed by firing squad a few months after the Tiananmen Square protests. In *Red China Blues: My Long March from Mao to Now*, Jan Wong writes that the man is still alive and is hiding in mainland China.

The People's Republic of China government has made few statements about the incident or the people involved. In a 1990 interview with Barbara Walters, then-CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin was asked what became of the man. The Chinese leader first stated (through an interpreter), "I can't confirm whether this young man you mentioned was arrested or not." Jiang then replied in English, "I think never killed." A June 2006 article in the Hong Kong *Apple Daily* stated that there are rumours that the man is now residing in Taiwan.