

'Farewell: We must be faithful first to our country'

by Katherine R. Notley

June Four, A Chronicle of the Chinese Democratic Uprising

by the Photographers and Reporters of the *Ming Pao News*

University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, Ark., 1989

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There have been many books in the year since the June 4 massacre at Tiananmen, and there will be many more, no doubt. But this book holds a special place among them, for it made its appearance in June 1989, within a month after the staff of *Ming Pao News* was thrown out of Red China on June 10. For this reason, the writing in *June Four* frequently appears to be dry and understated, and therefore can have all the more powerful effect as its authors chronicle the inexorable events.

Unfortunately, to this reviewer, the understated tone is also its drawback: The outcome of events between the April 15 death of Hu Yaobang and the June 9 public reappearance of Deng Xiaoping were made inevitable by the determination of the U.S. government to sell out China's democracy movement. What was inexorable was the determination of George Bush's U.S. administration to protect its condominium with Mikhail Gorbachov, who became the first Soviet head of state since 1966 to make a state visit to China on May 15. The four crowns of empire—Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China—

would soon rest easy on their rulers' heads, thought Thatcher, Bush, Gorbachov, and Deng.

What they had not counted on was that the parents of this first generation to reach adulthood since the end of the Cultural Revolution had quietly, and with determination, imbued their children with the greatest works of Western Judeo-Christian civilization. I vividly remember, during the heady days of mid-May last year, a news report on one Chinese family, whose parents decided to share their bedroom with their children, so their two-room apartment could have space for a piano. The report showed their 10-year-old son diligently (and quite adequately) playing Mozart on the old upright. It is well known, but sadly left out of *June Four's* account, that the public address system the Beijing hunger strike committee set up in Tiananmen Square played Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The loudspeakers also played Beethoven's Fifth, whose opening rhythm, "di-di-di-da"—Morse code for the letter "V," for victory—was BBC's well-known signature tune during World War II.

While these are not described in the *June Four* chronicle, neither do *Ming Pao News's* authors miss the point. Their brief descriptions of day-to-day events are interspersed with abridged versions of declarations by either the Communist Party or the Federation of Beijing Student Unions (FBSU), and transcripts of negotiations between the two. These transcripts are among what makes *June Four* invaluable, because they reveal the hubris of the democrat on the one side and the arrogance of the oligarch on the other. The reader finds his or her mind inescapably drawn to scenes from of Friedrich Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* in reading these tracts.



One student restrains a tearful friend from violence (left), while a second is brutalized while trying to photograph the soldiers.

'In these bright and beautiful days of May'

The student hunger strike was first called to force the *People's Daily* to rescind its April 26 editorial, which had accused demonstrating students of creating "turmoil" because they had demanded to know why the late party chairman Hu Yaobang had been removed from his post two years earlier. Far from being the product of "youthful exuberance," their May 13 declaration targeted the decline their country had suffered and their commitment to change it. "In

these bright and beautiful days of May, we are beginning a hunger strike," they wrote. "We are young, but we are ready to give up our lives. We cherish life, we do not want to die.

"But this nation is in a critical state. It suffers from skyrocketing inflation, growing crime rates, *guandao* [government corruption] and other forms of bureaucratic corruption everywhere, concentration of power in a few people's hands, and the loss of a large number of intellectuals who would



(Left) Artists showed their support for the hunger strikers by adopting one of the foremost symbols of Christianity—the detail of God giving life to Man from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel fresco. The slogan reads, "The people are with you." (Right) A photo of the Goddess of Democracy adorns the cover of June Four.



now rather stay overseas. At this life-and-death of the nation's fate, countrymen, please listen to us! . . .

"We have one wish, that the lives of everyone we leave be better. We have one request, that you remember this: our pursuit is life, not death. Democracy is not a task for a few; it takes generations. . . .

"Farewell, father and mother, forgive us that we're being unfaithful as your children; we must be faithful first to our country. . . ."

At any one time, there were 3,000 student hunger-strikers in Tiananmen Square. As the life of each would become threatened, he or she was whisked off to the hospital to be saved, while another took his or her place.

By May 18, Li Peng and his gang met with some leaders from the FBSU and attempted to deter them, by professing concern for the strikers. Wuer Kaixi, who had been released from the hospital to attend the meeting and was still in his pajamas, made clear to Li, "it won't help if all of us at this meeting are persuaded [to leave Tiananmen], because we consist only of one-tenth of a percent of the students in the Square. It's not a matter of subordination to the majority. I believe if there is one single student who decides not to leave, the rest will keep him company."

After futile, patronizing attempts by Li to convince the students he only had their best interests at heart, student Xiong Yan intervened, "Comrade Li mentioned disorder. I want to have three minutes to analyze the simple relationship between disorder and the student movement. When a society or country has upheavals, are they caused by student movements? . . . In my opinion, when a country is unstable . . . students take actions to try to pinpoint what is wrong . . . Any attempt to suppress the student movement, or as we call it the democratic movement, will cause social upheaval. That is a very simple truth."

At this point, Wuer Kaixi fainted, and the meeting was brought to a close. Two days later, Li Peng declared martial law in Beijing. A consummate oligarch, Li Peng's declaration contradicts itself, even within a paragraph, ending with his open threat: "In fact, the hunger strikers are being used as 'hostages' by a few people trying to force the Party and the government to yield to their political demands. These people do not show a single sign of compassion. . . . The student representatives admit that they are no longer able to control the situation; crowds keep pouring into the already-packed Square, shouting their own demagogic slogans. If we fail to end this chaos resolutely and immediately—if we go on tolerating it—it is very likely that we will end up with a situation that none of us would like to see."

On June 4, 1989, the Red Chinese government killed an estimated 4-7,000 people in Tiananmen Square. On June 10, the Ming Pao Publishing House in Hong Kong summarized their views in a statement: "After the darkest night, we expect the light of morning, the dawn. But are we sure that what we have seen is the darkest?"

A look back at Tiananmen Square, and beyond

by Don Baier

Beijing Spring

Photographs by David and Peter Turnley, Text by Melinda Liu, Stewart, Tabori and Chang, New York, 1989
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When I first saw the student demonstrators in the streets of the capital of China, on television a year ago, I was struck by how much they reminded me of the demonstrations of my own youth. This beautifully produced book of photographs reaffirms that impression.

I don't mean to slight the obvious differences with "the Movement" of the 1960s in the United States. No U.S. demonstration was ever crushed as brutally as Tiananmen Square, not even civil rights actions in the South. Hunger strikes weren't popular among American students, and photos of the pitifully cramped and barren living quarters of Chinese students at elite Beijing University make clear the difference in living standards.

And of course, the "Goddess of Democracy" testified more powerfully than words ever could, to the proposition that the Chinese were mounting a "pro-American" revolution, in the sense of the ideals of 1776; whereas by the end of the 1960s, the "revolutionaries" in the United States, claiming to speak for a movement which had started out a decade before in the lunch counter sit-ins and the Freedom Rides where students risked their lives for American principles, had instead taken to burning the American flag, bombing university campuses, and cheering Mao's Red Guards.

What then, beyond the "Goddess of Democracy," was "American" about the Beijing demonstrations of 1989?

At least some American youth in the 1960s were impatient enough with the obvious immorality of denying black people their civil rights, and of such conduct as Lyndon Johnson's in escalating the Vietnam War, as to react: "Here's an obvious injustice—Let's do something about it, now, today."

So, what began in individual acts of resistance, or as a