CHINA

An Historical Overview of Popular Protests in China and Repression

By H. M. LAI

Popular protests, many of them spearheaded by students and intellectuals, have played an important role in modern Chinese political history. Chinese government decisions have also been affected by related actions in Chinese communities abroad including those in the US.

Most people consider the first major popular political demonstration to have occurred during the May 4 Movement of 1919. On that date 3,000 Beijing students gathered at Tian'anmen Square to demonstrate against the Allies' decision at the World War I Paris Peace Conference to transfer to Japan all German privileges and concessions in the Shandong Peninsula, originally taken by force from the Chinese.

This patriotic movement quickly spread to other major cities. Chinese organizations around the world also responded by inundating the Chinese government with protests. In the US the Chinese Six Companies led other Chinese American groups in organizing the Chinese National Welfare Society to educate the Chinese communities and the general public on the Chinese position. This broad-based exhibition of public sentiment finally forced the Chinese government to refuse to sign the Versailles Treaty.

Concurrent with this political expression was a movement which advocated for science and democracy and against tradition to put China on a path to modernization. Both the Kuomintang, as reorganized in the 1920s, and the Communist Party are products of this national mood. That is why Tian'anmen is such an important symbol to the Chinese Communists.

In the US these events helped to give impetus to the modernization of the Chinese American community. For example, it was during this period that Chinese schools with modern curricula were founded, including the first coeducational Chinese school in SF.

By the 20s the Kuomintang had forged an alliance with the Communists and had established a base in Guangdong to prepare for a Northern Expedition to rid China of warlord rule. Anti-imperialist demonstrations were part of the political struggle to gain popular support. A major series occurred in 1925 sparked by the shooting of strikers at Japanese-owned textile mills in Shanghai and Qingdao. Students were in the forefront of support for the strikers. On May 30, Shanghai student demonstrators were shot by police of Shanghai's International Settlement. A general strike was called paralyzing the city.

As in the May 4 Movement, demonstrations rapidly swept the rest of the country. In June a general strike was called in Hong Kong which was active supported by the people of Guangzhou. On June 23, as Guangzhou demonstrators supporting the strikers passed the foreign concession at Shameen, British and French troops used machine guns to kill 52 and wound more than 170.

In this country these bloody events led to expressions of protests from the Chinese Six Companies, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and other Chinese organizations. Within a few weeks Chinese in North America raised more than $300,000 to aid the families of the victims. For the first time, donations were also received from the American labor movement.

In 1927 the Kuomintang unified China. Soon afterward in 1931 Japan seized Manchuria. As Japanese encroachments continued and the Nationalist government yielded territory, students and intellectuals led the call to resist Japan. A major demonstration occurred on Dec. 9, 1935 when 6,000 Beijing students marched to protest the establishment of a pro-Japanese government in North China and to demand that the government stop the Chinese civil war. Police injured more than a hundred people. On Dec. 16 when the pro-Japanese government was being inaugurated, 15,000 again braved the police to demonstrate. Another 400 were injured.

Student demonstrations also broke out in other major cities to show their support. Such demonstrations played important roles in making the populace aware of the threat of Japanese imperialism. Two years later the war of resistance against the Japanese aggressors began.

In the US Chinese Americans had been urging the Chinese government to resist the Japanese. They had enthusiatically organized national salvation associations to raise money to support generals fighting the Japanese invaders as early as 1931. But by the mid-30s their spirits had begun to flag due to the non-responsiveness of the Kuomintang regime. The student demonstrations in China helped to revive this national salvation movement and for the first time Chinatown businessmen and university students joined in a common cause as they marched in the US to urge resistence to Japanese aggression.

Demonstrations after World War II from the late forties to the present express a common basic theme — popular resentment against repression and bad government.

The largest and bloodiest demonstration occurred on Taiwan which had just been restored to China after Japan's defeat. The Taiwanese had welcomed the mainlanders as liberators. But when the Nationalists treated the island population as a conquered people, joy soon turned to disillusonment. On Feb. 27, 1947 a Kuomintang official investigating smuggled goods got into an altercation with a female peddler, severely beat her, and then shot sympathetic bystanders. The enraged populace called a protest march and general strike on the 28th. All over the island, Taiwanese arose and took over governmental offices. Republic of China President Chiang Kai-shek's appointed governor then stalled for time by pretending to negotiate. When Chiang's reinforcements from the mainland arrived on Mar. 8, they ruthlessly suppressed the revolt, butchering at least 20,000.

After the slaughter some leaders who escaped founded groups in Japan advocating Taiwan independence. The US later became this movement's principal center with the founding of United Formosans for independence in 1958.

On the mainland on May 17, 1947 Beijing

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Non-Violence : A Triumph of Evolution

The following is the text of a speech presented by author Maxine Hong Kingston at the June 27 Davies Hall fundraiser for the Foundation for Chinese Democracy and Asia Watch. Ed.

By MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

We must count the three weeks of non-violence in Tian'anmen Square as a triumph in the evolution of human society. The students set a record — organizing their large numbers into a community, claiming that square as a "holy land for democracy," and living in it as free men and women for three weeks. A new, hopeful generation tested whether peaceful means — reasoning, singing, "parading," fasting, the posting of "big words" — could accomplish a good, peaceful end — transforming China into a country to live freely in.

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A world of human beings who deal with one another peacefully is a vision so rare, we have hardly begun to invent its symbols and tactics. The students courageously presented a beautiful example of non-violence to the government and the workers, the unionists, the unemployed — how they could negotiate their differences, how the elders could make changes without resorting to yet another revolutionary civil war. The Goddess of Freedom had a stance of her own, and as they unveiled her, the students sang the "Internationale." They were trying to integrate two political systems that have divided the world this century.

The students did the right thing dismantling guns and pouring the gasoline out of the molotov cocktails. And holding up their fingers in the V-for-peace sign. And sitting beside a flower in front of the row of seated soldiers, and wearing a slogan painted in red on the back of one's jacket — in the tradition of Yue Fei the Patriot, whose parents dedicated him to China by cutting vows on his back. (The two consulate members in San Francisco who [refused to follow the Chinese government's version of the massacre] did so during the week of the dragon boat races, a festival honoring Chu Ping, a courtier who was banished for protesting the the emperor's war plans.) Walking up to the tanks with nothing but one's life and ideas.

I'd like to add my voice to those nominating for the the Nobel Peace Prize Chai Ling, the 22-year-old woman student who was "Supreme Commander of the Defence of Tian'anmen." She said, "Ours was a struggle between love and hate. Our objective was to make a peaceful petition, and our chosen methods would peacefully achieve this. It wouldn't be a battle of weapons because we are making a peaceful petition."

Describing the young man who danced in front of the tanks and stopped them for minutes, Betty Bao Lord said, "His ancestors are with him." Yue Fei the Patriot and Chu Ping of the Dragon Boat Races are his ancestors. His ancestors are also Thoreau, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. His relatives were there with him too, and they include all of us one whose behalf he was establishing a way of peace.

The students at Tian'anmen (the Gate of Heavenly Peace) — our children — are the latest evolution of humankind toward being a peaceful species. In China and in every country we will have to repeat the non-violence that these students accomplished until we establish peace, until we establish love.

Maxine Hong Kingston, who has visited China twice under the auspices of the Chinese Writers Association, recently told East West that when she asked to meet writers other than official members of the association, her requests were politely ignored. According to Kingston, a "writers' underground" does exist in China, "For years, I had heard of underground novels. During the Cultural Revolution there were novels in drawers and in trunks. People were waiting until conditions were better and the books could be published."

Kingston's references to Yue Fei and Chu Ping exemplify one of China's oldest literary traditions, that of "talk-story." The oral tradition of handing down myth and history throughout the ages, it has survived because talk-story conveys basic human truths "I'm hoping that talk-story is strong enough so that news of Beijing gets through to the peasants and overcomes the propaganda," Kingston said. "There's so much inspiration from mythology and the past."

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NEWS

Popular Protests

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(then named Beiping) and Tianjin students called strikes to protest the runaway inflation, civil war and political repression. On May 20, 1947, 7,000 students, starting from Beijing University, marched in protest. Similar demonstrations occurred in other cities. The government arrested thousands, but the movement spread to more than 60 cities and lasted nearly a month. Such demonstrations marked the beginning of the end for the Nationalist government as it lost the support of the intellectual class and led to the founding of the People's Republic of China.

After the KMT lost the mainland they fled to Taiwan where they imposed a martial law which lasted almost 40 years. In 1979 Taiwanese resentment against this repression was expressed in a major demonstration. The magazine *Formosa Weekly*, violating a government order banning assemblies, had organized a rally in Kaohsiung on Dec. 10 to observe Human Rights' Day. More than 10,000 attended. Fighting ensued when the police tried to disperse the crowd. A few days later the government banned the publication and arrested 8 individuals for sedition.

In the US this incident led to the founding of the first Taiwanese newspaper, *Asia Journal*, in southern California in 1980. This was followed in 1982 by the founding of Formosan Association for Public Affairs (FAPA) which was active in lobbying the US Congress to pressure the Taiwan government on human rights issues. There was also an upsurge of political activities supporting dissidents in Taiwan. In 1987 the Taiwan government bowed to the inevitable, lifted martial law and subsequently allowed the formation of opposition parties.

On the mainland the Communists had skillfully used popular demonstrations as a political weapon to help unseat the Kuomintang. After they gained power in mainland China, however, such mass rallies were possible only under tight party control. But in the mid-70s, when the nation was under the repressive rule of the "Gang of Four," the people threw caution to the winds and gave way to their feelings. Premier Zhou Enlai had died in January 1976. As Qingming [festival honoring the dead] approached that year, the people of Beijing began laying wreaths at the People's Hero Monument in Tian'anmen Square to pay respect to his memory despite government disapproval.

By early April thousands of wreaths, poems, couplets and eulogies had been written. Many of these attacked the "Gang of Four." On Qingming, April 4, more than 2 million visited Tian'anmen. Next day several hundred thousand people gathered again, reciting poems. Towards evening policemen attacked the crowd with belts and clubs and arrested more than 200. Similar demonstrations took place in other cities.

In the aftermath, the "Gang of Four" accused Deng Xiaoping as the behind-the-scenes backer of the Tian'anmen demonstration and stripped him of his post as vice-premier. This expression of popular sentiment, however, had sounded their death knell and the "Gang" fell a few months afterward. By the late seventies China had embarked upon a policy of opening up the country. She gradually gained the good will of many Chinese around the world as the nation appeared to be on its way towards building a better society. But as economic construction went apace, abuses of power, corruption and inflation also increased. Demands for political reforms from students and intellectuals grew more insistent.

In mid-December 1986 students from more than 30 universities and institutes in Shanghai, Hefei, Wuhan, Beijing, and Guangzhou demonstrated demanding democracy and freedom. In early 1987 Communist Party secretary Hu Yaobang was sacked for allowing the situation to get out of hand. Dissidents scientist Fang Lizhi, reporter Liu Binyan and writer Wang Ruowang were expelled from the party.

Unlike Taiwan, intransigent hardliners in the PRC prevailed who were fearful that the party would lose its leadership role in the country and this event would become another step enabling the progressive shift of power to the conservatives. The bloody and repressive events of the past few weeks were but a further development of this trend.

After the 1986/1987 events a number of Chinese Americans began to express their concern in open letters to the Chinese government. After the June events the concern changed to condemnation and denunciation. Numerous groups were formed to support the democracy movement in China. For all practical purposes Chinese support for the PRC in this country, especially among intellectuals and the middle class, has dropped out of sight.

But in spite of these expressions of disapproval, can Chinese Americans, as in the past, still be able to play a role in shaping the future course of events in China? The answer to that question will certainly depend both on their conscious efforts and on China domestic and international developments in this still unfinished drama.

Hearing

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argument in regards to South Africa. There is no way in dealing with a totalitarian government to achieve your goals without any pain or any difficulty."

Pelosi said, "We should not allow our interest in preserving the relationship between China and the United States to impede our dedication to the cause of those who died in Beijing. The cry they sent up from Tiananmen Square must receive an adequate response from the country that prides itself on democracy."

Both Pelosi and Lantos have introduced legislation in response to the brutal military crackdown in Beijing and subsequent human rights violations by the Chinese government.

Lantos' bill (HR 2613) calls for suspending China's most-favored nation status (MFN) and terminating its participation in the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). According to current legislation, any communist country which receives MFN status for its trade with the US must permit its citizens the right or opportunity to emigrate, and OPIC participants must adopt and implement internationally recognized workers rights. Since China has refused to permit astrophysicist Fang Lizhi from leaving China and has banned all but government-sponsored labor organizations, it has violated both agreements, the bill reasons.

Pelosi has introduced legislation (HR 2712) which will waive a two year return residence requirement commonly attached to most Chinese student visas, and permit Chinese nationals to go to a country other than China without jeopardizing their eligibility for another type of visa in the US.

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