



# "Lies in Ink, Truth in Blood": The Role and Impact of the Chinese Media During the Beijing Spring of '89

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# **“Lies in Ink, Truth in Blood”**

**The Role and Impact of the  
Chinese Media During the  
Beijing Spring of '89**

**by Linda Jakobson**

**Discussion Paper D-6  
August 1990**

**The Joan Shorenstein Barone Center**

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**PRESS • POLITICS**



**• PUBLIC POLICY •**

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**Harvard University  
John F. Kennedy School of Government**

## INTRODUCTION

What a pleasure to write an introduction for Linda Jakobson's Discussion Paper! Though I had known her father, Max Jakobson, a distinguished Finnish journalist and diplomat, for many years, I had only met Linda in the summer of '88 during a trip to Helsinki. I was immediately impressed by her engaging personality, intelligence — and dedication as a journalist to the story of China. She'd just been there for a year, and was soon to return for another. It was to be a fateful return.

Jakobson was in Beijing in April, May and June 1989, when the Chinese students left their classes, occupied the back streets and Tiananmen Square and defied the Communist authorities in a stunning display of raw courage in the face of tyranny. Who can forget the picture of one man standing in the way of a tank column? As Stanley Karnow, a veteran China watcher, observed, this was not the first time that the students had stood up to the dictatorship of the Old Guard, but it was the first time that their defiance and their bloody repression had been televised and faxed from one end of the globe to another. It was to be a case study of the impact of the press and television on a major foreign policy crisis.

Linda Jakobson spent the rest of the year in China and then in early February 1990, after just a brief stop in Helsinki, she arrived in Cambridge, where she took up her responsibilities as a Research Fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy in the spring semester of the 1989-90 academic year. Because of her eyewitness experiences in China, her knowledge of the language and the strong likelihood that she would be returning to China as a journalist, she was immediately invited to contribute to a longterm JSB Center research project, sponsored by the Ford Foundation and devoted to a study of U.S. press coverage of foreign crises. The first study in this project has been devoted to press coverage of the Tiananmen massacre and its effect on American policy. Jakobson's participation sparked a research paper of her own on the role and impact of the Chinese press on the events in Beijing.

(The second part of this research project will be a comparative study of press coverage of the U.S. invasion of Panama in December 1989. How did the US, Mexican, Spanish and West German press cover the invasion? Henry Ray-

mont, a writer and former New York Times correspondent in Latin-America, will supervise, research and write this report.)

Because in our overall research so much of the spotlight was focused on American press coverage of Tiananmen, Jakobson felt that her paper should focus on the Chinese press. How did it cover the "democracy movement"? Indeed, did it participate in the movement? "Lies in Ink, Truth in Blood" is the impressive result of her effort. Jakobson interviewed dozens of Chinese journalists, scholars and other observers, read and watched the Chinese press coverage, produced a lot of fresh information and put it all in a Chinese social and political context. Her paper provides special insights into the Chinese press, which, for a flickering moment in time, functioned "freely," reporting the news, criticizing the leadership, writing editorials that were not echoes of Communist dogma and even joining in the pro-democracy demonstrations with placards that extolled: "Freedom of the Press." Did they really know what it meant? If they did, how had they come to that understanding? Why were the placards in English? "How was it possible," Jakobson asks, "that the press rid itself of its chains?" It was a heady time, but it only lasted for a month or so. Then, on June 3-4, 1989, when the tanks rolled through Tiananmen Square, the curtain again fell on the Chinese press.

It is a sad but illuminating and somehow inspiring story. On behalf of the Shorenstein Barone Center, I take pleasure in presenting this paper. Linda Jakobson would be eager to get your comments. So would I.

**Marvin Kalb**  
**Edward R. Murrow Professor of Press**  
**and Public Policy**  
**Director**  
**Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the**  
**Press, Politics and Public Policy**

# “LIES IN INK, TRUTH IN BLOOD:” THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF THE CHINESE MEDIA DURING THE BEIJING SPRING OF '89

On May 18th, 1989, Chinese television viewers witnessed a scene that no one could have imagined seeing on state-run television one month earlier. The news broadcast showed the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Zhao Ziyang, and the Prime Minister Li Peng, accompanied by other “leading comrades,” Qiao Shi, Hu Qili and Rui Xingwen, visiting defiant students at a Beijing hospital. The students were being treated after fainting as a result of their hunger strike at Tiananmen Square.

After zooming in on the Party Secretary and Prime Minister hovering over a few patient-demonstrators, the broadcast jumped to a new scene showing Qiao Shi, Hu Qili and Rui Xingwen talking with a hospitalized student. The student said: “We must reestablish the Party’s prestige among the people. If the Communist Party has hope, China will have hope. Right now, some people think there is no hope. They all feel that the country has no hope. The Communist Party has no hope.”

I watched the news broadcast in the company of a few Chinese friends, who grinned and cheered upon hearing the student’s comments. The student continued: “Therefore, I think that, like the United States, we should restore the people’s confidence that the state can do a good job. Do you agree?” Hu Qili and the other leaders nodded their heads and said: “We fully agree with you.”<sup>1</sup>

The mood in my friend’s apartment was exuberant, very similar to the atmosphere which prevailed all over the capital. On street corners, in shops and in factories, people were talking about the hunger strikers and about the sympathy and support that hundreds of thousands of citizens from all walks of life had expressed for them. Time and again, while bicycling or strolling along the streets of Beijing, I heard people speak with admiration of the students, who were openly challenging the authorities. Ordinary people were quick to seize the chance to vent their frustration about the ills of society affecting their everyday lives, most noticeably inflation and corruption.

My friends proudly showed me a copy of

that day’s People’s Daily (*Renmin Ribao*), the official mouthpiece of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party — the ‘Pravda’ of China. A report with details of the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev’s much awaited historical visit had been pushed down into the lower corner of the front page, while coverage of the hunger strike and demonstrations — six page-one articles with photographs — dominated the

*“Save the Students,  
Save the Children,”  
pleaded one headline.*

top part. “Save the Students, Save the Children,” pleaded one headline. I had already seen the official English-speaking *China Daily*, with its conspicuous front page bold text headline: “A million march in support of students.”

Though the footage of Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng visiting the hunger strikers in the hospital was not the first time that the student demonstrators were on the air, I shook my head in amazement. What could Chinese viewers be thinking when they heard the country’s leaders listening to a 20-year-old telling them that “the Communist Party has no hope?” For 40 years there hasn’t been any other hope in China except for the Communist Party, at least according to every officially sanctioned media report.

Already on April 30th, when the government gave in to the students’ demands and ordered the mayor of Beijing, Chen Xitong, to meet with student representatives in a televised session, I had watched in utter disbelief while the students demanded to know his income. They also challenged him about the mistakes made with regard to the education system.<sup>2</sup> Never in the 40-year history of the People’s Republic of China had government officials been publicly humiliated in such a way in front of millions of television viewers.

Since the founding of the People's Republic the media has been controlled by the state. News coverage is intended not so much to open minds as to shape them. People have been taught that whatever the newspapers print, and whatever the evening news broadcaster says, is in accordance with the 'official party line.' When the state-run media started to openly report on the student movement in the spring of 1989, it was interpreted by ordinary people to signify that the students had the authorities' approval.

The Chinese pro-democracy movement of 1989, and particularly the images of the students occupying the heart of Beijing, Tiananmen Square, caught the attention of millions of people around the world thanks to the presence of the Western television cameras. Western journalists were present in unusually large numbers because of the Gorbachev visit and they were unquestionably instrumental in making the Beijing Spring of '89 a major international story.

But what about the Chinese media? How did the Chinese press corps cover the pro-democracy movement and what effect did they have on the events themselves?

Press freedom was one of the students' demands from the very start of the movement. The students were enraged when their activities during the mourning of the ousted Communist Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang were not reported by the Chinese press. American media reports, both television and print, made note of this demand for freedom of the press. But how many American, or Western, viewers and readers, realized that the actions of the Chinese press constituted an essential part of the drama at Tiananmen Square?

The Chinese journalists' role during the Beijing Spring of '89 was two-fold. They became participants in the movement when they joined the demonstrations as the first non-student group. On May 4th, about 200 journalists marched for the first time carrying banners with texts saying: "Don't force us to spread rumours," "Our pens cannot write what we want to write" and "News must report the truth."<sup>3</sup>

By taking part in the demonstrations the journalists encouraged other educated groups of society to become active. If the journalists had not taken to the streets, it is highly unlikely that so many prominent intellectuals would have dared to step forward and show their support for the students' demands.

Secondly, for approximately two weeks in May, Chinese newspapers, radio and television carried stories about the demonstrations and activities related to the pro-democracy movement. People in tens of cities around the country marched to show their support for the students because they perceived the movement to be officially sanctioned. The media helped to mobilize the urban population in a way which would not have been possible if the press had not reported on the students' actions. Uncensored coverage all over China reached its peak in the days prior to May 20th, when martial law was declared in parts of Beijing.

Why was the press unleashed? Or rather, how was it possible that the press rid itself of its chains?

In order to answer these questions and understand the immense impact that the journalists had on the events during the Beijing

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*How was it possible  
that the press rid itself  
of its chains?*

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Spring of '89, it is useful to first review the role of the press in China, in particular during the reform era of 'open door policy,' launched by Deng Xiaoping in late 1978. Though the Chinese media covered an increasingly wide range of subjects during the past decade, it was not permitted to carry stories which contradicted with the 'official line.' During the pro-democracy movement in 1989, General Secretary Zhao Ziyang let it be known that he differed with the more conservative leaders on the question of the student movement. After that, for about a month, there was not just one 'official line,' but two. The journalists chose to abide by the one spelled out by Zhao Ziyang. Next, it is necessary to examine the two roles of the Chinese press corps — the journalists as reporters and the journalists as participants. Lastly, I will elaborate on the overall impact of the Chinese media on the events themselves. The journalists' actions were crucial in helping to transform the student movement into a mass protest.

## ***The Media of the '80's: Increasing Openness***

When I moved to China in 1987, I very soon realized that no amount of background reading and research about the People's Republic would have properly prepared me for the extraordinary degree of openness and diversity which I encountered wherever I turned in urban Chinese society. During the first months I was amazed when reading the *China Daily*, when listening to the radio, watching the television and speaking to people.

Newspapers published reports of party officials indicted for embezzlement and profiteering. Letters to the editor described the unfair treatment by party members of ordinary people. In general, many commentaries and editorials, both in the newspapers and on television, touched upon the failings of society, and were frank and to the point.

There were subjects (like the situation in Tibet) which were not reported and yes, newspapers ran long-winded commentaries with ideological liturgy. But for someone used to the performance of the press in the other Communist superpower, before the days of Gorbachev's *glasnost*, the Chinese press seemed remarkably vigorous and daring. Deng Xiaoping's decision to drastically reform the economy and open up the country to foreign trade led to a general easing of control in all sectors of society.

I also was taken aback at how well-informed urban residents were about what was happening elsewhere in the world. This was, to a large extent, due to the ever-widening range of subjects which the Chinese press itself was covering and to the increasingly lively contact with foreigners. But the immense flow of information was also a result of the popularity of Voice of America and BBC broadcasts in both Chinese and English — especially among young people — and partly because many Chinese were regularly seeing the so-called "for internal use only" Reference News publications. The Chinese propaganda apparatus has many layers. Anyone, including foreigners, may purchase or subscribe to a wide selection of newspapers and publications, from dailies like *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), *Jingji Ribao* (Economic Daily) and the only English language daily *China Daily to ladies'*, youth and sports magazines. In addition, there are numerous publications, some of them merely xeroxed pamphlets, which are produced for restricted consumption. They

contain direct translations from foreign newspapers and broadcasts as well as uncensored articles written by Chinese journalists about sensitive issues.

What you are allowed to read depends on who you are. The higher your position the easier your access to more confidential and controversial material. However, in reality, the general breakdown of control during the 1980's led to a situation where information not meant for the public eye has had a way of finding itself to many, unintended readers.<sup>4</sup>

Thanks to the success of economic reforms, radios and television sets are no longer unobtainable commodities. According to official 1988 statistics, the number of television sets owned by Chinese grew 38-fold from 1978 to 1987 and numbered 143 million.<sup>5</sup> During the two years I lived in China (1987-89), the national television news used footage from Western news agencies regularly. It was particularly surprising that violent scenes of clashes between demonstrators and police in South Korea and Burma were allowed to be aired.

Despite the increasing boldness of the official Chinese media — a reflection of the growing openness of Chinese society as a whole during the 1980's — it still was not free to cover what it would, as it would. Though journalists from Western countries, especially the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Australia, were invited as 'foreign experts' to teach professional techniques at the various schools of journalism, students also received ample instruction about the restraints of journalism in China.

When I gave a lecture about the press in Finland at the China School of Journalism in May, 1987, the Dean, Zhou Lifang, spoke at length about the social responsibility that Chinese journalists must shoulder despite the development of society and the reform policy.

"All of us are trying to build a modern socialist society together," Dean Zhou said. "We have a common goal, and therefore, a Chinese journalist must always contemplate what kind of consequences his writing will have. If critical reporting results in something positive, that's fine. In fact, investigative reporting is encouraged, as you can see from our newspapers. But revealing information which might have a negative effect on society is useless, maybe even harmful."

For example, a story about an official being

punished for taking bribes was considered positive because it served as a warning for others. On the other hand, coverage of demonstrators protesting the unfair treatment of Tibetans in Lhasa might lead to social disorder elsewhere and would therefore have a negative effect on society.

Dean Zhou, who was formerly the London correspondent for the Xinhua News Agency, took me to the video room of the China School of Journalism. One of the tapes on file was an American broadcast showing a VOA reporter being interviewed about the news blackout in China during the 1986-87 student demonstrations. Chinese journalists were well aware of what was going on, but they were not allowed to report on the students' protests. "The authorities in charge of propaganda felt that publicizing the students' activities would not have a positive effect on society," Dean Zhou said with a faint smile.

Obligatory reading for every journalism student is a long detailed speech "On the Party's Journalism Work," given by former Party Secretary Hu Yaobang. It was the death announcement of Hu Yaobang on April 15th which triggered the 1989 pro-democracy movement.

Hu Yaobang started off by saying: "The party's journalism is the party's mouthpiece, and naturally it is the mouthpiece of the people's government, which is led by the party." Later, comparing the differences between journalism in China and capitalist countries, he reminded his listeners: "In our socialist motherland, the interests of the party and the government are identical with those of the people and the party's newspapers are the people's newspapers."

Hu Yaobang also spelled out to what extent Chinese journalists, faced with the new challenges of reform policy, should "expose and criticize the unhealthy trends of society:" "Our newspapers should give 80 percent of their space to reporting good things and achievements and give the remaining 20 percent of their space to criticizing the seamy side of things and to exposing our shortcomings."<sup>6</sup>

Jing Jun, a former Chinese journalist who worked at *China Daily* for five years as National News Editor, described the intricacies of Party control of the press in his paper "The Working Press in China." He cited an example from 1984, when the government was about to launch its urban reforms. The man in charge of

propaganda for the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Hu Qili, delivered a speech at the headquarters of the Xinhua News Agency. Hu Qili outlined five ways in which the agency should "agitate" for the Party's policies in its reporting, when the reforms were officially declared.

The Chinese government not only controls the press — it makes full use of it. As Jing Jun pointed out, criticism is not rare, but it is strictly used to attack deviations from Party policy.<sup>7</sup>

Yang Yulin, a Chinese political scientist who used to work for one of the country's most liberal research institutes, decried the Chinese press of the 1980's in the following way: "When the reformers in the Party had the upper hand, the press portrayed their more broad-minded views and especially the younger generation pushed the limits of what is acceptable. When the conservatives were in control of the Party's policies, the press was forced to accept a stricter approach, which was less tolerant of diverse opinions."<sup>8</sup>

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The system of controlling the press is complex. Basically, all journalists must bear in mind the Party's policies, though, as many journalists have reminded me, it is not always altogether clear what the policy on a certain issue is. An official interviewed for a story may demand to see the text before it goes into print or before it is aired. The editor in charge of putting a story into the newspaper may overrule a story after it has been written. A serious mistake can mean the end of a career. A critical phone call from the Propaganda Department of the Party's (CCP) Central Committee, which is in charge of the day-to-day work of checking the press, ensures that a similar story is not published again.

The Xinhua News Agency and the People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*), both directly controlled by the Party's Central Committee, set the tone. By reporting on an issue, and by outlining the correct interpretation of policies, they give the

green light to other media organizations to follow suit.

Xinhua News Agency is the most prominent of all the media organizations, a notch above the others. Previously, Xinhua had exclusive rights to cover top-level political meetings. In the 1980's the leading newspapers managed gradually to introduce healthy competition, thanks to the growing degree of professionalism. But Xinhua is still the flagship—though a newspaper carrying a Xinhua story might write their own headline or cut the story for lack of space, it would still not add to or revise the text.

While Xinhua News Agency is the authority when it comes to news, the People's Daily sets the editorial agenda. Wu Guogang, who formerly worked on the editorial staff of People's Daily, says that a certain degree of antagonism exists between the People's Daily and the Party's Propaganda Department. "Mao Zedong used to write the most important editorials of the People's Daily himself, and the newspaper has always had very close ties directly with the very top leaders. Because of the special relationship between the newspaper and the country's leaders, it does not like the idea of taking orders from the Party's Propaganda Department."

It was interesting to hear from Wu Guogang, a Nieman fellow at Harvard University from 1989-1990, that as Party Secretary, Hu Yaobang personally gave instructions for important articles or editorials concerning policy and ideology. He also checked the finished product. When Zhao Ziyang became Party Secretary in 1987, he did not personally participate in the editorial work, but delegated the job to Hu Qili, another reform-minded member of the Standing Committee.<sup>9</sup>

In practice, censorship is implemented with the help of specific guidelines, which are drawn up by a working group of the Party's Central Committee Propaganda Department. Five or six people make up the working group, which meets weekly, usually on Monday morning. They decide which issues should be touched upon during the coming week and on which themes the commentary pieces should focus. In the spring of 1989 the working group was led by Hu Qili.

For example, the working group might decide that a speech to be given by a senior leader should be prominently displayed or a state visit by a foreign dignitary should receive special attention. After this meeting, the

editors-in-chief of the major national newspapers are called to the Propaganda Department headquarters, where they are briefed on the following week's news and editorial policies. The editors-in-chief, in turn, hold similar meetings for their own editors, so that by Tuesday word has passed from the very top — the Party's Central Committee Propaganda Department — right down to the journalists in charge of running the everyday routines of the newspaper.

Television and radio are administratively controlled by the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television, which in turn is under the Propa-

*Minister Ai Zhisheng would usually personally show up at the CCTV newsroom and preview the 7 p.m. Chinese news broadcast. He was known by the nickname 'Director of News.'*

ganda Department of the Central Committee. According to Feng Xiaoming, who worked for the English language news department at China Central Television, CCTV, from 1985 to August of 1989, Minister Ai Zhisheng would usually personally show up at the CCTV newsroom and preview the 7 p.m. Chinese news broadcast. He was known by the nickname 'Director of News.'

Because neither the minister nor his aides spoke English, the English language news broadcast, aired 6 nights a week after 10 p.m., would be explained to him in Chinese. "But for the most part, he was only told headlines, not details, and therefore the English language news broadcasts enjoyed a bit more freedom than the Chinese news."<sup>10</sup>

In retrospect, it seems a bit ironic that Hu Yaobang, who was revered in the spring of 1989 by the students as a symbol of liberal thought, was the man behind the previously mentioned key speech, which clearly defines the boundaries of Chinese journalism and emphasizes the sense of social responsibility that Chinese journalists should adhere to.

Hu Yaobang's speech, which he delivered as Party Secretary to the CPC Central Commit-



tee in February 1985, was a response opposing the suggestions put forward by leading Chinese editors and publishing officials. They had held a symposium in Shanghai in December 1984 to discuss the contents of a formal press law. They proposed that the same kind of responsibility system, which had been devised for enterprise managers, should be introduced for editors-in-chief, and that articles would no longer have to be submitted to Party officials before publication.

"When Chinese journalists demanded press freedom, they were not asking for independent newspapers or private radio stations," former China Daily news editor Jing Jun stressed when I interviewed him in May 1990. "They were not even thinking of news organizations which would stand on their own feet economically or be independent of the Party administratively. They simply wanted to do away with censorship. They wanted the right to

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*"They simply wanted to do away with censorship. They wanted the right to report on events factually."*

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report on events factually."<sup>11</sup>

The Chinese students' rallying cry for 'democracy' did not mean democracy in the way it is known in the West. Nor was 'press freedom' defined in the same manner by Chinese journalists as by their Western counterparts.

### **Media Coverage, Part 1: Pushing the Limits**

When a few thousand students, mostly from the prominent Beijing University, marched to Tiananmen Square in the early hours of April 18th and laid their wreaths under the Monument of the People's Heroes to mourn the death of Hu Yaobang, it was neither surprising nor unusual that the newspapers and television broadcasts made no mention of either the march or the protest sit-in thereafter. Hu Yaobang had,

after all, lost his job and his chances to become Deng Xiaoping's successor following the student demonstrations of 1986-87. The official Party obituary made no mention of why he was removed from his post or of the 'campaign against bourgeois liberalization,' which followed his dismissal.

According to Seth Faison, the Beijing correspondent for the English language Hong-kong daily *South China Morning Post*, two reporters from People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*) confronted their editor-in-chief, Tan Wenrui, with an article about the April 18th march late that same evening, in the hope that he would approve it for publication. The young reporters' efforts were to no avail. In spite of his reputation as an editor in favor of reforming the press, Tan Wenrui was not ready to risk his 39-year career as a Party journalist.<sup>12</sup>

It was no secret that the government did not want to encourage or support any actions of dissent. Since the news of Hu Yaobang's death spread through Beijing, the university campuses had been abuzz with activities which had the air of protest and defiance to them. "The one who shouldn't die died, while those who should die still live on," proclaimed one of the many hundred *dazibaos*, a Chinese large-character poster, which ordinary citizens have traditionally used to voice their concerns. There was no doubt that "the ones who should die" were Deng Xiaoping and the other octogenarian leaders who wielded power behind the scenes.

To everyone's great surprise the newspaper which was the first to break ranks was Science & Technology Daily (*Keji Ribao*). Its April 19th issue ran a news story with a factual account of the scene at Tiananmen Square, accompanied by a photo showing students, some with clenched fists. The article was naturally, as Seth Faison notes, merely a "tiny leak in the dike of official control," but it did not go unnoticed.<sup>13</sup> Though it has a limited circulation and had not previously covered politically related stories, *Keji Ribao* is a national newspaper and it set an example for others to have the courage to follow suit.

From the start, the media succeeded in discreetly portraying the general respect which was felt for Hu Yaobang and disapproval about his ousting. Muted criticism of the present leadership was evident in headlines like "Hu mourned as great man," "Poland ends 7-year ban on Solidarity" and "110 Soviet party heads quit posts," or, in quotes run by Xinhua News

Agency, that Hu Yaobang "did a lot for the country's reform and his respect of intellectuals and education set a good example to all Chinese leaders."

On April 20th, the People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*) ran a long article about its reporter's visit to the Soviet Union, where the "oppressive atmosphere that had long weighed people's minds has been replaced by an open, relaxed and free atmosphere. People have freely discussed various problems in political, economic and social life without any fear."<sup>14</sup>

*China Daily* published a dynamic photo depicting solemn students, sporting dark headbands, with their arms raised in front of a 6-meter high portrait of Hu Yaobang on the front page of its April 20th issue. Beside this eye-catching photo was the Xinhua News Agency's official version of a clash which had taken place between security guards and demonstrators just after midnight on April 19th. The incident occurred outside the gates of Zhongnanhai, a sealed-off area where most Chinese top leaders live and work.

Jeanne Moore, an American journalist who

*When authorities stopped the normal distribution of the newspaper by mail, the journalists themselves carried bundles of the April 24th edition to post offices around Beijing.*

was working as an English language 'polisher' at *China Daily* at the time, was on hand when this militant-looking photo was chosen for publication. "No one on duty that evening felt good about having to run the Xinhua version of the Zhongnanhai incident. At the evening news conference someone remarked that we should have a picture of the day's events for the front page. No one had been officially assigned to cover the Square. The photo editor suddenly disappeared and came back in an instant with this remarkable photograph. Everyone marvelled about what a good shot it was. None of the news editors on hand wanted to be the one to forbid its use, and so the picture went in the

paper."

Jeanne Moore remembers that the breakdown in control was a gradual process. Bit by bit the editors in charge of routine news decisions became more daring. "But the fact that there were always reporters on hand, ready to report what they had been out on their own accord witnessing, or photographs, like in the April 20th example, available without anyone having officially been told to take them, was significant. There was a tremendous force among the members of the staff, who were trying to put as much pressure as possible on the editors to cover the ongoing news story."<sup>15</sup>

Many Chinese journalists were among the onlookers during the night of April 21st, when more than 100,000 students marched in organized fashion through the city in order to reach Tiananmen Square before it was closed off for the official services commemorating Hu Yaobang. They sang the 'Internationale' and carried banners with texts "Long live democracy" and "Down with corruption." While the leaders of the country attended the memorial service inside the Great Hall of the People on April 22nd, three students — in a scene rich with symbolism — knelt on the steps outside with a scrolled petition listing their demands raised above their heads. Crowds of students standing in Tiananmen Square chanted: "Li Peng, Come out!" He didn't. The frustrated students returned to their campuses.

The students' disappointment turned to anger when they discovered that their protest and their demands were not reported by the Chinese media, with one exception. Once again it was Science & Technology Daily (*Keji Ribao*) which broke with tradition and published a factual account of the events, inside and outside the Great Hall of the People. Its article stated that about 100,000 students gathered at Tiananmen Square "to protest the Party's treatment of Hu Yaobang and... (to demand) a quicker pace for democratization." After a stormy meeting, the younger members of the staff finally persuaded editor-in-chief Lin Zexin to run the story. When authorities stopped the normal distribution of the newspaper by mail, the journalists themselves carried bundles of the April 24th edition to post offices around Beijing.<sup>16</sup>

Also the Shanghai-based weekly World Economic Herald (*Shijie Jingji Daobao*) refused to submit to silence. Bearing in mind the Herald's reputation as China's most liberal and

forthright newspaper since its founding in 1980, its clash with authorities was to be expected. Editor-in-chief Qin Benli was a veteran communist journalist, who advocated publicly that without political reform China's economic reforms could not succeed. He had managed to weather a series of storms and confrontations with propaganda officials because of his close ties with Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang. Survival in China's thunderous political climate is doomed without a highly placed ally.

The head of the Party's propaganda department in Shanghai, Chen Zhili, telephoned Qin

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*They made sure that Deng Xiaoping was given the impression that the students were truly about to throw the country into havoc.*

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Benli on April 21st and asked to see the final page proofs of issue no. 439, due out on April 23rd. Though she had never asked to see the proofs before, Chen Zhili said she was curious to know the contents of an issue with six pages dedicated to Hu Yaobang. According to Kate Wright, who wrote a detailed article about the World Economic Herald case for the *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, Chen Zhili told the newspaper staff that she "thought there would be little problem with any of these things." However, she did ask Qin Benli to change a specific passage written by the reform-minded political scientist Yan Jiaqi.

In the controversial paragraphs, Yan Jiaqi referred directly to the student protests on April 18th ("Yesterday, at Tiananmen Square, I saw our police and soldiers really at one with the people.") and advised the Party to make a fair assessment of the late Hu Yaobang. "If a correct appraisal is not made, problems may still arise... If it (the Party) selflessly recognizes its errors I feel China has prospects. If not, the old disastrous road lies ahead."

First, editor-in-chief Qin Benli refused to delete the requested text, assuring Chen Zhili that he would take full responsibility. When Chen Zhili turned to Shanghai Party boss Jiang Zemin (presently leader of the country), Qin Benli was forced to give in. By this time some

160,000 copies of the original version had already been printed and several hundred of them hastily distributed. Following a few days of heated tug-of-war, Jiang Zemin announced on April 26th that Qin Benli had been dismissed and that a working group representing the Party's propaganda department had been appointed to oversee the Herald's operations.<sup>17</sup>

Afterwards, there was some speculation that had Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang been in the country, Qin Benli might have been able to keep his job. But Zhao Ziyang was on a state visit to North Korea — a circumstance which unquestionably had an effect on the events taking place in Beijing.

On April 24th, Li Peng hurriedly called a Central Committee Politburo meeting to be held in the absence of Zhao Ziyang. According to a report delivered by Mayor of Beijing, Chen Xitong, on June 30th, Deng Xiaoping made a speech after this meeting expressing "his full agreement and support" of the decision to publish an editorial condemning the student activities. China's paramount leader supposedly also gave his blessing to the decision to use whatever force necessary to "put down the turmoil."<sup>18</sup>

Deng Xiaoping has often been described as a genuine revolutionary who has fought for 70 years to establish a stable political system. He was not willing to see his work go down the drain because of demands made by a bunch of 20-year-old kids. In their book *Crisis at Tiananmen*, Yi Mu and Mark V. Thompson quite rightly point out that the older leaders of China sincerely believe that independent student organizations are not simply a threat to their power, but a "crack at the foundation of socialism as they understand it. . . . The kind of socialism in which they were educated only reinforced the traditional Chinese view that the state must control all facets of society . . . . The real tragedy involved here is not that Deng Xiaoping and his allies were clinging to power, but that they ultimately believe that their actions were fully justified."

There have also been reports that Deng Xiaoping had access to a very limited amount of information. The hardliners wanted to use the student demonstrations as a pretext to get rid of the more liberal Zhao Ziyang — they made sure that Deng Xiaoping was given the impression that the students were truly about to throw the country into havoc.<sup>19</sup>

After the People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*)

published its harsh editorial on April 26th, calling for a firm stand against disorder and accusing the students of creating 'national turmoil' — in Chinese terms, an offense punishable by death — it was generally taken for granted that the students had heard the voice of the 'emperor' and had been frightened into lying low for a while, at least until May 4th. The 70th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement would provide a new official pretext to rally publicly.

The students' historic 10-hour march on April 27th, just one day after the stern editorial, was finally covered by major Chinese media organizations. The Xinhua News Agency Domestic Service in Chinese reported: "Carrying streamers and shouting slogans, tens of thousands of students from some schools of higher education in Beijing paraded in the streets today." The story later described the slogans as "Support the CPC (Communist Party), Eradicate Corruption, Down with Official Profiteers," to emphasize the students' loyalty towards the government.<sup>20</sup>

Though the media coverage on the April 27th march was minimal, with few details, and echoed the authorities' demand that students resume classes, it was apparent to any sophisticated reader that a severe breakdown in public obedience had occurred. The students marched defiantly despite the previous day's warning. As Yi Mu and Mark V. Thompson write: "... the Party was confronting an entirely new situation in which society was escaping the control of the state. Put more bluntly, people were asking to take control of their own lives."<sup>21</sup>

### ***Media Coverage, Part 2: Straightforward Reporting***

Starting from April 28th, stories about the students' protest activities appeared in all major newspapers as well as TV and radio broadcasts. Step by step, the pieces were based on factual reporting and listed the students' demands. A major breakthrough was the televised 'dialogue' between student representatives and State Council officials on April 29th, the first one of its kind in the history of the People's Republic, followed by a second one with Mayor Chen Xitong on April 30th.

The announcer of the 'National News Hookup' program featuring the meetings started

off by explaining that the government officials had a "candid conversation with the students on the issue of punishing official profiteers, clean government, educational development, how to view the current student strike, and other questions. They voiced their determination to relay the students' suggestions to the responsible comrades concerned accurately."

On May 3rd, Beijing Television Service aired the entire press conference which focused on the students' demands and was held by State Council spokesman Yuan Mu for both Chinese and foreign journalists. That day's issue of People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*) printed the Xinhua News Agency's story about student demonstrations in Shanghai, making note of some of the banner texts, for example: "We Want Democracy and Freedom." The momentum of the media surged in pace with the movement's.

May 4th has often proved to be a milestone in Chinese history. The May Fourth Movement of 1919 is honored in China as the first time students initiated a mass movement not only to protest against government policies, but also to spread new ideas. Shortly after the founding of the People's Republic it was declared National Youth Day.

The students' demonstrations on May 4th drew hundreds of thousands of onlookers, who cheered and marvelled at the jubilant, but non-violent atmosphere. For the first time journalists joined the marchers under their own banners demanding "Support the World Economic Herald" and "Reinstate Qin Benli." Television and newspaper reports of the day consisted of straightforward coverage with the use of pictures portraying the unbelievable scenes.

Equally — if not more — significant as the May 4th demonstrations was the speech made that same evening by Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang at the annual meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The Xinhua News Agency's story citing Zhao Ziyang saying that the recent demonstrations did not indicate political instability was a clear sign to even the less informed reader. Zhao Ziyang wanted to distance himself from the April 26th editorial which had accused the students of instigating turmoil. He wanted to make public his split with the conservatives in the Party.

In a speech on May 24th, China's President, General Yang Shangkun, suggested that everyone go back and read very carefully Zhao Ziyang's speech at the ADB meeting. "Comrade

Zhao Ziyang's speech was a turning point," Yang Shangkun admitted. "It revealed all the differences of members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo in front of the students."<sup>22</sup>

Yang Shangkun was telling the truth. Every experienced editor knew what Zhao Ziyang's speech implied and by May 5th, it was clear which side they favored. Zhao Ziyang's words were splashed over the front pages of all the major newspapers. His speech was broadcast on radio and television for three days.

In the week that followed, newspapers and Xinhua News Agency ran favorable commentaries, made by people from different parts of society, about Zhao Ziyang's speech and his attitude towards the student movement. Mayor Chen Xitong, who in his report of June 30th reviewed the events leading up to the "counter-revolutionary rebellion," said that the China Broadcasting Station, CCTV, People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*) and other newspapers were encouraged to do so by Zhao Ziyang's close aide Bao Tong.<sup>23</sup> The mayor accused Zhao Ziyang and his followers of manipulating the media. But it is also apparent that Zhao Ziyang's stance was in accordance with the aspirations of the students and the press corps.

By bringing the disagreements among the top leaders out into the open, Zhao Ziyang provided the media with a chance to show their support for the student movement by reporting on it and the students' demands. All the Chinese journalists I have spoken to admit that the press corps was not merely attempting to do their job in the professional sense and cover the news, though this was their primary aim. They were also aware that the movement would benefit from publicity. The editors-in-chief knew they could cover up by saying that they were only publicizing the views of the Party General Secretary.<sup>24</sup>

Politburo member Hu Qili reportedly visited eight major media organizations, evidently on May 6th, to relay a message from Zhao Ziyang: "There is no big risk in opening up a bit by reporting on the demonstrations and increasing the openness of news."<sup>25</sup>

The split in the top leadership affected all layers of the government, including the ones intended to control the media. "By the time the newspapers were publishing stories on the student movement, something was deadly wrong," (former China Daily news editor Jing Jun analyzed the situation). "The central gov-

ernment was in disarray. The work group was not getting its guidelines from the top leaders and therefore, instructions were not being passed down to the newspapers in the standard, institutionalized way."

According to a cadre working for the Information Department of the CCP Propaganda Department, two weeks passed in the beginning of May without the Department receiving a single phone call from the Central Committee, which in normal times routinely relayed instructions. TV news anchor Feng Xiaoming remembered that Ai Zhisheng, the Minister of Film, Radio & Television, did not show up for his daily preview of the 7 o'clock news broadcast between May 15th and May 19th.

The beginning of the hunger strike at Tiananmen Square on May 13th marked a resurgence for the student movement and the start of an unprecedented period in the history of both the People's Republic and the Chinese Communist press. The hunger strike hit a nerve among ordinary citizens, which in turn led to a spontaneous outpouring of sympathy and support for the students.

Anyone in China over the age of thirty remembers a time when most urban residents hardly had enough to eat and there was widespread famine in the countryside. The meaning of food in the Chinese culture is portrayed in the common greeting: "*Ni chi fan le ma?*" which literally means, "Have you eaten?" though it is meant to express the same as the American phrase, "Hello, how are you?" And just as English-speakers respond, "Fine, thank you," Chinese answer "*Chi fan le,*" or "I have eaten," regardless of whether they have or not.

With the top leadership paralyzed, and with Hu Qili's remarks regarding Zhao Ziyang's views to fall back on, the media was free to report on the events taking place not only in Beijing, but in cities all over China. Translations of articles and broadcasts published by the Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (FBIS) alone would fill a thick book. Media reports from all corners of the kingdom described demonstrations in support of the fasting and fainting students in Tiananmen Square and activities related to the movement.

Chinese television broadcast moving images of suffering students, stretched out on the ground in suffocating heat or in the pouring rain, determined not to give in. Xinhua News Agency's domestic service ran scores of stories about the support pouring in from the most

unexpected sectors of society during the week-long hunger strike. It also noted that workers had joined the ranks of marching supporters.

When I phoned the Ministry of Foreign Trade (MoFERT) to arrange to meet a section chief related to my research work, the receptionist apologized, "Sorry - he's out marching." Government officials, representatives from the People's Liberation Army, distinguished members of various Party-led organizations all joined the "more than one million people from all works of life," who were trying to urge and pressure the leadership into submitting to the students' demand for an "open and equal dialogue."

The openness of the media coverage reached its climax on May 18th, when Prime Minister Li Peng met with students in a dialogue televised nationwide. The impertinent behavior of the student representatives, especially the brash conduct of Wu'er Kaixi, who

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*Chinese newspapers were not free to report on any subject without limitations.*

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criticized the Prime Minister for being late and told him off for quibbling with him, made a lasting imprint on the minds of hundreds of millions of viewers across the country. The government's decision to agree to such a meeting was surprising enough, but to give in to the students' demand that it be televised made the concession all the more astonishing.

During the dialogue the student representatives set two conditions for ending the hunger strike. First, the April 26th editorial was to be rescinded. In other words, their movement should be officially acknowledged as a democratic, patriotic movement which was not creating turmoil. Secondly, televised dialogues should be held between the decision makers and genuine leaders of the students, i.e., the unofficial students' organization. Li Peng, who at times seemed at odds about how to talk without a prepared agenda to the unruly students, did not agree to either one.<sup>26</sup>

On May 20th he declared martial law in parts of Beijing.

The Chinese journalists' short-lived period

of openness would gradually come to an end. To speak of China's "three days of press freedom," which quite a few writers have done, is hasty and inaccurate.<sup>27</sup> China has yet to experience press freedom.

In the first place, Chinese newspapers were not free to report on any subject without limitations. They did not publish articles which, for example, quoted people calling for the overthrow of the Communist one-party system of rule, or who demanded that Tibet be granted independence. They reported on the movement which basically was intent on reforming the Communist Party from within. On the other hand, the period during which the media carried stories of the students' protests was longer than the three days often cited. It was closer to three weeks.

Balanced, objective news stories and analysis were also scarce. There was no doubt that the journalists' sympathy was on the side of the students. The students repeatedly defined their demands as modest, but what would they have entailed in reality? A negation of the April 26th editorial was equivalent to asking Deng Xiaoping to write a self-criticism publicly. And to recognize the unofficial student organization would have been interpreted as giving permission to other groups in society, most notably the workers, to organize themselves independently. The government's dilemma was acute. Also, Chinese journalists did not dare speculate on the intense power struggle going on among the top leadership.

### ***Media Coverage, Part 3: The Party's Mouthpiece***

Even after martial law was declared, hardliners in the government did not regain control of the media immediately. As late as May 24th newspapers published stories and photos of citizens setting up roadblocks along main routes in the outskirts of Beijing to prevent the troops from entering the center of the capital.

Even though the director and editor-in-chief of People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*), Qian Liren and Tan Wenrui, were removed from their posts, and a 'work team' loyal to the conservatives in the Party took over, the staff managed to publicize the protests for a few days. On May 23rd, the front page carried two photos, one of the students continuing their sit-in at Tian-

anmen Square, and the other of a child offering a popsicle to a soldier sitting in a blocked military truck. A day earlier, a front page story and headline cited a Hungarian leader saying that Stalinist tactics of violence should not be used to suppress the people.

A group of students visited the famous retired marshals Xu Xiangqian and Nie Rongzhen to ask for their support. According to the Beijing Domestic Service Radio broadcast, the students spoke of their fear that the troops were going to use violence against them. The marshals assured the students that "the army comrades are, under no circumstances, willing to see a bloody incident." In the days following the declaration of martial law, the media carried several reports citing prominent Party members warning against the use of force.

On May 23rd, television viewers were shown shots of the mass demonstration with about one million people demonstrating against martial law. The slogan "Down with Li Peng" could be faintly heard in the background. Xinhua News Agency's English Service wire story mentioned that "most of the slogans were directed against the chief leader of the State Council." Li Peng's name was not mentioned.

An increasing number of articles quoted prominent members of society, who praised or endorsed the decision to declare martial law and appealed to the students to return to their

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*Do the citizens of Beijing believe what the government has told them about the 'incident?' My answer is wholeheartedly, no.*

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campuses to ensure the stability of the country. But the peaceful situation and "normal order" in all parts of Beijing were also getting a lot of media attention, which was clearly intended to undermine the government's attempts to create an image of disorder. Reports mentioning the continuing sit-in at Tiananmen Square were still being published as late as May 30th, even in People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*).<sup>28</sup>

By the time the statue "Goddess of Democracy" was erected on May 30th, it was evident that forces loyal to Prime Minister Li

Peng had regained control of the press. All media reports emphasized the government's disdain for the statue.

On May 29th, Beijing Radio Service broadcast a circular issued by the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television. It stressed "that radio and television services are the mouthpieces of the party, government, and people, and that state radio and television stations must . . . publicize the brilliant decision of the party Central Committee on ending the turmoil . . . and educate the masses to conscientiously safeguard the situation of stability and unity."

'Stability' and 'unity' — these two words were used time after time to justify the "quelling of the counter-revolutionary rebellion" in Beijing. The Chinese media coverage of the events of June 3rd and 4th is well-known. It reflects the one-sided government version of a revolt, led by a handful of people, and of heroic soldiers risking and sacrificing their lives to ensure the stability and unity of the nation.<sup>29</sup>

Do the citizens of Beijing believe what the government has told them about the 'incident?' My answer is wholeheartedly, no.

The tens of thousands who were on the streets that night saw with their own eyes, how outraged civilians at major intersections along the main boulevard tried to prevent the soldiers from reaching Tiananmen Square. The people, who at first refused to believe that the People's Army would fire at its own citizens, had only sticks and stones and 'Molotov cocktails' at their disposal. The soldiers were equipped with machine-guns and armoured PC-vehicles. The severity of the situation was clear even to those witnessing the chaos from a safe distance. Rickshaws raced up the side-streets transporting the bloodied bodies of the wounded and dead to hospitals and morgues.

But do people in other cities, not to speak of the countryside, believe that "a small handful of thugs and ruffians were trying to overthrow the government?" That is a question which is much more difficult to answer accurately. People in China have grown accustomed to continuous changes in policy and they are wary of ferocious political campaigns. They know that the official version of the "counterrevolutionary rebellion in Beijing," the one the media is putting out, is what they are supposed to think. And they have learned that believing — at least saying one believes — in the official Party line is a way to stay out of trouble.

## ***The Journalists Join the Demonstrators***

Already months before Hu Yaobang's death, the 70th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement had been targeted by a handful of student activists as the start of a new student movement. According to Shen Tong, a biology major at Beijing University and one of the many student leaders, small informal 'democracy groups' were set up during the winter of 1988-89 to discuss strategy and ways to promote political reform.

"My group, which was called the Olympic Institute, contacted people from many different parts of society, especially of course intellectuals, in order to establish a network of relationships," Shen Tong explained in an interview in April 1990. "I think I was one of the few who realized the importance of getting the journalists involved in our movement. Already in June 1988 I met with some of the journalists at, for example, *Renmin Ribao*, *Jingji Ribao* (Economic Daily), *Zhongguo Qingnian Ribao* (China Youth Journal), *Keji Ribao*, *Beijing Ribao* (Beijing Daily) and *Guangming Ribao*."

Shen Tong said that the student activists were well aware of the shortcomings of the 1986-87 movement. "We were too isolated. Not even the intellectuals stood up to endorse our cause. All of us knew that without freedom of the press we would not be able to arouse interest and support for our ideas. That's why it was one of our major demands from the beginning."<sup>30</sup>

I remember pricking up my ears on a street corner near the Beijing Library, where I was watching groups of singing students march by on April 27th. I recognized the tune of "Frère Jacques", and after a moment or two, I burst into laughter when I managed to decipher the words: "People's Daily, People's Daily, very strange, very strange. Always printing lies, always printing lies. Very strange, very strange."

Also among the journalists, especially the younger ones who had been educated after the Cultural Revolution in an environment which promoted competitive standards in education, there were people advocating that the press be permitted to report on news stories factually. As mentioned earlier, the suggestions put forward by leading editors in late 1984 were too much for Hu Yaobang to swallow, but the struggle for professionalism was not abandoned.

"There is too much interference," wrote Mo Ru in a blatantly critical article about

journalistic work and the rules of journalism, published in *Zhongguo Jizhe* (Journalist of China), a month before Hu Yaobang's death. "Newspapers carry a lot of reports that are not news, while genuine news reports that the readers like to see are pushed aside."<sup>31</sup>

The decision on the part of the journalists to take to the streets and demonstrate on their own behalf for 'freedom of the press' was made in a meeting on May 3rd at the Lu Xun Museum in Beijing. "Ever since Hu Yaobang's death and the escalating activities of the students, many journalists had met informally in private homes to contemplate action," Zhang Dandan of the *Jingji Zhoukan* (Economic Weekly) recalled in an interview in May 1990. "We have all read a lot about the work of Western journalists and their role as 'watchdog' in society. We felt the time was ripe to fight for that right ourselves. We were terribly excited and moved by the students' brave actions."<sup>32</sup>

Zhang Dandan was among the approximately 200 journalists who demonstrated on May 4th. They were the first non-student group to publicly rally on behalf of the students, though they also had their own agenda. Their banners were prepared by Shen Tong and two other students, who, in the pre-dawn hours of May 4th, took them to the gates of Xinhua News Agency.

After that day, the columns of protesting journalists became a common sight whenever the students were on the move. As Canadian journalists Scott Simmie and Bob Nixon write in their book, *Tiananmen Square*, "the students and the media thrived on a symbiotic relationship."<sup>33</sup> During the hunger strike, the different media organizations marched under their own banners, and even the older editors could be seen chanting, "We want to be able to tell the truth."

On May 9th, a petition requesting a 'dialogue' on freedom of the press was delivered to the All-China Journalists' Association. It was signed by 1,013 journalists from 30 news units. In that same day's issue of *Worker's Daily* (*Gongren Ribao*), an article vehemently defended the citizens' right to know what was going on from the domestic press.

The government did not take long to succumb to the journalists' demand for a 'dialogue.' On May 11th, the Politburo member in charge of propaganda, Hu Qili, and the head of the CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department, Wang Rezhi, went to the office of the



China Youth Journal (*Zhongguo Qingnian Ribao*) to meet with members of the media. The Xinhua News Agency reported that officials maintained that "it is high time to carry out press reform, which is an important part of political reform." The wire story did not carry any quotes. According to the Hongkong media, one of the journalists, Li Datong, exclaimed in his presentation that "We feel profound shame!" and added, "Journalism means recording the facts."

To understand the effect the journalists' participation in the demonstrations had on the movement as a whole, one has to appreciate the special characteristics of Chinese society. Throughout history, university students have been a distinct group apart from the rest of society. On the one hand, they are looked upon as 'children', who sometimes do not know better, but on the other hand, they are also privileged members of the community, who have the right to have pure and idealistic views.

Not only the students were elated when they discovered that they were 'no longer alone', thanks to the journalists' protest march on May 4th. Other intellectuals also felt inspired and encouraged that responsible adults who had families to support — people whom any educated city-dweller could, at least to a certain extent, relate to — had summoned enough courage to speak out about their frustrations.

Once the journalists, even members of the Party's mouthpiece *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*), got away with their public show of discontent, the most determined members of other intellectual groups pushed ahead with plans to join in and show their support for the students' movement. The journalists' march served as a catalyst. As Andrew Walder, Professor of Sociology at Harvard University, agreed in an interview for this research, "The Chinese journalists were absolutely central in stoking the fire."

### ***The Impact of the Media on the Events***

Andrew Walder is one of the few American academics who has studied the role of the Chinese media during the Beijing Spring of '89. In an article published in *Problems of Communism*, Walder describes two new developments that distinguished this movement from previous ones and led to an unprecedented popular rebellion.

First, he points to the widespread support which the students received from people in all fields of urban society. "Second, and perhaps more important, the party split internally over its response to the student movement, which prevented effective repression early on, and which eventually led to key elements of the capital's party apparatus and, most crucially, the mass media to support openly certain student demands. The combination of mass support and party fragmentation led rapidly to a massive, nonviolent rebellion that echoed in scores of cities throughout China . . ." <sup>34</sup>

While the journalists' participation in the demonstrations had an effect on the educated parts of society — in Chinese terms, the intellectuals — it hardly caught the attention of the workers. The media coverage is what mobilized the 'man on the street.' When the newspapers and television started to report on the protests by the students, without branding them trouble-makers, it was interpreted as something officially sanctioned. Political scientist Jing Yulin summarized, "it was like giving people the green light, showing them that it was as good as permissible, certainly risk-averse, to support the students."

It was hard to ignore television shots showing wailing mothers begging their offspring at Tiananmen Square not to starve themselves to death, or small children carrying signs: "Don't let our big sisters and brothers die!" Even those who were not the slightest bit interested in politics felt touched. The public relations value of the hunger strike was enormous. "The reportage helped to magnify public sympathy and involvement, and for a pivotal period, made it appear that the demonstrations might succeed in toppling the hard-line leadership," Andrew Walder asserted.

In the West, the shock which the general public experienced after watching the gory events of June 4th on television has been widely publicized. Few envisioned that the authorities would use brutal force to crush the movement. The underlying forces which led to the reactions of the Chinese public have received less attention. Would the unimaginably stubborn resistance which the army encountered on the night between June 3rd and 4th have been so persistent had it not been for reports by the Chinese media citing high-ranking people saying that violence should not be used against the students? Might these reports not have egged the people on, giving them the illusion that they

might somehow come out of the struggle victoriously? Neither the Western nor the Chinese press seemed to believe that Mao's famous expression about power coming from the barrel of the gun still held true.

Li Lu, whose official title during the movement was 'deputy commander of the hunger strike committee,' did not hesitate when asked about the impact of the Chinese

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*“Verification of the killings spread in true Chinese fashion, by word of mouth.”*

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media: “It was extremely important — it brought the movement onto a national scale. According to the government reports, protests spread to at least 81 cities. In addition, because of the media's impact, the student movement became a people's movement.” Li Lu is a physics and economics major from Nanjing University. He arrived in Beijing on April 27th and stayed at the Square until the students marched out in the early hours of June 4th.<sup>35</sup>

Xiang Xiaojie, who led the students' dialogue delegation together with Shen Tong, agreed that the Chinese media was instrumental in changing the nature of the movement. “Initially, the students had no intention of mobilizing the city dwellers. We wanted to limit the movement to students. The workers' demands were too rash and we knew that endorsing them would lead to trouble. Also, the students did not have enough experience to organize the workers. But, as a result of the Chinese media, the masses' attention was aroused.”

Xiang Xiaojie was a graduate student at the University of Politics & Law in Beijing. “In the long run, maybe the articles which were written during that spring will have a more lasting effect than the student movement itself,” he ventured. “People can keep the newspapers.”<sup>36</sup> That is exactly what has happened — in many a home which I visited during the autumn of 1989, I was shown a cardboard box full of clippings from the May issues of Chinese newspapers. “So that not even my children will ever forget,” a friend explained.

An American who was teaching English in a — by Chinese standards — tiny city of 350,000

inhabitants in Anhui province, said everyone was very aware of what was going on in Beijing. The college students in the city staged their own demonstration in support of the hunger strikers on May 18th.

“We would all gather around the television in the teachers' dormitory and eat our meals in front of the television. The local newspapers were also reporting on the student movement. Everyone was very impressed when the local television station broadcast the two-hour dialogue between students from Hefei Science and Technology University and provincial leaders. The sincere way in which the leaders responded was remarkable.”

Voice of America and the British Broadcasting Company became the primary sources of information once the Chinese media was silenced. The American teacher, who asked not be identified because of plans to return to China in the near future, said that one could hear the blaring VOA broadcasts all along the city's one and only main street. News of the bloody suppression reached her college on June 5th. “My students, who were all extremely upset, kept asking me, can we believe the VOA reports about the massacre? When one of the students' brothers returned from Beijing, verification of the killings spread in true Chinese fashion, by word of mouth.”<sup>37</sup>

Nicholas Kristof, Beijing correspondent for the *New York Times*, felt that VOA and BBC had an “enormous impact,” while the Chinese media had “quite a bit of significance for the Chinese.” He and his wife Sheryl WuDunn received a Pulitzer award for their reporting during the Beijing Spring of '89. Sandra Burton, Bureau Chief in Beijing for *Time*, thought the Chinese media was “very significant,” while *Time* Beijing correspondent Jaime FlorCruz added that the Chinese journalists' input was considerable “in giving the movement a second wind.”

In other interviews dealing with the effect the Chinese press had on the movement, American journalists echoed the view that because of Chinese media, the whole nation knew what was going on in Beijing during May. David Holley, of the *Los Angeles Times*, opined that this was one of the reasons the government had a much harder time explaining the crushing of the movement, and “in part, it is why China remains in such a near crisis situation today.”<sup>38</sup>

Going through the major American media organizations' coverage of the events, one finds

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*Despite relentless attempts to use the media to justify its actions following the crackdown, the government has not succeeded in 'demobilization.'*

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numerous references in both print and television reports about the demand for 'freedom of the press' and also references to the opening up of the Chinese media. The World Economic Herald's (*Shiji Jingji Daobao*) case was described in detail by major American publications. But only after June 4th, when the government had taken full control of the propaganda apparatus, did American newspapers publish more in-depth analysis of the role of the Chinese media during the actual movement.<sup>39</sup>

While the drama was unfolding, the immense impact which the Chinese newspaper, radio and television coverage was having on the country, and on the events themselves, did not receive the attention it deserved by the American media. American network news broadcasts and morning shows did use footage obtained by Chinese television (CCTV) and Wei Hua, the female anchor of CCTV English News, became a familiar face to many Americans, thanks to the airing of some of her reports from Tiananmen Square. But American network reporters failed to elaborate on the fact — to the degree the situation warranted — that the same dramatic images which were being relayed to American living rooms were also being seen by hundreds of millions of Chinese viewers.

Based on my own encounters and observations in China until late November 1989, when I left Beijing, I agree with Nicholas Kristof's assessment that China has changed in three fundamental ways, despite the fact that the "democratic conflagration" of the Beijing Spring has been extinguished on the surface. His piece "Ominous Embers from the Fire of 1989" was published exactly one year after the death of Hu Yaobang.

First, Kristof writes, "democracy is an issue on people's minds in a way it never was before." Secondly, "the rulers and ruled alike came to see that their discontent was much broader than anyone realized." And thirdly,

"the leadership, in handling the protests the way it did, actually strengthened and expanded the opposition. A new vitriol burns in those who were once merely disdained."<sup>40</sup>

The Chinese media's ability to spread the news of the student-led movement and its supporters has a direct bearing on all three of these changes. The press mobilized the urban population all over the country for nearly a month, and despite relentless attempts to use the media to justify its actions following the crackdown, the government has not succeeded in 'demobilization,' as far as the spirit which the movement left behind is concerned.

As I prepared to leave China, one of my more politically active friends assured me: "Our fists will remain clenched, though for the time being they are hidden in our pockets." The disgust and rage were naturally the most vehement among those who personally witnessed the ruthless killings. But even in cities outside Beijing, I sensed a deep-rooted longing for change, though an air of hopelessness also prevailed.

In conclusion, I quote one of the first letters which I received from China after having arrived in the United States. It is from a teacher friend of mine, who enjoyed explaining old Chinese sayings to me. Even in everyday conversation, Chinese often refer to hundreds of well-known proverbs to express themselves — understanding them is an important part of getting to know the Chinese culture. My friend had been to Beijing and had heard mention of Lu Xun Museum, the museum where the Chinese journalists gathered and decided to join the demonstrations. Lu Xun, who lived at the beginning of this century, is revered as one of China's greatest writers.

"Visiting Lu Xun Museum made me think of you," my friend wrote. "I think you should learn this saying by Lu Xun: 'Lies written in ink can not conceal a truth written in blood'."

## Brief Chronology of Events

- April 15** Hu Yaobang dies.
- April 18** Few thousand students march from Beijing University to Tiananmen Square. Later in the day about 10,000 students stage sit-in in front of Great Hall of the People.
- April 19** *Keji Ribao* (Science & Technology Daily) publishes first account of April 18th march. Other newspapers do not.
- April 22** Hu Yaobang's official memorial service in Great Hall of People at Tiananmen Square. About 100,000 students gather outside. Three students kneel on steps of Great Hall holding a petition demanding a dialogue with the leaders.
- April 24** *Keji Ribao* is only newspaper to publish factual account of students' part in Hu Yaobang's memorial service. General Secretary Zhao Ziyang leaves for state visit to North Korea.
- April 25** Prime Minister Li Peng calls Politburo meeting in absence of Zhao Ziyang. Decision is made to publish an editorial condemning students and accusing them of creating turmoil.
- April 26** People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*) publishes harsh editorial. Editor-in-chief of Shanghai-based World Economic Herald is fired for refusing to delete text referring to student demonstrations and criticizing government for ousting Hu Yaobang (in 1987).
- April 27** In an unprecedented show of civil disobedience, hundreds of thousands of students march to Tiananmen Square and demand a 'dialogue' with government.
- April 28** Xinhua News Agency and major national newspapers run articles about April 27th march. From this day until May 20th, Chinese media gradually opens up and starts to run increasingly detailed articles about movement and students' demands.
- April 29** First televised dialogue between students and government officials.
- May 3** Televised press conference about student movement. State Council official brands unofficial student organization illegal.
- May 4** 70th anniversary of May Fourth Movement. About 20,000 students march to Tiananmen Square. A few hundred journalists join in as the first non-student group of demonstrators. They demand the right to "tell the truth" and that fired editor-in-chief in Shanghai be given back his job.
- Zhao Ziyang makes important speech at Asian Developing Bank meeting. Says student movement will not cause chaos in China. Makes it clear that he does not agree with April 26 editorial. During following week major media organizations print stories with favorable commentaries about Zhao's speech.

- May 6** Zhao Ziyang briefs leaders in charge of propaganda and says there is “no risk for the press to open up a bit by reporting on student demonstrations.”
- May 9** Petition with 1,013 signatures of journalists delivered to government representatives. Journalists demand dialogue to discuss press reform.
- May 13** Beginning of hunger strike at Tiananmen Square. Students demand that April 26th editorial be retracted and televised dialogue with Party leaders be held.
- During following week detailed reports of hunger strike published in newspapers all over the country. National television airs footage with dramatic shots from Tiananmen.
- May 15** Soviet leader Gorbachev arrives for historic visit.
- May 16** Deng Xiaoping’s and Gorbachev’s meeting overshadowed by hunger strike.
- May 17** About one million march through Beijing in support of students. Members of government organizations also join in.
- May 18** Once again about a million people demonstrate.
- In early morning, Zhao Ziyang, Li Peng and other leaders visit hospitalized students — Chinese television covers visit. In the afternoon, Li Peng meets with defiant students for about an hour in a discussion broadcast live nationwide.
- May 19** Zhao Ziyang visits Tiananmen Square. Chinese television crew is present. Zhao apologizes for having come “too late” in his last public appearance. In the evening students decide to stop hunger strike.
- May 20** Martial law is declared in parts of Beijing. Media organizations are gradually taken over by forces loyal to the hardliners. Number of reports on students’ activities decline. However, reports of ongoing sit-in can still be found and numerous articles are published citing prominent members pleading for restraint.
- More than 100,000 students continue their sit-in at Tiananmen Square despite authorities’ strict orders to leave. Hundreds of thousands of citizens gather at major intersections all around the capital to block the troops from marching to the Square. Beijing becomes intoxicated with ‘people power.’ Pictures of civilians lecturing soldiers and warning them not to hurt the students shown on television.
- May 30** Statue “Goddess of Democracy” is erected at Tiananmen Square. Media reports are critical in tone and warn that the country will fall into chaos if the students do not leave the Square.
- June 3** In early evening martial law troops begin to force their way through the streets of Beijing towards Tiananmen Square, firing indiscriminately at civilians. The troops are clearly unprepared for the fierce resistance of civilians who try to prevent the soldiers’ passage.

**June 4**

As dawn breaks, martial law troops allow remaining students to march out of Tiananmen Square.

The media is completely controlled by the 'hardliners' and publishes reports describing the "quelling of a counter-revolutionary rebellion" in Beijing.

## Endnotes

1. TV Coverage of Zhao, Li Visit. Quotes from text provided by Foreign Broadcasting International Service (FBIS-CHI-89-095, 18 May 1989, p. 39).
2. Text of meeting provided by Foreign Broadcasting International Service FBIS. Li, Chen Meets Students, Beijing Television Service in Mandarin, from the "National NewsHookup" program (FBIS-CHI-89-083, 2 May 1989, p.9).
3. Banner texts from report 'Tens of Thousands' Join March. Foreign Broadcasting International Service, Hong Kong, Zhongguo Tongxun She in Chinese. (FBIS-CHI-89-085, 4 May 1989, p. 19).
4. Between April 1987 and April 1988, I spoke with a number of Chinese journalists about their work and Chinese media organizations for my book about everyday life in China (*Mureneva muuri, Vuosi kiinalaisena*), published in Finnish in October 1988.
5. *Statistical Yearbook of China* 1988.
6. Text of Hu Yaobang's speech "On the Party's Journalism Work," published in *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) April 14, 1985, translation by FBIS, 15 April 1985, p. K1.
7. "The Working Press in China" by Jing Jun, November 1985, pp.8-13. Paper submitted to Harvard University, Dept. of Regional Studies/East Asia.
8. Interview (May 1990) with political scientist Yang Yulin, who is currently a research fellow at Harvard University. Until 1986 Yang Yulin worked as Director for the Dept. of International Cooperation at the Economic System Reform Institute of China, known to be one of Zhao Ziyang's think tanks.
9. Interview with Wu Guogang (May 1990). Wu Guogang worked on the editorial staff of *Renmin Ribao* from 1983-1989. He was granted a Nieman fellowship at Harvard University in 1989.
10. Interview with Feng Xiaoming (May 1990). Feng Xiaoming worked for five years in the English language news department of the China Central Television CCTV. During the Beijing Spring of '89 his position was news anchor of the English News Service. He was awarded a Benton fellowship at University of Chicago in September 1989.
11. Interview with Jing Jun (May, 1990). Jing Jun worked for the *China Daily* from 1981-1986. His last position was national news editor. He is presently working towards his Ph.D. in social anthropology at Harvard University.
12. Details of People's Daily reporters confronting Tan Wenrui from chapter about the Chinese media written by Seth Faison, Beijing correspondent of *South China Morning Post*, for an upcoming book about the Beijing Spring of '89 to be published by M.E. Sharpe, edited by Anthony Saich of International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.
13. Details concerning April 19th issue of *Keji Ribao* from chapter written by Seth Faison, see endnote 12.
14. Headlines from *China Daily*, page 1 of April 17th, 18th and 27th issues (1989). Xinhua quote by Guan Yushuo, senior lecturer at Chinese University of Hongkong, used by *China Daily*, April 19, 1989, p.1 "Sorrow expressed around nation." Reporter gives impressions of visit to USSR, *Renmin Ribao*, April 20, 1989. Translation by FBIS, 4 May 1989, p. 9 (FBIS-CHI-89-085).
15. Interview with American journalist Jeanne Moore (May 1990). Jeanne Moore worked as an English language expert at *China Daily* for 14 months in 1988-1989.
16. Details about April 24th issue of *Keji Ribao* from chapter by Seth Faison (see endnote 12) and article by Kate Wright: The Political Fortunes of Shanghai's 'World Economic Herald,' *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 23, Jan 1990, p. 128.
17. Article written by Kate Wright about the World Economic Herald (see endnote 14).
18. Explanation of Deng Xiaoping's speech made in report by Mayor of Beijing, Chen Xitong, to National Peoples Congress on June 30, 1989. Text translated in Appendix 1 of *Crisis Tiananmen*, Yi Mu & Mark V. Thompson, China Books, San Francisco, 1989, p. 206.
19. Quote by Yi Mu and Mark V. Thompson from *Crisis at Tiananmen*, p. 29.  
Information concerning Deng Xiaoping having limited access to information about student demonstrations from "Inside Story Revealed on 26 Apr 89 Editorial," based on material for restricted consumption, in Hong Kong *Tangtai*, 8 April 1990, FBIS 3 May 1990, FBIS-CHI-90-086, pp. 16-18.
20. Xinhua, Domestic Service in Chinese, 27 April 1989 (FBIS-CHI-89-081, 28 April, p.14).  
Hereafter, unless otherwise specified, all quotes from Chinese newspapers, radio and television broadcasts taken from translations provided by Foreign Broadcasting Information Service, April 15th to June 15th, 1989.

21. Quote from *Crisis at Tiananmen*, p. 30.
22. Speech by Yang Shangkun at meeting of Central Military Commission on May 24, 1990. Quote from translation provided in Appendix One of *Crisis at Tiananmen*, p. 184.
23. Report by Mayor Chen Xitong, see endnote 18, *Crisis at Tiananmen*, p. 209.
24. One precaution taken by journalists was the use of the anonymous byline: "By our staff reporters."  
In addition to the Chinese journalists identified in my discussion paper — all of whom are currently living outside China — I have discussed the performance of the Chinese press during the pro-democracy movement with one elderly editor from *Renmin Ribao*, two younger generation Xinhua reporters and one middle-aged *Jingji Ribao* reporter. All four wished to remain anonymous.
25. *New York Times Magazine*, "How the Hardliners Won," Nov. 12, 1989, by N. Kristof, p. 66.
26. Excerpts of the dialogue were published in all major Chinese newspapers on May 19, 1989. Translation of full text provided by FBIS, 19 May 1989, pp. 14-21.
27. For example, well-known Chinese journalist Liu Binyan spoke of the "three days of press freedom" in China at a conference held at the Univ. of Minnesota in October 1989. Liu Binyan has written his own version of the events in China in "*Tell the World*," Liu Binyan, Pantheon Books, New York, 1989.
28. *Renmin Ribao*, 30 May 1989, p. 1. Text contains passage: "However, there was no sign that the petitioning students at Tiananmen Square would finish their sit-in and withdraw..." FBIS, 30 May 1989, p. 73 (FBIS-CHI-89-102).
29. There were a few Chinese journalists who succeeded in publicizing news of soldiers firing on civilians as late as June 4th. On page 1 of *Renmin Ribao's* June 4th issue, there is a news report filed at 5 A.M. listing hospitals that had "been calling our newspaper non-stop to report on the casualties of those hospitalized since the middle of the night."  
In addition, Beijing Radio's English service announcer read a news report, written by the son of former Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian, describing the "tragic incident" and appealing "to all its listeners to join our protest for the gross violation of human rights and the most barbarous suppression of the people." According to TV news anchor Feng Xiaoming, the announcer was not permitted to go abroad to study, as previously planned. The son of the minister was still in police custody when Feng Xiaoming left China in August 1989.
30. Interview with Shen Tong, currently a student at Brandeis University (April 1990).
31. *Zhongguo Jizhe* on Journalistic Work, 15 March 1989, p. 1. Text translation from FBIS (FBIS-CHI-89-084, 3 May 1989, p. 56).
32. Interview with Chinese journalist Zhang Dandan (May 1990). Zhang Dandan was a staff reporter of *Jingji Zhoukan* (Economic Weekly) during the Beijing Spring of '89. She is currently living in Canada.
33. *Tiananmen Square*, Scott Simmie & Bob Nixon, Univ. of Washington Press, 1989, p. 75.
34. Interview with Andrew Walder (May 1990). Quotes from Walder's article "The Political Sociology of the Beijing Upheaval of 1989," *Problems of Communism*, Sept-Oct. 1989, p. 30 and p. 38.
35. Interview with Li Lu (May, 1990). Li Lu is one of the student leaders who escaped China after the crackdown and is studying at Columbia University. He has written his own account of the Beijing Spring in *Moving the Mountain*, published by Macmillan in Great Britain, June 1990.
36. Interview with Xiang Xiaojie (April 1989). Xiang Xiaojie also managed to escape from China (with his wife) and is currently working on his Ph.D. at Columbia University. His 4-year old daughter remains in the care of her grandparents in China.
37. The American referred to worked as an English teacher from August, 1988 to June, 1989.
38. Interviews dealing with the role of the Chinese press conducted by Amy Zegart on my behalf in Beijing in May 1990.
39. Data according to the National Newspaper Index. With the exception of 4 articles dealing with the World Economic Herald case (1 by the *N.Y. Times* April 27, 1 by *Washington Post* May 2 and 2 by *Christian Science Monitor* April 25 and April 28), no separate articles reporting on the Chinese media performance were published until May.
31. (*L.A. Times*, No 'Goddess' Shown on China TV). After the crackdown on June 4th, the *L.A. Times* published 1 more article (June 13) and the *N.Y. Times* 2 articles (June 12 and June 22), which focused on the Chinese press and its role during the Beijing Spring of '89. Of course, the Chinese media was touched upon in general news stories during May by all of these newspapers.
40. *New York Times*, "Ominous Embers From the Fire of 1989," April 15, 1990, p. 1, p. 8.