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THE TIANANMEN SQUARE “INCIDENT” IN CHINA AND THE EAST CENTRAL EUROPEAN REVOLUTIONS¹

Ever since the Chinese imperial court moved to the “Northern Capital” (Beijing) in the early fifteenth century, the area in front of the southern gate of the palace has held special importance. Tiananmen, the “Gate of Heavenly Peace,” leads to the Temple of Heaven, the altar where the emperor, the son of heaven who ruled with heaven’s mandate, prayed to heaven to maintain harmony between man and the universe. This was the place where imperial edicts were announced and the people could submit their complaints to the emperor.

The word *an* (安) does not only mean “peace” in Chinese, but it can also serve as a verb meaning “to pacify” or even “to subdue.” In China, peace also means subservience to power.

The square south of the Forbidden City has witnessed much unrest, protest and violence. Throughout the last six centuries of the imperial period, it served as a site for public trials, tortures and executions. In 1900, during the Boxer Rebellion, the square became larger when the international forces of the eight allied nations damaged and burnt down the ministries located there. The first mass demonstration on the square took place on 4 May 1919, when Chinese students protested Japanese imperialism, official corruption and the Versailles Treaty, which planned to cede parts of China formerly under German control to Japan. The resulting political and cultural movement sought to create a Westernized culture as a solution to China’s political, economic and social problems. This was the first time that students made history on the square. In December 1935, patriotic students demonstrated against Japanese imperialism and the weak policies of the Guomindang, which showed no willingness to resist the Japanese menace. Tiananmen gained new importance in 1949, when Mao Zedong announced the founding of the People’s Republic (PRC) from its rostrum. During the Cultural Revolution it hosted mass rallies, with millions of young Red Guards arriving here from around the country. Today Tiananmen is one of the national symbols of the PRC, and its image occupies a central position on the country’s national emblem. But for many Chinese families, this place represents

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the site where on 4 June 1989 the government harshly suppressed peaceful student demonstrations.²

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On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the peaceful transition in East Central Europe, numerous festive events and scholarly conferences took place around the world, with this episode being labeled one of the most significant developments in the second half of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, in China, the Chinese student movement that was centered on Beijing's Tiananmen Square, the popular unrest in China's cities, and the military crackdown on demonstrators remain banned topics. It is essentially only the media outside of China that has kept the memory of the events alive. The images of students sitting on the square wearing headbands, the white statue of the "Goddess of Democracy," or the man in a white shirt who stopped the tanks rolling toward the square, before vanishing, never to be identified, are still fresh in our memories.

Similar to the changes in Europe, in China June Fourth (六四 *liu si*, the most common Chinese term for the events) also signifies a turning point. However, while the former led to the collapse of the "socialist world," the latter convinced China's leaders that political stability, even if achieved by dictatorial means, is essential for successful economic development. As a result, China's communists have not only managed to remain in power, but have even generated rapid economic growth while at the same time maintaining relative social stability.

Economic and political reforms in China in the 1980s

Before we recount what happened in Beijing in the spring months of 1989, it is necessary to summarize the profound changes that occurred in Chinese domestic politics after the late 1970s. Following Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping opened China to the outside world, developing the Chinese model of a market economy presided over by an authoritarian government. Deng's reform program, initiated in December 1978, resulted in Maoist radicalism being replaced by pragmatic moderation, and correspondingly, the government's focal point shifted from politics to economics.

China's leaders took on the task of transforming a command-planned, highly centralized system under public ownership into a market-oriented, decentralized, mixed ownership system, improving incentive systems in order to increase production, and establishing an interrelated legal framework in order to reduce the

² On the history of Tiananmen Square, see Péter Polonyi, *Mi történt? Tienanmen tér, '89* (Budapest: Hírlapkiadó Vállalat, 1990), 9.

absolute dominance of the state over economic activity. In the 1980s, the overarching concern of the central leadership was how to maintain stability and avoid domestic chaos while proceeding with modernization and reform.

Similar to the reform efforts in the European Soviet-type economies, the reforms in China also lacked a clear goal model and guiding theory. Beijing proceeded with reforms without a concrete plan—in the words of Deng Xiaoping, “crossing the river by feeling for stones” (摸着石头过河 *mozhe shitou guo he*). This tendency resulted in trial-and-error procedures and frequent improvisation of the reform process. The leadership had to cope with a constant cycle of reform and readjustment, whereby each set of reforms triggered both expected and unexpected consequences. These, in turn, required readjustments and further reforms.³ American political scientist Richard Baum has described the ambivalent pattern of Chinese reforms in the 1980s as a constant cycle of relaxation and control, “characterized by an initial increase in the scope of economic or political reform (in the form, e.g., of price deregulation or intellectual liberalization), followed by a rapid release of pent-up social demand (e.g., panic buying or student demonstrations); the resulting ‘disorder’ would set off a backlash among party traditionalists, who would then move to reassert control. A conservative retrenchment would follow, marked by an ideological assault on ‘liberal’ tendencies and an attempt to halt (or even to reverse) the initial reform. The ensuing freeze would serve, in turn, to exacerbate existing internal contradictions and stresses, leading to the generation of renewed pressures for relaxation and reform—and so on.”⁴ In the second half of the 1980s, the periods of readjustment were longer than those of effective reform. The first such period came in 1985, only a year after the introduction of the enterprise reform, and lasted for two years. The next reform period also lasted for only one year and was similarly followed by a readjustment period, this one lasting for about two to three years.

In contrast to the reforms in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union, China’s economic reform strategy was more gradual and, institutionally, more innovative. The leadership agreed on the gradual introduction of market mechanisms into the operations of the centralized command economy and on China’s integration into the global economy. Reformers both moderate and more radical found common ground in their shared conviction that the economy—especially the rural sector—needed “room to breathe.”⁵

³ David Shambaugh, *China’s Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (Washington D.C., Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and University of California Press, 2008), 4.

⁴ Richard Baum, “The Road to Tiananmen: Chinese Politics in the 1980s,” in Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *The Politics of China*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 340–471, 341.

⁵ Barry Naughton, “The Impact of the Tiananmen Crisis on China’s Economic Transition,” *China Perspectives*, no. 2 (2009): 63–78, 65.

During the initial period, from 1979 to 1984, the reforms focused on restructuring the farming system. People's communes were replaced with household farming and more consumption of self-generated products was allowed. As a result, households not only managed their own farming operations but also could keep the fruits of their labors.

In 1984, following these rural reforms, new nationwide reforms were initiated, the so-called urban economic reform. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee's resolution adopted in October 1984 declared that "the law of value must be consciously followed and applied."⁶ The system of centrally fixed prices was revised and a price reform was introduced. Although the new system was designed to reflect the shifts in supply and demand more freely, not all prices were released to find their market level. While the prices of certain products were under strict government control, prices of most farm products were deregulated, and the prices of certain other goods were allowed to fluctuate within a certain range. Prices of raw materials under mandatory planning were fixed, whereas prices of extra-plan output could vary according to market conditions.⁷ As part of the enterprise reform, a director responsibility system for state-owned enterprises was designed to separate ownership and management and reduce party and administrative intervention in enterprises. However, the reform failed to revitalize the enterprise system for several reasons, the most important being the lack of price reforms. The mixed price system and decentralization resulted in unprecedented inflation and corruption. Local authorities who controlled the supply and allocation of (inexpensive) fixed-price goods began investing in the more profitable light and consumer goods industries, and indulged in rounds of selling and reselling these goods at ever higher prices.⁸

In May 1988, the party leadership decided to push ahead with price reforms in the face of mounting inflation. This resulted in a wave of urban consumer panic, triggered by rumors of impending price decontrol and "rendered politically volatile by deepening public resentment over flagrant official profiteering."⁹ As a consequence, in September of the same year, the central leadership reoriented its effort toward "improving the economic environment and rectifying the economic order," meaning essentially curbing inflation and corruption. This meant that price reforms and other reform measures were postponed.¹⁰

⁶ Yanqi Tong, *Transitions from State Socialism: Economic and Political Change in Hungary and China* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), 77.

⁷ Kathleen Hartford, "The political economy behind the Beijing spring," in Tony Saich, ed., *The Chinese People's Movement: Perspectives on Spring 1989* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1990), 50–83, 61–63; Keith Crane and K.C. Yeh, *Economic Reform and the Military in Poland, Hungary and China* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1991), 87–91.

⁸ Hartford, "Political economy," 63.

⁹ Baum, "Road to Tiananmen," 344.

¹⁰ Crane and Yeh, *Economic Reform*, 93.

Parallel to the uneven process of economic development was a sharp increase in the consumer price index, estimated at 18 to 20 percent. In early 1989, unofficial estimates mentioned an inflation rate that had become as high as 30 to 40 percent.¹¹ All this, particularly the sudden steep increase in food prices, further deteriorated living conditions and morale in the cities, especially among intellectuals, students and public servants. “China continued to suffer from the worst distortions of the old system without enjoying the anticipated benefits of the new.”¹² In May 1989, summarizing the causes of the emerging political and leadership crisis in China, the report of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs referred to the inconsistency, discrepancy, and insufficiency of the reforms.¹³ In sum, the political crisis that climaxed at Tiananmen was heightened, if not actually caused, by what American political scientist Lowell Dittmer has described as a crisis of incomplete reform.¹⁴

“Reform and opening up” (改革开放 *gaige kaifang*) was only one aspect of Deng Xiaoping’s strategy. The other, equally important element of his plan to reform China was first formulated in his speech on 30 March 1979, in which Deng set the political limits of reform by establishing the “Four Cardinal Principles”: adherence to the socialist road, dictatorship of the proletariat, the leading role of the communist party, and the supremacy of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought. At the core of these four principles was to be the leadership of the CCP, because whoever controlled the party, by definition, also represented the people and thus had the right to exercise dictatorship on behalf of the proletariat and the authority to interpret what Marxism really means.¹⁵ By setting out this political framework, Deng, “the man of development under dictatorship,” expressed his determination to take a firm stand against any political liberalization that might have challenged the ruling authority of the party.¹⁶

Similar to the situation in the Soviet Union, China’s leaders understood that effective markets require a free flow of goods, people and information. They also saw their own version of glasnost spill over into the political sphere in the form of demands for political participation. However, the majority of Chinese leaders perceived these demands as a threat to the leadership role of the party, even to

¹¹ Report of the Fourth Territorial Department of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, On the Domestic situation in China, Budapest, 26 May 1989, in Hungarian National Archives (HNA), XIX-J-1-j-Kina-2-001433/4-1989.

¹² Baum, “Road to Tiananmen,” 344.

¹³ Report of the Fourth Territorial Department of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, On the Domestic situation in China, Budapest, 26 May 1989, in HNA, XIX-J-1-j-Kina-2-001433/4-1989.

¹⁴ Lowell Dittmer, “China in 1989: The Crisis of Incomplete Reform,” *Asian Survey* 30, no. 1 (January 1990): 25–41.

¹⁵ Crane and Yeh, *Economic Reform*, 95.

¹⁶ Michel Bonnin, “The Chinese Communist Party and June 4th: Or how to get out of it and get away with it,” *China Perspectives*, no. 2 (2009): 52–61.

the very existence of the system, and as a result they suppressed all forms of organized opposition.¹⁷

From the outset of reforms in China, the leadership attempted to transform the political power-holders' style of wielding power, to control political interventions in economic management and the arbitrary use of power, and to separate economic management and political decision making. Separation of party and government, supervision of political power through checks and balances and through law and institutions, and participation of the masses were also among the issues in the Chinese leadership's discussions about political reform. There was only one point on which the leadership recognized no compromise: that all reforms had to strengthen the party's leadership. The Chinese leaders firmly rejected the tendency toward what they called "bourgeois liberalization," (资产阶级自由主义 *zichanjieji ziyoushuyi*), a term that the authorities never clearly defined, but which can be interpreted as "wanton expression of individual freedom (individualism) that poses a threat to the stability and unity of the country."¹⁸

By 1987, the notion of pluralism also became a matter of consensus, in part because economic reform heightened socioeconomic differences. On the eve of the thirteenth party congress in 1987, reform-minded Acting General Secretary Zhao Ziyang argued before the Central Committee that in a socialist society "people of all kinds [...] share common interests, but their special interests should not be overlooked. The conflicting interests should be reconciled."¹⁹ As to the question of democratization, no agreement was made on how and how soon democracy should be achieved. Under the pressure of mounting social and political tensions generated by the economic reform, the majority of China's leaders increasingly embraced the opinion that reform required authority, not democracy.²⁰

Official tolerance of opposition movements was always limited in China. The Confucian tradition justifies criticism of the government on moral grounds, but it does not guarantee the legality of opposition. By the late 1950s, no independent political organization existed in China, since the CCP did not allow any political organization outside its control to survive. Whenever popular criticism exceeded the framework that was still acceptable for the central leadership, independently organized political activities were ruthlessly suppressed.²¹

¹⁷ Andrew C. Janos, "Social Science, Communism, and the Dynamics of Political Change," *World Politics* 44, no. 1 (October 1991): 81–112, 102.

¹⁸ Julia Kwong, "The 1986 Student Demonstrations in China: A Democratic Movement?" *Asian Survey* 28, no. 9 (September 1988): 970–85, 983.

¹⁹ Zhao Ziyang, "On Separating Party from Government," *Beijing Review*, 14–20 December 1987, 20.

²⁰ Tong, *Transitions*, 157.

²¹ The same is true today. The authorities know no mercy when dealing with attempts to organize groups that oppose the existing order, either in the form of human rights activities (Charter 2008), oppositional parties (the Democratic Party) or religious movements (Falun Gong).

Parallel to the cycles of reform and readjustment in the area of the economy, the CCP’s policy towards intellectuals also “oscillated between periods of repression and [...] periods of relative relaxation.”²² Encouraged by growing ideological openness, intellectuals started to organize collective activities and groups to voice their political demands right after the announcement of the new reform course in 1978–79. Neither the Democracy Wall Movement²³ nor the student demonstrations in 1986–87 confined themselves to the officially set boundaries.

In 1979, the term “democracy” (民主 *minzhu*) “primarily expressed a desire for rulers more prepared to listen to the people express their concerns.”²⁴ The authorities tolerated the expressions of discontent in Beijing only to the point when Wei Jingsheng published his famous article entitled “Democracy: The Fifth Modernization.”²⁵ Wei was arrested and sentenced to fifteen years in prison, allegedly for revealing military secrets.²⁶ Deng’s proclamation of the four cardinal principles upon which debate was not allowed within the PRC was a response to the challenge that the intellectuals of the country had posed to the leadership.

The political reforms of the government served as a mobilizing factor for the 1986 student protests as well. Students of the Chinese University of Science and Technology in the eastern city of Hefei (Anhui Province) began to protest when authorities failed to implement direct elections as promised. Soon pro-democracy protests were held in several cities, including Shanghai and Beijing, there on Tiananmen Square. Compared to the Democracy Wall Movement, the student demonstrations in 1986–87 were significantly larger and better organized. In Shanghai, students even had opportunities to negotiate with local party and government officials, including Jiang Zemin, who was then serving as the mayor of the city. They demanded recognition of their movement as patriotic and correct, as well as no recrimination against students who participated. Contrary to official reports, the student movement was actually poorly organized. Although the students also raised issues that went beyond their personal interests, namely, major

²² Merle Goldman, *China’s Intellectuals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 9.

²³ The Democracy Wall Movement started during the winter months of 1978–79 with the posting of large character posters, complaints and protests about the ills of China on a long brick wall to the west of the former Forbidden City, at the intersection of Chang’an Avenue and Xidan Street in Beijing. Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard, “The Democracy Movement in China, 1978–1979: Opposition Movements, Wall Poster Campaigns, and Underground Journals,” *Asian Survey* 21, no. 7 (July 1981): 747–74, esp. 759–70.

²⁴ Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *China in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 71.

²⁵ Wei’s essay that he posted on the “Democracy Wall” in Beijing played on the official Chinese policy of “Four Modernizations” in the fields of agriculture, industry, technology, and defense. Published in William Theodore de Bary et al. eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 497–500.

²⁶ Wei Jingsheng (1950–) is one of the best-known Chinese political exiles. He now lives in the United States.

social concerns affecting society at large, including democracy, freedom of the press, bureaucratism, nepotism and corruption, Canadian sociologist Julia Kwong argues that it is misleading to call the student demonstrations in 1986–87 a democratic movement. This is because “most students were demonstrating primarily to show their concern over the social ills of the country and their impatience in resolving them,” but their demands did not threaten the government since they were not asking for changes that challenged the fundamental structure of the political and social systems.²⁷ The term “democracy” was merely rhetorical, giving the movement the unity and flexibility to incorporate various grievances at the different university campuses. By complaining about campus facilities, inadequate dormitories and food services, as well as expressing their impatience with the slow pace of change, the students, in a way, affirmed their approval of the government’s policy direction. It was the non-threatening nature of their demands that put the government off guard and kept it from taking prompt action. Action was only taken when the demonstrations became so large and so widespread that they attracted the world’s attention.²⁸

The official Chinese assessment of the 1986 demonstrations clearly mirrors the authorities’ fear of uncontrolled, organized forms of discontent. The official version of events asserts that students initially complained only about their living conditions (the quality of food, the introduction of tuition fees, etc.). Later, however, allegedly under the influence of outside forces, the students took to the streets with exclusively political demands, especially in Beijing. They demanded the withdrawal of the party and the government from the economy, and practically rejected the Four Cardinal Principles. The leadership has asserted that it felt an urgent need to calm down the protests for two reasons. First, the ongoing discussions about the issue of political reform set forces into motion that dismissed the party’s reform policy as being insufficient. These forces were subsequently attacked by the party leadership as “rightist.” Secondly, the process of polarization did not find acceptance among the country’s workers, who had been used to egalitarianism for decades. The Chinese authorities opined that street demonstrations were dangerous because they could have provided ground for these two forces, with their different motivations, to unite.²⁹

Soon after the outbreak of the demonstrations on Tiananmen Square, the authorities launched a counter-attack. The campaign against “bourgeois liberalization,” which followed the demonstrations in January, lasted a few months, with students receiving intensified ideological education after the campuses had quieted down. However, the participants in the demonstrations did not suffer any sort of recrimination.

²⁷ Kwong, “1986,” 981.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 985.

²⁹ Conversation between Chinese diplomat Chen Zhiliu and Hungarian MFA head of department Bálint Gál, Budapest, 30 December 1986, in HNA, XIX-J-1-j-Kína-13-004915/1-1986.

The most significant consequence of the 1986–87 student demonstrations was the removal of Hu Yaobang from the post of Party General Secretary in January 1987.³⁰ According to Deng and the party elders, Hu’s mistake was that he favored the introduction of more “democratization” or plurality into the political system and that he had not taken prompt action to contain the movement. The official position was that Hu called for more political reform than the system could bear, and, in effect, had gone beyond the consensus reached within the leadership concerning the pace and content of the reform agenda.³¹ To the masses Hu became the symbol of a “liberal” leader, sympathetic to the rightful demands of the people.³²

The 1989 student democracy movement

In the spring of 1989, university students staged the largest anti-government demonstration since the founding of the PRC. The unexpected confluence of former Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang’s death on 15 April, the seventieth anniversary of the 4 May 1919 student movement, and the summit meeting between Deng Xiaoping and Mikhail Gorbachev on 16 May resulted in the most serious political challenge faced by the CCP since it had come to power.

It was Hu Yaobang’s death that sparked the Tiananmen demonstrations. In a highly symbolic show of support for reformist ideas, with “the dead being used to exert pressure on the living,” (用死人压活人 *yong si ren ya huo ren*), mourners gathered on the square and commemorated the liberal leader who had been demoted for failing to crack down on the student protests of late 1986 and early 1987. The mourners demanded freedom of the press and to demonstrate, as well as an end to corruption. At first the events seemed quite similar to the 1976 Tiananmen Square Incident prompted by the death of Zhou Enlai, when the

³⁰ The army leadership resisted accepting Hu Yaobang as party leader and chairman of the Central Military Committee because of his allegedly weak character and lack of authority. This also contributed to his dismissal. See Hungarian ambassador’s cable, Beijing, 12 January 1987, in HNA, XIX-J-1-j-Kína-25, 2-00210-1987.

³¹ The Hungarian embassy in Beijing did not consider the dismissal of the general secretary as a sign of crisis within the CCP leadership. Ambassador Iván Németh concluded that the “CCP leadership shows unity and works effectively,” and argued that the dismissal of Hu Yaobang was necessary in order “to prevent a crisis,” proving the leadership’s ability to renew its unity through compromises in the case of emergency. The Hungarian embassy’s opinion on the Chinese domestic situation, Beijing, 17 April 1987, in HNA, XIX-J-1-j-Kína-200-001292/5-1987.

³² After his dismissal as general secretary, Hu was allowed to retain his membership in the Politburo. This step shows the self-confidence of the new leadership toward conservatives at home and was meant as a gesture toward those foreign countries that were concerned about the future of Chinese reforms. Discussion with leading diplomats of the Chinese embassy in Budapest, 30 October 1987, in Historical Archive of the Hungarian State Security (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történelmi Levéltára, ÁBTTL), 1. 11. 4. S-II/2/87, 245.

memorial ceremony turned into a mass demonstration, the first large scale spontaneous movement in the capital since the establishment of the PRC. Paradoxically, that event was a demonstration in support of Deng Xiaoping, the person who thirteen years later, in 1989, was the key person who ordered the army units to crush the demonstrations.³³

Hu Yaobang's funeral was scheduled for 22 April. Although demonstrators had been prohibited from entering the square when the memorial service was held, students arrived at Tiananmen Square in large numbers during the previous night and remained there despite the ban. A few party leaders attempted to persuade Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang to convene a Politburo meeting and discuss the situation before departing for Pyongyang on 23 April, but Zhao did not feel the necessity for such a meeting. Before his departure, Zhao suggested to his colleagues in the Politburo that while the authorities "should firmly prevent the students from demonstrating and should get them to return to classes immediately" and "should use legal procedures to punish severely all who engage in beating, smashing and robbing," "the main approach to students should be one of persuasion."³⁴

On the next day, in the wake of renewed student demonstrations, the declaration of a boycott of classes, and the establishment of a national students' federation, Premier Li Peng convened a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Politburo.³⁵ The hard-liners, with Deng Xiaoping's support, decided that the country was facing "planned and organized political anti-Party and anti-socialist turmoil" and called on the people to "fight hard to rapidly quell the unrest." On 26 April, *People's Daily*, the party's central organ, published an editorial entitled

³³ The events of 1976 were not entirely free of violence. On the afternoon of 5 April, five vehicles and a small building at the southeast corner of the square, where the joint command post of the armed forces was located, were set on fire. After some hesitation, the authorities emptied the square. Ironically, the events in 1976 led to the renewed sidelining of Deng Xiaoping. Zhang Chunqiao, who followed the developments from the window of the Great Hall of the People, compared the events on the square to the 1956 Hungarian uprising, and called Deng Xiaoping China's Imre Nagy. On 7 April, Mao endorsed Zhang Chunqiao's evaluation, and agreed "to throw him [Deng] out." On the same day, the Politburo accepted the appointment of Hua Guofeng to first vice-chairman of the CC and premier, and the dismissal of Deng from all his posts. On the 1976 Tiananmen Square demonstrations, see Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 424–28.

³⁴ Zhang Liang, Andrew J. Nathan, and Perry Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 50.

³⁵ One of the aims of Zhao's visit was to act as a mediator between Tokyo and Pyongyang. The Japanese had requested China to play such a role during Premier Li Peng's visit to Japan a few days earlier. The detailed proposals were carried to North Korea by Zhao Ziyang. Still in February, President Bush, during his visit to China, expressed his gratitude to the Chinese for their role as mediators, and the Americans expressed their hope that Zhao might persuade Kim Il-sung to soften its position toward American and Japanese proposals for negotiations. Ciphred telegram, Beijing, 5 May 1989, no. 168, Jász, in *ÁBTL*, 1. 11. 4. S—II/2/1989, 132.

“Take a Clear-cut Stand Against Turmoil” and condemned the student movement for seeking to “poison people’s minds, create national turmoil, and sabotage the nation’s stability and unity.”³⁶ When in response tens of thousands of students marched through Beijing’s streets into the square, huge crowds of Beijing residents cheered the peaceful demonstrations. The hard-liners issued a clear warning that “troops will be dispatched if necessary,” but in the General Secretary’s absence, they refrained from using military force to restore order.

The leadership had become polarized between hard-liners urging a crackdown and those favoring dialogue with the demonstrators. On 4 May, the students’ march to commemorate the 4 May 1919 Movement attracted the growing participation of the city’s population from all walks of life; even journalists from *People’s Daily* and other state-run media joined the protest. While the students rallied in the square, Zhao Ziyang made a speech to delegates from the Asian Development Bank in which he set forth a soft line, calling the students well intentioned and patriotic, and declaring that “reasonable demands from the students should be met through democratic and legal means.”³⁷

During the following two weeks, Zhao’s soft line stayed in effect. As a result of the General Secretary’s permission for the official Chinese media to cover the protests, the press initially reported on the anti-government activities with significant accuracy and even sympathy.³⁸ As Mike Chinoy, CNN’s Beijing bureau chief in 1989 observed, “an unprecedented wave of openness was sweeping through the Chinese media. CCTV [China Central Television] began to broadcast regular, balanced reports on the protest, while the *People’s Daily* and other official newspapers ran sympathetic articles about the students, as well as photographs of the huge crowds in Tiananmen.”³⁹

It was Mikhail S. Gorbachev’s visit to China that ultimately changed the course of events and led to the bloody crackdown on demonstrators. Before the visit, the Chinese authorities made an extraordinary move: they allowed representatives of the international media to cover the event. Originally, the summit meeting between Deng and Gorbachev was planned to be presented as one of the most important diplomatic achievements of the chief architect of China’s foreign policy. However, as international television crews began their live coverage from Beijing, the students realized that the media gave them leverage. They intended to use it. As Chinoy noted, by mid-May the students “were far more sophisticated in handling the media than they had been just a few weeks

³⁶ 必须旗帜鲜明地反对动乱 [Bixu qizhi xianming de fandui dongluan] *People’s Daily*, 26 April 1989, 1.

³⁷ “Students’ Reasonable Demands to Be Met through Democratic, Legal Channels: Zhao,” *Xinhua*, 4 May 1989, in Michel Oksenberg, Lawrence R. Sullivan, and Marc Lambert, eds., *Beijing Spring, 1989: Confrontation and Conflict. The Basic Documents* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1990), 254, Document 31.

³⁸ Dittmer, “China in 1989,” 32.

³⁹ Mike Chinoy, *China Live* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 213.

earlier,” preparing their signs and banners in English and in Russian for the cameras.⁴⁰

Radical students decided to escalate tactics and start a hunger strike on the square. Their announcement and commitment (“Farewell moms and dads, please forgive us. Your children cannot have loyalty to our country and filial piety to you at the same time.”⁴¹) stirred powerful emotions and attracted more widespread support from the public. The protest gathered momentum and an alliance between intellectuals, students, workers and ordinary citizens began to take shape. Even independent organizations such as the Beijing Workers’ Autonomous Union appeared and had an organized presence on the Square. American political scientist Andrew Walder argues that “the workers’ unprecedented political response helped transform a vibrant student movement into the most severe popular challenge to Communist Party rule since 1949.”⁴²

The events surrounding Gorbachev’s visit embarrassed the regime before the world and strengthened the position of hard-liners at home.⁴³ On 16 May, Yang Shangkun, one of the hard-line party elders argued that as a result of Zhao’s strategy, “these last few days Beijing’s been in something like anarchy.”⁴⁴ As a consequence, the leadership finally decided to crack down hard on the protesters.

On the morning of 17 May, an extended Politburo Standing Committee meeting was held at Deng Xiaoping’s residence. After a heated debate, Deng’s conclusion was that “we should bring in the People’s Liberation Army and declare martial law in Beijing” with the aim “to suppress the turmoil once and for all and to return things quickly to normal.”⁴⁵ Although Zhao Ziyang expressed his

⁴⁰ Ibid., 207.

⁴¹ Hunger Strike Announcement, Originally Printed at Tiananmen Square in *Xinwen Daobao* [News Express], 12 May 1989, in Oksenberg, Sullivan, and Lambert, *Beijing Spring*, 260, Document 33.

⁴² Andrew G. Walder, “Workers, Managers and the State: The Reform Era and the Political Crisis of 1989,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 127, Special Issue: The Individual and State in China (September 1991): 467–92, 467. In 1989 we cannot yet speak of an organized civil society in China. Béja and Goldman have noted that “an embryo of organized civil society appeared to be taking shape in Tiananmen Square” (p. 22), but added that terms such as “pro-democracy movement” or “opposition movement” referred only to “the scattered individuals and groups interested in political reforms who attempted to establish informal networks of like-minded counterparts.” Jean-Philippe Béja and Merle Goldman, “The Impact of the June 4th Massacre on the pro-Democracy Movement,” *China Perspectives*, no. 2 (2009): 18–28, 25.

⁴³ In March 1989, Chinese reformists hoped that the success of Gorbachev’s visit would result in the strengthening of Zhao’s position. See: Ciphred telegram, Beijing, 13 March 1989, 102, Jász, in *ÁBTL*, 1. 11. 4. S—II/2/1989, 87–86. In connection to the demonstrations in Beijing, the Japanese ambassador in Beijing noted that Gorbachev’s visit was successful at least in one aspect, namely that it proved that in China there was a great deal of support for Soviet-type democratization. Ambassador Iván Németh’s cable no. 132, Our Ambassador’s evaluation of the student demonstrations II, Beijing, 18 May 1989, in HNA, XIX-J-1-j-Kína-24-002064/5-1989.

⁴⁴ Zhang, Nathan, and Link, *Tiananmen Papers*, 178.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 189.

reserve concerning the use of military force, finally he too submitted to party discipline.⁴⁶ At dawn on 19 May, in a last desperate effort to persuade the students to leave, Zhao went to the square, accompanied by then head of the CCP CC General Office, Wen Jiabao, to meet personally with the students. It was his last public appearance before he was stripped of all his posts and placed under lifelong house arrest for aiding and abetting the “counter-revolutionary rebellion.”⁴⁷

On 19 May, martial law was proclaimed in Beijing, but the leadership was too divided to resort to force until the night of 3–4 June.⁴⁸ During that night, tanks and tens of thousands of armed soldiers moved through the square and its adjacent streets in Central Beijing, killing hundreds or thousands of civilians. The exact death toll is not known, and will probably never be known.⁴⁹

Immediately after the massacre, the student movement was renamed a “counter-revolutionary rebellion” (反革命暴乱 *fangeming baoluan*).⁵⁰ Deng Xiaoping formulated the official version of events five days after the massacre. In a speech to his officers justifying the suppression of the Beijing demonstrations, he explained that:

“they [the demonstrators] were attempting to subvert our state and overthrow the Communist Party, which is the essence of the issue. If we do not understand the fundamental problem, it means we are not clear about the nature of the issue [...] It all became clear once the incident broke out. They [the demonstrators] had only two key goals: one was to overthrow the Communist Party, the other was to topple the socialist system. Their aim was to establish a bourgeois republic totally dependent on the West.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ Ibid., 189–90.

⁴⁷ Zhao’s name has been subject to official blackout since 1989. I experienced this effort to erase Zhao from public memory when I spent the 1989–90 academic year studying Chinese in Beijing. In one of our textbooks, which had been written and published in 1986, the language instructor blacked out Zhao’s name from the phrase “Premier Zhao Ziyang” each time it appeared.

⁴⁸ It was the second time within three months that the government proclaimed martial law. Following outbreaks of nationalist unrest in Lhasa, martial law had been declared in the Tibetan capital in early March.

⁴⁹ Official sources claim that thirty-six people died on 3–4 June, but the unofficial death toll provided by survivors and international observers is several hundred or more. Chen Jian, “China and the Cold War After Mao,” in Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), vol. 3, 181–200, 200. Ding Zilin, whose son was killed during the crackdown, recorded 92 deaths in her *4 June Death List*. Ding Zilin, *Liusi shounanzhe mingce* (Hong Kong: The Nineties Monthly, 1994). Quoted in: Dingxin Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 203–4.

⁵⁰ Later on the events were gradually downgraded to “disturbance” (动乱 *dongluan*), “incident” (事件 *shijian*), and finally to “skirmish” (风波 *fengbo*, i.e., “wind and waves”).

⁵¹ “Address to Officers at the Rank of General and above in Command of the Troops Enforcing Martial Law in Beijing,” 9 June 1989, in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, vol. 3 (1982–92)* ed. by *People’s Daily Online*, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/c1990.html> (accessed 26 September 2009).

China and Eastern Europe after 4 June

As a result of seven weeks of demonstrations in Tiananmen Square and in cities throughout China, the party's internal cohesion and legitimacy were seriously undermined, just at a time when communism was in a state of turmoil in Eastern Europe and in the USSR.

It is a symbolic coincidence that on the same day the People's Liberation Army opened fire on peaceful demonstrators in Beijing, in Europe the first communist regime lost power, smoothly and peacefully, through democratic means. In Poland, the first "semi-free" elections were held, in accordance with an agreement reached at the roundtable talks, which resulted in the victory of Solidarity, the first independent trade union within the Soviet bloc.⁵² It was probably the most pregnant manifestation of the rift within the socialist world between the orthodox hardliners and the reformists choosing the road of peaceful transition. British journalist and BBC Beijing Bureau Chief in 1989, James Miles, has noted that "if Tiananmen was a body blow to the Chinese communist structure, the elections in Poland and the rapid collapse of communism across the European continent in the months that followed were a series of debilitating follow-up punches."⁵³

In Hungary, the first plenary session of the roundtable talks was held on 13 June, and three days later the system was symbolically buried at the reburial ceremony of Prime Minister Imre Nagy and his fellow martyrs on Heroes' Square in central Budapest. In November, the Hungarian ambassador concluded that "the contradiction between political changes in the majority of European socialist countries and the Chinese interpretation of 'socialist renewal' seems to be insuperable."⁵⁴

In late 1989, the Chinese leadership followed the unfolding drama in the countries of the former Soviet bloc with great concern. Beijing had every right to consider the systemic changes in Eastern Europe as a direct challenge to both its rule at home and its international position. The developments in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, Bucharest and Sofia posed a challenge to the domestic status quo in China, encouraging pro-democracy forces and alarming Chinese leaders. The systemic changes and the abandonment of the socialist system claimed by the Chinese communists to be superior to capitalism further undermined the internal and external legitimacy of the Chinese leadership. Domestically, it proved to the Chinese masses that socialism was not necessarily the ultimate goal of social

⁵² The Polish elections were only partly free: the ruling Polish United Workers' Party reserved a majority of seats in the main house of parliament and thus, Solidarity was able to win a majority of seats through free competition only in the senate.

⁵³ James Miles, *The Legacy of Tiananmen* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 41.

⁵⁴ Ambassador Iván Németh's cable no. 323, Beijing, 30 November 1989, in HNA, XIX-J-1-j-Kína-10-001419/5-1989.

development, and internationally, it further isolated Beijing, which could no longer count on the support of the region's regimes.⁵⁵

China classified foreign countries into four categories based on their reactions to the Chinese events. Those countries that condemned China and introduced economic and political sanctions belonged to the first group, China's critics to the second, neutrals to the third, and China's supporters to the fourth. Although East Central European countries did not announce any "sanctions" against China, all high-level visits with China were canceled and even some working exchanges were postponed.⁵⁶ As a result, Beijing classified Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia to the second category and responded to dismissive Hungarian reactions with cutting back the number of economic and trade delegations.⁵⁷ China did not criticize these countries openly, but according to Hungarian intelligence sources, these governments and especially their official media were subject to harsh internal criticism within the apparatus in Beijing.⁵⁸ After 4 June, all news items concerning Poland and Hungary had to undergo political examination before publication. A CCP CC instruction prohibited the Chinese mass media to publish commentaries on or analyses of the developments in these two countries. Only short, factual news items were allowed to be released. The official consideration behind this decision was that criticism would have meant interference into the others' domestic affairs, and positively treating the events in these two countries might have resulted in undesired domestic consequences.⁵⁹

When the East Central European regimes fell one after another, China's leaders were concerned over the possible consequences of the domino effect. Events in Romania, especially the execution of Ceaușescu and his wife, came closer to disturbing Beijing's uneasy calm than any other upheaval in Eastern Europe. The lifting of martial law, which was originally planned for 24 December, was postponed until 10 January, ostensibly because of the outright alarm of the Chinese leadership.

Internationally, the East Central European changes attracted strong positive attention from the developed countries of the West and Japan, as well as from international financial institutions and businesses. The Tiananmen crackdown and the accompanying Chinese economic retrenchment alienated the political, business and foreign assistance decision makers in non-communist developed countries and in international financial institutions, while the positive changes in East Central Europe offered the prospect of diverting their resources away from Chi-

⁵⁵ Czesław Tubilewicz, "Chinese Press Coverage of Political and Economic Restructuring of East Central Europe," *Asian Survey* 37, no. 10 (October 1997): 927–43, 927–28.

⁵⁶ Alyson J. K. Bailes, "China and Eastern Europe: A Judgement on the 'Socialist Community'," *The Pacific Review* 3, no. 3 (1990): 222–42, 234.

⁵⁷ Ciphred telegram, New York, 12 September 1989, 367, Kozák, in *ÁBTL*, 1. 11. 4. S—II/2/1989, 198.

⁵⁸ Ciphred telegram, Beijing, 13 July 1989, 254, Bokor, in *ÁBTL*, 1. 11. 4. S—II/2/1989, 175.

⁵⁹ Ciphred telegram, Beijing, 12 September 1989, 308, Jász, in *ÁBTL*, 1. 11. 4. S—II/2/1989, 197.

na. Chinese officials voiced their concern that this had come at the direct, or at least indirect, expense of China, since the amount of direct foreign investment in their economy was reduced.⁶⁰ The changes in East Central Europe also accelerated changes both in Sino-American relations and in the politics of Western governments, which pledged to reduce China's relative influence in world affairs.⁶¹

The Chinese were aware of the possible negative consequences of their decision to suppress the popular movement. But since the leadership of the CCP and the future of the whole system were at stake, they did not hesitate for a moment to proceed with the crackdown.

Developments in East Central Europe and the Soviet Union also provided positive opportunities for Chinese interests. The most important consequence was the marked decline of the perceived Soviet military threat to China.⁶² Among other things, the decline of Soviet power provided Beijing opportunities to exert greater influence in areas at the country's periphery and sphere of interest, areas that historically had always been seen as extremely important to China's security and national pride, including the Korean peninsula and Southeast Asia.

The response of the Soviet bloc countries to 4 June was not uniform. In the East Central European states, the official views concerning the events were polarized, divided into pro-reform and anti-reform camps.⁶³ The Soviet Union declared the events a domestic issue, and was against any foreign pressure.

The GDR, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria, North Korea, Cuba and Vietnam supported the official Chinese "counter-revolutionary" version. The GDR published all relevant statements and declarations from the Chinese party and state leadership, "in order to make objective information available and counter Western horror stories."⁶⁴ On 5 June, the East German party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* labeled the demonstrations a "counter-revolutionary riot."⁶⁵ On 8 June, the East German *Volkskammer* (Parliament) issued a declaration which,

⁶⁰ Hungarian Ambassador Iván Németh's top secret cable: The Chinese evaluation of Eastern European changes, Beijing, 18 January 1990, in HNA, XIX-J-1-j-Kina-10-0021-1990.

⁶¹ Robert G. Sutter, "Changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union: The effects on China," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 33–45, 35.

⁶² Since the late 1960s, Beijing has considered the USSR its main strategic adversary. Trends in the 1970s and 1980s prompted China to downgrade the immediate threat posed by the USSR, but Chinese military planners still saw a strong need for active military modernization and vigilance to prepare for threats from the north.

⁶³ Czesław Tubilewicz, "1989 in Sino-East Central European Relations Revisited," in Frank Columbus, ed., *Central and Eastern Europe in Transition* (Commack, NY: Nova Science, 1998), vol. 1, 145–61, 147.

⁶⁴ Joachim Herrmann on the Need to Stand Firm, 22–23 June 1989, in Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker Gransow, eds., *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944–1993* (Providence, RI: Berghahn 1994), 35, Document 2.

⁶⁵ "Volksbefreiungsarmee Chinas schlug konterrevolutionären Aufruhr nieder," *Neues Deutschland*, 5 June 1989, 1.

while it did not mention “counter-revolution,” emphasized that the Chinese party and state leadership’s efforts to find a political solution to domestic problems “were hindered by violent, bloody incidents by anti-constitutional elements,” and that the popular government had therefore been “forced to restore order and security through the use of armed force.” According to the declaration, the *Volkskammer* “consider[ed] the events in Beijing exclusively the internal affair of the PRC and oppose[d] any foreign interference.”⁶⁶ A few days later, the GDR foreign minister Fischer received his Chinese colleague Qian Qichen and expressed his solidarity with the PRC and the Chinese brother nation.⁶⁷

Poland and Yugoslavia, like the Soviet Union, declared the events a domestic issue and took a basically neutral position. Public opinion, however, was different; the events were condemned in the press and demonstrations were staged. The governments of neither Poland nor Yugoslavia wished the situation to become sharper, as they were eager to preserve their carefully forged links with China. A brief Polish statement expressed sympathy to the families of those killed and stressed that “what happened in Beijing is a great drama of a friendly country.” However, it added that “we treat this as an internal Chinese affair” and “believe that the conflicts which have arisen will be solved by the Chinese themselves by political means and that caution and realism [will] win.”⁶⁸ The statement issued by the Yugoslav Party Presidium on 6 June expressed “great concern and regret.”⁶⁹

It was only Hungary that condemned the bloodbath at the official level. The Hungarian government issued a statement on 7 June 1989 that expressed its deepest concern about the “tragic events” which had resulted in the loss of “a score of innocent lives,” and further declared that the repression of “fundamental human rights” could not be confined exclusively to the internal affairs of any single state.⁷⁰ The Hungarian party general secretary, Károly Grósz, speaking “on behalf of the leadership and members of the HSWP [Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party] [...] deeply condemned the violence and fratricidal war,” and added that “such methods have nothing to do with socialism.”⁷¹ In Poland and Hungary, the tragic events served as a point of reference for the reform-minded leaderships to strengthen their determination to continue with the reform process. The Polish authorities’ conclusion was that political reform and dialogue must go even deep-

⁶⁶ “Erklärung der Volkskammer der DDR zu den aktuellen Ereignissen in der Volksrepublik China,” *Neues Deutschland*, 9 June 1989, 1.

⁶⁷ “Verbundenheit mit China,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 June 1989, 7.

⁶⁸ Jeanne L. Wilson, “‘The Polish Lesson’: China and Poland 1980–1990,” *Studies in Comparative Communism* 23, no. 3–4, (Autumn–Winter 1990): 259–79, 275.

⁶⁹ Alyson J. K. Bailes, “China and Eastern Europe: A Judgement on the ‘Socialist Community,’” *The Pacific Review* 3, no. 3 (1990): 222–42, 234.

⁷⁰ “A Magyar Népköztársaság kormányának nyilatkozata a Kínai Népköztársaság fővárosában lezajlott összecsapásokkal kapcsolatban,” Budapest, 7 June 1989, *Külsügyi Évkönyv* (1989): 241.

⁷¹ “Grósz Károly: Az MSZMP mélységesen elítéli az erőszakot, a testvérháborút,” *Népszabadság*, 8 June 1989, 1.

er to keep up with economic change.⁷² The reform-minded minister of state and Politburo member Imre Pozsgay stated that “to throw people into a meat grinder and wade knee deep in blood cannot be justified by power considerations,” adding that “the bloody events in Beijing will not discourage the Hungarian reform forces” and that “we have to do our best to preclude any power from using such tools in order to conserve its governing position and oligarchy.”⁷³

Another domestic repercussion in East European countries of Tiananmen and the crackdown on student demonstrations was that it provided an opportunity for the opposition to launch a renewed anticommunist offensive. Referring to the ruthlessness of Chinese communists, the Hungarian opposition attempted to further destroy the prestige of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party by pointing out the inhuman nature of communism. The Alliance of Young Democrats (*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége*, FIDESZ) organized several events to express their solidarity with the Chinese youth demanding democracy. On 25 May, they staged a sit-in in front of the Chinese embassy in Budapest. Although the opposition round table did not issue a joint declaration in response to the Chinese events, all of the participating organizations condemned the bloodbath. Thousands participated in a demonstration in front of the Chinese embassy on 7 June, where representatives of FIDESZ handed over their memorandum to the ambassador. There were demonstrations in Poland and even in the GDR, where demonstrators were arrested.

In foreign policy, the developments in Beijing provided an additional impetus for relations to be improved between the countries of the region and Taiwan. In the late 1980s, the Taiwanese government made repeated efforts to approach the Soviet Union and its European allies in order to break out of its diplomatic isolation and to diversify its export markets. Taipei’s “flexible diplomacy,” which aimed at expanding Taiwan’s international space, was helped by the 4 June massacre and the strong anti-communist sentiments in Eastern Europe.⁷⁴ Immediately after the massacre, the Hungarian ambassador in Beijing proposed that Hungary accelerate its development of economic ties with Taiwan. Although he mentioned that “any kind of improvement in this respect would harm our relationship with the PRC,” he also added that “if the harm to our relationship is unavoidable in any case, it serves our interests to take this risk now, during the period of the present Chinese line.”⁷⁵ As a result, Hungary was the first former

⁷² Bailes, “China and Eastern Europe,” 234.

⁷³ “A pekingi véres események nem bátorítanítják el a magyar reformerőket,” *Népszabadság*, 6 June 1989, 1.

⁷⁴ Czeslaw Tubilewicz, “Breaking the Ice: The Origins of Taiwan’s Economic Diplomacy Towards the Soviet Union and its European Allies,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 6 (September 2004): 891–906, 903.

⁷⁵ Hungarian ambassador Iván Németh’s cable, The proposals of our ambassador in Beijing on how we should conduct Hungarian-Chinese relations in the future, no. 170, Beijing, 13 June 1989, in HNA, XIX-J-1-j-Kína-20-001433/18-1989.

Soviet bloc country to allow Taipei to open a trade office, which occurred on 1 January 1990.

Conclusion

The year 1989 was critical for China and a turning point for Sino-East Central European relations. In the 1980s, the social and economic reform processes in China resembled those in East Central Europe, and as a result China and the European socialist states faced similar problems and dilemmas. Paradoxically, the same reform processes—which on both sides initially ran parallel, serving as a point of reference and contributing to the renormalization of relations—had, by 1989, led to diametrically opposite political solutions. The former binding force turned into a source for difference and separation.

The events in China helped stir up anti-socialist activism in East Central Europe, while the developments in East Central Europe alarmed the Chinese leadership to the extent that they did not hesitate to take action against any kind of organized opposition. Following the systemic changes in East Central Europe, the political foundations of bilateral relations collapsed. As a result of the dominant Western orientation in the foreign and economic policy of Eastern Europe, relations with China became of secondary importance. In Poland and Hungary, the possibility of breaking relations with the PRC was even raised.

After 4 June, the communist leadership in China launched a renewed political offensive to achieve control over its populace and win legitimacy for its autocratic regime. The policy of reform and opening to the outside world was reaffirmed at the fourth plenum of the thirteenth Central Committee, convened in late June 1989. Nonetheless, it took China three years before the reform process got back on track. In the early 1990s, the regime brought inflation under control, resumed economic growth, restored and broadened its relations with the outside world, and strengthened its influence worldwide. In the past two decades China has experienced unprecedented economic growth; in 2010 it had become the second largest economy in the world. During this process, the Chinese leadership has successfully controlled the speed and scope of market reform implementation, maintained political supremacy and a critical level of stability, and generated sufficient regime legitimacy.⁷⁶ Today, it does not seem possible for the system to change, either through revolution or through peaceful transition. Although the reform and modernization process has led to a capitalist transformation of the country’s economy, China, in words at least, still adheres to socialism “with a Chinese character.”

⁷⁶ On the problem of regime legitimacy, see Thomas Heberer and Günter Schubert, eds., *Regime Legitimacy in Contemporary China* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

