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### Report from China

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# NEWS AND VIEWS

## Report From China

By Isabel Marcus

“If you’ve been to China for one week, you think you can write a book. If you’ve been to China for three months, you try to write an article. If you’ve been to China for one year, you’re so damn confused you can’t write anything,” laughingly said a Canadian friend who had been teaching English in Beijing for the past academic year. Mindful of his caveat and still recovering from the post traumatic stress syndrome generated by my week in Beijing—the fateful week which encompassed the continuing of the broad based support for “democratization,” the brutal suppression by the Chinese military, and the heroic resistance by the Beijing citizenry—I agreed to write these observations.

As I began to organize my thoughts for the undertaking, I began to re-experience events as fragments—sharp, jagged, intense, piercing moments—connected yet discrete, luminously clear yet troublingly opaque, comprehensibly grounded yet incomprehensibly remote. Initially I was deeply unsettled by this range of emotions and images. There was no way to “grab hold” of them—to force them into a semblance of a structure of

understanding. They eluded me and invaded me. Now that I acknowledge them for the inexplicable presence that they are—clinically elusive, imaginatively powerful, culturally complex—I can begin to speak them to paper.

During Fall 1988 I was accepted as a participant by the SUNY (Buffalo)/Beijing Higher Municipal Education Authority academic exchange program. This acceptance provided me with an institutional affiliation in China (the Beijing Teachers College). But the term “institutional affiliation” interpreted through an American cultural lens fails to convey the significance of the term in the Chinese context. The Teachers College was my “work unit.” It was the source of my employment, of my housing, of my food at subsidized prices. Were I Chinese it could provide child care and the opportunity for further education or travel. Were I Chinese I would not be free to enter and leave it; rather it would be my societal assignment and a key to my identity. Expulsion from it might make me totally dependent on the generosity of my immediate or extended family. Operating within its ambiance I would be subject to a hierarchical structure of social and political control through the Chinese

Communist party cadres assigned to the unit.

My obligations as an Associate Dean at the Buffalo Law School necessitated delaying my arrival date in China until after graduation—thereby losing two weeks of incredibly valuable time during early May when it became clear that the students were both politically and organizationally a force to be reckoned with by the government. Initially I had planned to leave on May 22. During the preceding week the US State Department had issued a traveller’s advisory and upgraded it. The appropriate response for a sceptic like myself regarding US foreign policy was not self-evident. Radio and television provided general information. For more specific information there were telephone conversations between Beijing and Buffalo. Beijing advised postponement because the situation was “unclear” - fluid, volatile, and unpredictable. At the end of the week largely because “nothing” had happened i.e. the government had made no moves against the demonstrators and there was no street violence (although there was an ominous absence of governmental leadership in a country where the leadership is highly and in a paradoxical way reassuringly visible) the situation was

deemed sufficiently safe by Beijing to allow me to begin my journey. In addition to the formal assessment by the Municipal Education Authority, there was a more “personal” request from unidentified sources at the Teachers College. It was extremely important for Western faculty to come to Chinese institutions of higher education, even though the students were on strike. The government had to see that there was external support for the students and that foreigners were not deterred by government propaganda. So framed, existentially, the choice was a clear one. On May 29 I flew to Beijing.

As a painfully honest aside I should note that when I returned to the States I began to review the file of clippings I had made prior to May 29 as well as to clip newspapers for the week I spent in Beijing. A May 27 New York Times article, framed in terms of rumor and speculation, is startlingly prescient regarding the scenario of the ensuing week. I have no recollection of taking the contents of the article seriously in my assessment at that time.

Arriving in Beijing’s scruffy, dingy airport I was struck by several things: the absence of military personnel or of a luggage search and the rather casual manner in which passport control was exercised. Within a blessedly short period of time I emerged into the

steamy Beijing night to be met by a representative of the Beijing Teachers College Foreign Affairs office—a likeable young man, fluent in English, who had studied in the United States.

The 45 minute drive in the College van on the main road from the airport in the northeast quadrant of the city to the College in the northwest quadrant of the city was an uneventful one. There was almost no vehicular traffic though there were the ever present bicyclists. The text of the only roadside billboard: Tourism Makes Us Prosperous and Progressive caught my attention.

Since I expressed a preference to live on campus I was placed in the Foreign Students Dormitory—a building externally distinguished from others by an iron fence around it. My two room suite was ample but as drab as any college dorm. Later I discovered how palatial it was compared to Chinese student quarters. From my fourth floor window I could hear a reassuring steady stream of pedestrian and bicycle traffic and chatter on campus from early morning until midnight including the discernable “honk” of spitters. (I recalled the literature I had read years ago about Mao’s public health campaign to eliminate public spitting and how, at the time, I could not fathom the attention paid by a government to such an issue. Now being in China I could appreciate the signifi-

cance of the campaign).

In the early hours the traffic noise was accompanied by the rustle of the leaves of the tall trees catching the brief morning breeze before the Beijing air turned heavy and humid. The sound was a memorable one. Several days after my arrival I remarked on it to my interpreter, a law and jurisprudence professor, by asking about references to various types of breezes and leaf sounds in classical Chinese poetry. He responded with great intensity that there were many such references, onomatopoeic and otherwise, and enthusiastically began to quote ancient poetry and translate it for me. The conversation was a compelling reminder of his identification with thousands of years of culture. In his presence I experienced myself and Western culture as arriviste.

Scheduled for the day after my arrival was the formal welcome banquet. It was preceded by a meeting with the Director of the Foreign Affairs Office and the Dean of the Faculty of Political Studies and Legal Education—the key members of my work unit. They were accompanied by three young English fluent Teachers College faculty and the young man who had met me at the airport.

One faculty member struck me as smug and prigish—displaying a clear sense of his own self importance emanating, I supposed, from his

having spent one year in the States. Whether he had “guanxi” (a Chinese term best translated as “connections” such as relatives high up in the Party) I do not know, but he struck me as a caricature of how such a person would present them self. Another faculty member was a shy lecturer trained as a lawyer at the top ranked Beijing University Law Faculty who, when I finally was able to steer the conversation over to her, jumped in with a fierce intensity painfully shaped and constrained by a highly gendered culture. She was deeply interested in divorce law reform. In fact, she was translating Leonore Weitzman’s The Divorce Revolution into Chinese. The third faculty member, also trained as a lawyer at Beijing University, was designated as my guide. He was an extraordinarily appealing and gifted young man—open, expansive, intense, and willing to engage with ideas.

Early in the conversation all five Chinese expressed criticism of the Chinese emphasis on rote learning and formality. They were interested in demonstrations of American teaching methods which they identified as open discussion and the encouragement of debate and controversy. I promised that I would prepare such a demonstration. Privately I reminded myself of the delicate nature of such an undertaking, articulated so well in a forthcoming publication by my friend and CUNY law school

colleague Professor Sharon Hom, who spent two years as a Fulbright scholar in Beijing teaching law. American emphasis on argument and individual opinion is so deeply at odds with the constraints and strictures of Chinese culture exemplified by a Chinese proverb offered by my guide “The bird that leads the flock by sticking out its neck gets killed first.”

We briefly discussed the lecture topics I had proposed in my application for the exchange: Aspects of American Family Law, The Status of Women and the American Legal System, Law Reform with its Anticipated and Unanticipated Consequences, Social Insurance in the United States, and Issues in American Labor Law. The Dean indicated that everyone was interested in each topic but, unfortunately, there was insufficient time for me to lecture on all the proposed subjects; more particularly, there was no time for me to discuss Issues in American Labor Law.

Mindful of my conversations with Americans who had been to China and had told me that pre-banquet and banquet conversations were designed to be an exchange of pleasantries and polite observations, I tried to steer a course between the banal and the inappropriate. Only once was I conscious of an awkward moment of my own creation. I was asking questions about the emerging legal system in China and indicated that I

would be most interested in observing a court proceeding. All conversation ground to a halt. There was an extended exchange among the faculty and the two work unit heads in which the word “waigoren” (foreigner) recurred punctuated by what I came to recognize as “laughter” generated by a difficult social situation. (Paul Theroux’s functional analysis of laughter in Chinese culture in his otherwise snide book Riding the Iron Rooster is a helpful one). Suddenly the exchange ceased; heads nodded; a consensus had been reached. “It is not permitted for foreigners to see such proceedings.” This articulation of a prohibition did not brook of further discussion. A mischievous part of myself urged me to respond “If the rule changes, I would like to observe a court—any old court.” Fortunately I held my tongue.

During the next three days I spent hours wandering around the neighborhood surrounding the college compound. I and another SUNY colleague were the only visible Westerners. Bicycles frequently with another person clinging to the rider or a cart in tow crowded the roadways. Business was flourishing in several neighborhood free markets at which a large number of entrepreneurs were selling produce from the countryside at market rather than state fixed prices. Good looking vegetables and fruits jostled with proverbial penned chickens and ducks. Bicycles

and watches, widely available in Beijing, could be serviced by repairmen. One market had endless stalls of inexpensive clothing manufactured in the PRC with English language labels that suggested export destinations. Several stalls were offering sunglasses, an item which I was told had become a fashionable consumer commodity. No one was wearing a Mao outfit, though I did see a large number of Mao caps in the dusty display case of one state department store.

My guide informed me that merchants in the free market easily earned 2 or 3 times the monthly income of workers in state enterprises which included colleges and universities. Clearly the markets were one component of Deng's 'to be rich is glorious' campaign. I pressed him on what he considered an acceptable income differential in China which since 1948 had attempted to flatten the income pyramid. He sidestepped the issue, explaining that he would prefer the status of a professor despite his low pay to the monied success of a shopkeeper. But, he admitted, his views were not widely shared. People, especially in the sophisticated urban areas, demanded an increasing range of consumer goods and were dissatisfied with their existing purchasing power as the economy experienced waves of inflation.

Alert to the possibility of seeing women with bound feet,

I scanned the crowds looking for elderly females. I found several women hobbling along, aided by canes and resting at short intervals. I looked down and caught my breath. My eyes filled with tears.

We agreed to go to Tienanmen Square on Thursday afternoon (June 1). That morning loudspeakers from the College's nursery school down the street awakened me. It was Children's Day—national holiday. In the playground charming costumed children performed music, dances, skits and gymnastics before their adoring family members. Along with the to be expected mothers, a large number of fathers were present. With the exception of one very short skit there were no individualized performances; each child participated in a performing group. During one music interlude I distinctly heard a children's timpani group accompanying a somewhat scratchy tape cassette version of "Jingle Bells."

In mid-afternoon we began our outing to the Square using public transportation which included a ride on the cavernous, clean Beijing subway system. My SUNY colleague and I were the only non Chinese in the subway car and on the bus whose low ceiling reminded me that I, standing 5'9", was very tall by Chinese standards. People stared at us openly (the Chinese slang word for Westerners is for them our most distinguishing

feature—"big noses"). I, in turn, looked around marvelling at the infinite variety of features and their combinations among the Chinese.

Within 40 minutes we were emerged from the subway onto the Square. The panorama was breathtaking. Red banners with yellow lettering fluttered everywhere (each faculty in the many institutions of higher education in Beijing and elsewhere had its own identifying banner). There were numerous lean-to structures erected to protect the encamped students from rain and the merciless sun. Thousands of people were milling around, engaged in discussion—an unlikely occurrence for a weekday Thursday afternoon well after the traditional lunch and midday nap time. Only a handful of Westerners were in the crowd. One person solicited my signature for a petition in support of the students. My first impulse to sign it was replaced by caution. The person could be a government agent. I had similar thoughts when I noticed the number of Chinese with cameras taking pictures.

The monument at the center of the Square had been designated as the students' headquarters. Facing north toward the large portrait of a benign Mao at the entrance to the Forbidden City was the statue of the Goddess of Liberty and Democracy identified by my interpreter as "an Asian girl." The siting of the statue

was brilliant. She faced Mao boldly, holding the torch as a challenge to his beneficent face. Trying hard to control the sentimental impulses I associate with my seeing the Statue of Liberty and recalling the Emma Lazarus poem at her base I still found myself deeply moved in the Goddess' presence. Unconnected thoughts—cultural diffusion, artistic adaptation of images designed both for internal and external consumption, the indomitable yearnings of the human spirit, the power of public art—raced through my mind. In the end I abandoned analysis in order to allow myself to feel the moment of exhilaration and to absorb its significance.

Tumbling behind such emotions was a distinct feeling of shock that the government had not moved to quell such a challenge (though the government had forbidden the citizens to supply the students with food). The Square, hitherto used by the government to symbolically restate and reinforce its control, had become popular turf. It had literally changed hands!

There was one nightmarish aspect to the Square. Ringing the central part of the square were a series of loudspeakers controlled by the students which were used to read off student demands and provide news bulletins. At the north end of the square near Mao's portrait government turf was reconstituted by government controlled

loudspeakers blaring denunciations of students and complaints that the occupation of the Square had forestalled a celebration of Children's Day. By walking several yards north or south one could literally shift realities.

Since the Forbidden City had been closed to tourists several days earlier (the government had announced that it was concerned that the students would occupy it and rumor had it that there were troops garrisoned inside the compound) we walked west along the main boulevard toward Zhongmengai (the government compound). A respectful, curious crowd stood outside the stone archways behind a few sawhorses. Some 20 feet away on the steps of the entrance 12-15 students were camped out—complete with bedrolls. Near them stood a ceremonial guard of four soldiers. Someone in the crowd who spoke English whispered gleefully "The leaders cannot go in the front gate; they must drive through the side entrance." The symbolic magnitude of the defiance reinforced my surprise at government inaction.

Nearby wall newspapers (handprinted on large sheets of paper) which attracted a large number of readers contained denunciations of Li Peng. I was beginning to feel disarmed. The physical reality overwhelmed what I could identify as my analytic responses to the situation based on my training as a

political scientist and a lawyer. Perhaps it was possible that there would be a compromise, that military violence could be avoided in a situation where the position of the military was crucial to the political outcome. Historically in other volatile situations armies, when called upon to do so, had refused to fire on citizens. On the other hand in a political system like China's where there appears to be a lack of buffering institutions and norms which facilitate compromise and power transitions, power struggles become zero-sum endeavors and "warlordism" (with its deep involvement of the military) becomes the mode for dispute resolution.

On the morning of Saturday, June 4 I met with a group of students. Although the students were on strike they told me that various faculty would attend my lectures. When we finished discussing plans it was apparent that they wished to continue talking. I asked about their interest in jurisprudence and social theory. One volunteered that he adored Sabine's A History of Political Theory. I could barely contain my gasp of astonishment. Good old encyclopedic Sabine, the essential reference text for political theory graduate students! When I returned to the States I ferreted out my aging copy. Rereading the preface I began to understand the significance of the comments. Sabine's emphasis on the contextual nature of political theory and his consis-

tence, therefore, that political theory can hardly be said to be true posed a direct philosophical challenge to Hydianism and Marxism.

Many statements made by the Chinese required interpretation at multiple levels. Failure to recognize this layering might lead one to superficial and inadequate understanding of a comment, though despite this recognition, I often felt incapable of adequate plumbing of the various levels. In this particular context reference to Sabine, a self confessed "social relativist", could be a critical statement regarding the bankruptcy of the present regime in the PRC.

Which philosophers were their favorites? Locke, Mill, Bentham and Montesquieu, Rawls and Dworkin. Let's hear three cheers for the liberal tradition, I thought to myself. One member of the group had written his LL.M thesis on Bentham's penal system proposals. My initial unspoken response was a vision of the Panopticon perfect for China, a society where privacy is not a paramount value. "Why Bentham?" I asked, "Because he believed in the greatest good for the greatest number" was the response. So here was another layer - a non-Marxist broad based vision of distributive justice another critique of the regime using an esoteric aspect of 19th century English social and political theory. "And Montesquieu?" "A good pro-

posal for the structure of government", was the answer. And again there was another layer to the comment, one which I understood after I left China. In early July the New York Times published a transcript of Deng Xiaoping's June 9, 1989 speech in which he singles out for particular criticism those who would undermine the rule of the Communist Party by proposing a separation of powers in government. So Montesquieu too was part of the critical arsenal!

We turned to a discussion of contemporary events and student demands. They were interested in analyses of the qualities of a good leader. We talked about Weber and charisma. One student talked about a lecture on the qualities of a good leader. The class had decided that Li Peng did not have the correct qualities. I ventured that it did not seem that the student demands constituted a broad political platform. There was no mention of a major change in the structure of the political system, though one might assume that in the longer run student demands for freedom of press and expression would lead to political changes. The direction of the economy was not the subject of careful scrutiny. Instead the focus was on corruption in government—a classic Chinese allegation usually portending, when dissatisfaction became sufficiently great, chaos and, eventually, a recission of the incumbents.

"What do you think of the demands?" I asked. "They are good ones" was the reply. "We need to have clear laws to specify the boundaries of free speech and free press. Then we will know what we can say." I was taken aback. "It seems to me that such a statute is the beginning not the end of the inquiry" I said. My comment was brushed aside. For them it appeared self evident that such provisions would provide much more protection than the status quo. That itself was sufficient.

"But there is a dark side to western liberalism" I protested. "In its wake it can bring a radical individualism which is destructive of community, and combined with capitalism it provides the structural underpinnings for the commodification of everything and everyone." I added, "I feel like the Maoist in this conversation." They laughed. "We can resist the excesses of western liberalism by relying upon Confucian values which are deeply embedded in Chinese culture." Cultural pride was evident in their voices and faces. I countered "But, Confucian values stressing the obedience of subject to ruler and of children to father are the antithesis of a democratic outlook. They can provide the justification for authoritarian and autocratic institutions. Consider other countries subject to Western penetration like Iran. The traditionalist backlash when it occurs is a vitriolic

antidemocratic one." We circled around each other a bit longer. At some point it was clear that Confucian tradition like a "deus ex machina" salvaged the story line for them.

After three hours of intense discussion we parted with their promising to return on Sunday to help me and my SUNY colleague rent bicycles for travelling around Beijing. Exhilarated by the intensity of the experience I contemplated finding lunch. At that moment there was a knock on the door. It was another group of young people. The ostensible purpose for their call was to tell me that they had found me a Tai Chi instructor and that my wish to meet with a group of Chinese lawyers would not be fulfilled because the lawyers refused to meet with me while martial law was in effect. A classic example of law-abiding lawyers, I thought. I invited them into my suite. They accepted with alacrity, constantly apologizing for interrupting me. It was clear that they were determined to talk. I offered them several family law books and a set of my teaching materials, which they accepted. We then began an intense discussion about divorce law reform in China. Many women now sought divorces and were willing to disclose incidents of domestic violence in their lives she said. It was becoming a problem for the government. We talked about the role of judges and lawyers and the need to sensi-

tize and train practitioners in domestic relations. We touched upon the role of traditional Confucian values in family life. They acknowledged their importance, but I had the sense that were more time available they might have articulated a critique of them in the family law reform context. At one point one student volunteered that although she was becoming a professional woman because she was unmarried she was expected to go home during the summer vacation and spend time as a dutiful daughter with her family.

During the later part of Saturday afternoon rumors of troop movements toward the Square began to surface. My initial disbelief was dissipated upon hearing short sharp sounds reminiscent of firecrackers and louder dull noises that sounded like explosions. I wandered down the dormitory corridor to the suite of a Canadian couple who were teaching English at the College and who had a short wave radio. Beer in hand we huddled around the radio listening to the Voice of America, the BBC, and Radio China (the government English language station). How ironic! During the sixties in my travels outside the US I often criticized the VOA as the apologist for American imperialism. Now I dared not miss the hourly broadcast. Both the BBC and the VOA reported that tanks and other military vehicles were moving into the city from the

northwestern suburbs along the main road about one quarter of a mile west of the College. Radio China which had up to that time been calling the students "counterrevolutionaries, hooligans and thugs" now added the ominous words "aided by foreign elements." "That's us, comrades," I noted.

Between hourly broadcasts we raced to the front gate of the college where huge crowds of students had assembled. To the west we could hear the frequent sound of gunfire and explosions which lit the darkening sky. Stories of civilian resistance to soldiers attempting to reach the downtown area were legion. Virtually all traffic had stopped on the main east/west thoroughfare beyond the gate. Its absence was noticeable and eerie. Infrequently an empty bus (itself a most unusual sight in Beijing) or a truck would barrel down the thoroughfare. Hundreds of students would swarm into the roadway to stop the trucks. In several instances after talking with the driver a number of students would clamber onto the back of the truck cheered on by bystanders. Everyone knew where they were going—to the Square. The battlefield was foreordained.

I confess that for a brief moment I wanted to join them. They would not permit themselves to feel helpless. Likewise helplessness does not suit me well. Then I realized that I would be helpless no



matter where I was situated.

Around 10:30 a student came racing by on a bicycle brandishing a stick about 4 feet long and 2-3 inches thick. He held it aloft and shouted "The government has given these clubs to the workers at the iron and steel factory down the road and has promised them several months wages if they will go down to the Square and beat up the students." He then raced off to the next campus. A palpable collective shudder passed through the crowd. Then the buzzing began. These workers had supported the students and marched with them in April and May. How could this come about? Interestingly, no student emerged to lead a discussion or to make a speech. Individuals clustered in small groups exchanging opinions or waited silently for the next bit of news. Some walked off to the nearby road where civilian resistance was occurring.

Approximately two and a half hours later another student messenger cycled to the gate. He was bleeding profusely. "They are shooting in the Square. They are not using rubber bullets. They are not shooting at our knees but at our hearts and heads." Then he sped off. Everyone froze in collective horror. The myth that the People's Army would never shoot citizens had been smashed. People stood around solemnly. Another hour passed. No more news. The crowd drifted apart. Still stunned, I

walked back to the dorm. "No one is safe now," I kept muttering to myself.

After a fitful sleep I woke to the rustling of the leaves without the accompanying pedestrian and cycle traffic outside my window. Outside the dormitory dining room a hastily printed sign said "All foreigners must stay on campus." At breakfast several American students who had been in China since the fall were describing their efforts to cycle down to the Square to be with their Chinese friends; each of them had a harrowing tale to tell of mass confusion on the downtown streets, of roadblocks created by flaming vehicles of people peacefully approaching the soldiers and being mown down and of bullets whizzing by them as they rode their bicycles. My guide stopped by to tell me that he was going to the hospitals to check up on students and colleagues who had been wounded. He was grim and red-eyed. A Chinese student who had befriended me came to say that he had been in the hospital looking for friends and that he had seen doctors and nurses who refused to follow army orders not to treat wounded students and citizens shot from behind by soldiers. He broke down sobbing; I reached out to put my arm around his shoulder - uncertain whether this gesture would be regarded as a boundary violation and then deciding that I didn't give a damn.

I walked down the campus road to the hand lettered wall newspapers, which the students used to provide news and commentary as an alternative to government controlled media. Several large sheets of pink paper described the massacre in the Square—the shooting of many students and citizens, tanks rolling over the bodies of students, and the pyre of burning bodies. Students stood motionless and speechless as they read. One writer reported that some troops had to ask Beijing citizens where the Square was located and how to get there. Such a detail—at first reading a wryly humorous aside also had another interpretive layer to it—the writer was telling readers that the battalion was not from Beijing and therefore might be less sympathetic to protestors and resisters. Another writer had posted a slogan "blood cries out for blood."

From there I walked to the college gate. I could still hear the sound of gunfire and the air had a slightly smokey acrid quality to it. A banner was draped above the archway. It named two students known to have been killed and asked "What shall we do?" Next to the banner was a badly burned sub-machine gun with a bullet protruding from it. People were gathered in small clusters. There was talk of a general strike on Monday. As soon as I appeared a number of students gathered around me asking my

opinion about the events, begging me to tell their story to Americans when I returned home, and wanting to know what policy response I thought the United States should undertake. They were highly critical of Bush's failure to issue a strong condemnation of the repression. Some compared Deng to Hitler. "He is worse than the Japanese" another said. People were buzzing about the incident on Chinese radio in which an announcer blurted out "The Chinese army is murdering its own people." He was cut off and replaced by music immediately. During these conversations several students reported rumors that the army had already entered three campuses (Beijing University, Peoples University and Beijing Normal University) strongly identified with the pro democracy movement and shot up the student dorms. People warned me that the army might come to our campus.

The prospect of an army foray onto the campus was a terrifying one. Rumors or reports—there was no longer a meaningful difference between them—regarding the unpredictable and possibly uncontrolled behavior of the army at the Square circulated at the gate. All accounts seemed plausible. Stories were told that the army had dragged students from the dorms at Beijing University, killed them and

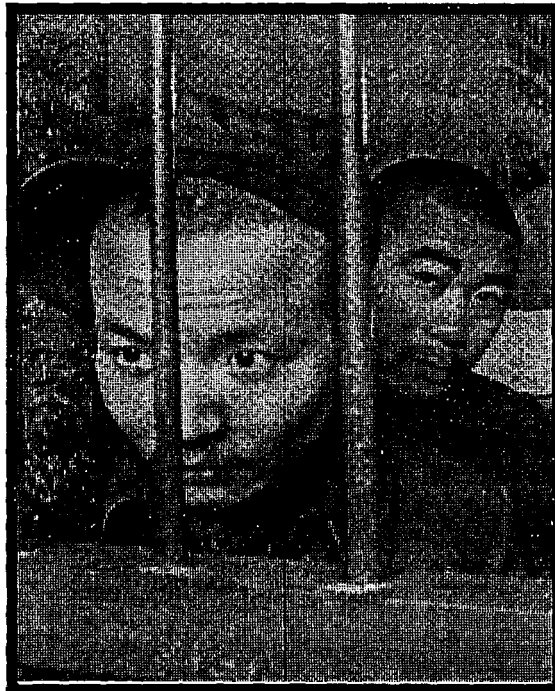
piled their bodies into trucks. It was said that doctors treating wounded soldiers in hospitals found traces of amphetamines in soldiers' urine. I recalled unverified reports during the Korean War that Chinese soldiers attacking in "human waves" were drugged by the Chinese government. During those years I assumed such reports were American propaganda designed to further

ing in reinforcements—a crack unit composed of soldiers from rural areas which had served in Kampuchea and Vietnam and was spoiling for a fight. It was apparent but left unstated that such a unit was unlikely to have any sympathy for the cause of the students and citizens of Beijing. And there was an interesting pragmatic personal element: Would the army vent its wrath on other Chinese or would it turn on "foreign elements?" On the one hand it was a legitimate tactical question. On the other hand it seemed irrelevant. No one could be an innocent bystander.

Contemplating the possibility of an army search of my room, I began a cat and mouse game—packing exposed films from the Square in sanitary napkins on the probably foolish assumption that the soldiers would not rifle through such objects and stashing slips of paper with addresses of Chinese whom I was supposed to contact in rolled up socks whilst at the same time deliberately leaving out other unexposed film canisters and notepads as

decoys. I tried to envision a soldier tearing about my room, screaming at me in a language I did not understand, and my trying to remain cool and calm. At least I could practice in my imagination.

I then returned to the campus gate where a very large



THE LONG WAIT FOR THE LAW

China has only 33,000 lawyers, so it may be months before this accused felon in Zhejiang can go on trial

Taken from *TIME* October 2, 1989

dehumanize "inscrutable Orientals." But now these were accounts which ostensibly came from Chinese sources who suggested that the drugging was government policy. They reinforced the image of irrationality. Finally, there were statements that the army was bring-

crowd had gathered. There was a nervous edginess in the air. People who appeared to be residents from the surrounding hutongs (alleys) mingled with students. I tried to remain at the edge of the crowd but found myself pushed into it as groups of persons surrounded me—some speaking English and others simply wanting to listen to the language. Suddenly someone yelled something urgent in Chinese. The crowd turned toward the campus and began running through the gateway arches. I was swept along cursing myself for wearing flip flops. Images of tripping or being tripped by falling bodies flashed before me. I would be buried alive beneath them. Or, I would be shot from behind and fall wounded or dead on a pile of bodies. Then with perfect clarity the photo image from the Vietnam War of a woman running, her mouth frozen in a scream, appeared before me. I became THAT WOMAN.

Sobbing and breathless, I ran until the crowd thinned out. I was close to the dormitory. I went to my room and lay still for half an hour. I recalled scenes from my own graduate school days in Berkeley in the sixties. Running from the police and the National Guard, a wet bandana across my nose and mouth to ward off the tear gas, was a different experience. Perhaps because it was my own turf and I could communicate with the people around me.

Perhaps because I did not assume that the occupiers would use live ammunition. On later reflection it was this latter point that was so crucial. Were I a person of color in the United States I might not have made the same assumptions. Then, hearing no noises of military occupation, I went downstairs. At the dorm entrance I encountered an English speaking Chinese student who told me that a soldier filled jeep had been spotted down the road and that someone, believing that it was a reconnaissance vehicle likely to be followed by a convoy, had yelled “run.” In fact, it turned out to be a lone jeep cruising down the road and had not turned into the college gate.

I was too drained to return to the gate. I tried to sleep. Outside a full blown rainstorm swirled. Crashing thunder and flashes of lightning recreated a battlefield outside my window. At times I leapt to the window, unsure whether it was nature or the army at work. Of one thing I was certain. It was time to leave China.

On Monday morning my SUNY colleague and I contacted the airlines to change our return reservations. We could only hope that the scheduled United plane would arrive in Beijing on Tuesday morning and be allowed to land. We then informed the Foreign Affairs Office that we were planning to leave. They offered no resistance to our plans. In fact they

indicated that the college officials could not guarantee our safety. There were now stories circulating that the two armies in the city might start shooting at each other on Monday night (Major military manoeuvres always occurred during the evening hours). They suggested that we might wish to spend the night at a hotel.

We asked whether a van from the college would be available to drive us to a hotel. That was not possible; workers were on strike and no drivers had shown up at the college. (Since private cars are so rare in China, the number of licensed car operators is limited largely to those Chinese who drive taxis, vans, and buses). One staff member suggested that we try to ride bicycles to the Friendship Hotel (a 10 minute cab ride) and that he would follow in a bicycle with a cart attached for our luggage.

Finally the SUNY exchange director who was living in the Friendship Hotel found us a van. I took all the books and other items which I had brought from the States and put them in plastic bags. “Take these and give them to students” I said to the sorrowful and frightened looking staff of the Foreign Affairs Office. I took one of them aside. “Please take all the money the Chinese government gave me as my first month’s salary (approximately four times the monthly salary of a Chinese worker) and give it to the student movement” I whis-

pered. He looked bewildered and protested "I cannot take it." Later, I realized that perhaps he, who was planning to go underground because he had extensive contacts with foreigners (In fact, he gave me a list of people in the States and Australia to tell not to write to him for the present), was afraid of being caught with a large sum of money in his possession.

The driver appeared looking harassed and frightened. We drove for ten minutes past the litter of bricks, glass shards and concrete road dividers wrenched from their moorings and placed across parts of the roadway to block the passage of tanks. A right turn into a gateway and I was in a tranquil, well manicured landscape punctuated by solid seven or eight story buildings embellished with Chinese motifs on their cornices. Down the road within the compound tennis games were in progress. I wanted to laugh maniacally at the air of unreality about the place. Ten minutes down the road I was in a place of siege. Now I was in an island of privilege for "foreign experts" (academics and other consultants). The massive buildings with their comfortably appointed suites had been built by the Soviets during the 1950's. The dining room was cool and clean; the tables were set with an array of Western utensils; the menu abounded with Western cuisine selections; the chatter was not in Chinese.

But there were reminders that appearances are deceptive. At hourly intervals I huddled with my hosts around the short wave radio; the news consisted of rumors that war between the two occupying armies might break out during the night. No one appeared to be in charge. It was a situation of maximum ambiguity. Tanks were being positioned around the Square. And, overhead, I could hear the intermittent drone of helicopters. It crossed my mind that there were disadvantages in being in the Friendship Hotel. People's University, a hotbed of student activity, was two blocks away. It had been attacked once; it could become a site for a battle between the armies which might spill over to a highly visible identifiable place teeming with foreigners viz. the Hotel. Or, one of the armies might decide to terrorize foreigners and, along with the downtown hotels, the Friendship was an excellent target.

I sat drinking beer with my hosts, exchanging stories, trying to make sense of the world around us. At one point the SUNY exchange director gave me a sheaf of papers. She told me that she had given her Chinese students who were studying English a copy of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and asked them to write an essay on their dreams for China. Their responses were passionate, patriotic, hopeful and, in many ways, disarmingly direct and unrealis-

tically uncomplicated as good symbolic speech is wont to be. They paralleled what I had heard at the College gate and had seen in the Square; they echoed the sentiments identified with the 1919 student movement. They spoke of a China which went beyond material well being, one what was committed to vaguely articulated notions of democracy and freedom. Then, they said, China could take its place among nations.

After dinner a group of us decided to take a walk. Hearing no military noises we ventured outside the compound. Down the road were several smouldering overturned jeeps and mounds of debris. Crowds of curious onlookers were strolling past them. At the People's University gate were floral wreaths and banners commemorating the dead. Ahead of us we saw a rather thinnish column of smoke with a crowd in front of it. There was a smell of flesh burning. I began to panic. Perhaps the crowd had captured a soldier and was burning him. But there was no screaming or yelling. Emboldened I walked closer—to discover that the smoke was produced by a vendor selling beef he was barbecuing over hot coals.

One member of the group wanted to fax something to her office. At first I responded with disbelief and shock. When it was clear that she was serious and that the one member of the group who knew the area would

accommodate her wishes, there was nothing to be said but to follow the group under the darkening sky to a nearby hotel with such a facility. The hotel clearly built for tourists was replete with gilt, mirrors, plush carpets and crystal chandeliers. No one except the Chinese staff was in the lobby or on the overhanging balcony. A bartender kept rewashing and polishing drinking glasses. A cocktail waitress in artfully tight attire lazed at the bar. The fax line was down, then up momentarily, and then down again. We left; it was dark. Despite the crowds on the street I was not re-assured. My step and pulse quickened until we were back within the compound.

The van driver who had taken us to the hotel had agreed to take us to the airport. The flight was scheduled to leave at 11:30 a.m. on Tuesday, June 6. At 5:00 a.m. we awoke to hear the radio. The war between the armies had not occurred during the night. Tanks had merely remained at their stations. How to interpret this turn of events was unclear. Were more troops being sent into the city? There were rumors to that effect. A call from the SUNY buffalo administration resulted in a rather lengthy conversation about whether the van would come and whether we could get to the airport, whether the plane would land and, if so, whether it would be allowed to leave. The surrealistic quality of the conversation was striking. Both in

the States and in Beijing we were relying on the same radio sources!! We tended to agree that the situation was likely to deteriorate and that even if the US Embassy in Beijing finally organized or assisted in some rescue efforts it would be best to leave as soon as possible.

At 6:30 a.m. the driver arrived. Through an interpreter he explained that he had enough gas for one round trip to the airport, that he had no spare tire, that his tires were balding and that he had heard nothing about the road to the airport being blocked. He asked for the equivalent of two months wages for the ride. We decided to risk it and three of us piled into the van.

As we went toward the downtown in order to join the road leading to the airport, the debris (burned jeeps, tanks, rubble, concrete barriers) became greater. There were no vehicles on the road. At one corner I could see a large crowd ahead with a column of smoke behind it. The driver and I had the same thought; if there were armed soldiers behind the crowd and if they began to shoot, our van would be caught in a crowd of people moving in our direction down the road trying to escape. He took a sharp left and then a right, thereby taking us away from the action but onto a dead end street. Suddenly he veered sharply to the right. We barreled down a bike path behind a hutong. People stood aside and

waved us on; citizens had torn iron gates from their moorings and piled them on the path to prevent military jeeps from wending their way through the alley. We jumped out of the van to push them aside and continued down the alley. I kept thinking about the balding tires and the absence of a spare. If anything happened to the tires we would be stuck in a back alley in northeastern Beijing with the likelihood of no English speakers available and the army several blocks away. After about fifteen minutes we were back on a paved road. The driver looked drained. The road to the airport was clear; the driver did point out an encampment of soldiers along the roadside.

Bedlam prevailed at the airport. Many Americans and Europeans were evacuating Beijing and were clamoring for airplane reservations. None of the Chinese staff had shown up for work at the ticket counters so a skeleton staff of American employees had to manage what could have become a totally chaotic situation. While waiting on line I had the opportunity to talk with other passengers. A number of American tourists did not seem shell shocked. They had merely been passing through. One woman who had come down the Karakoran Highway from Pakistan remarked that their group had no knowledge of any difficulties until they reached Xian where people were assembled around

the wall newspapers. A member of the tour group asked their guide to translate the paper. "Suddenly his English became very bad" she said. "We thought then something might be wrong." Academics, on the other hand, had shared a very special experience with Chinese students. The ones who had been teaching in Beijing looked worn and grief stricken.

Given the airport confusion it seemed amazing that the plane was delayed for take-off by only one hour. As it left the ground, a spontaneous cheer arose from the passengers—one which was repeated when we landed four hours later in Tokyo where all planes to Beijing were delayed. But irony and a surrealistic quality to experience are not confined to geography. I found myself sitting in my seat, numb with tears rolling down my face, looking at the opening credits for the in-flight movie "Working Girl" which are shown against a backdrop of the Statue of Liberty!

Little needs to be recounted of the homebound flight except for two incidents. On the San Francisco-Chicago leg of the flight I was seated next to a Fundamentalist missionary from South Carolina who had spent the last five years in the Phillipines. We chatted amiably for a while about the corruption of the Marcos regime. But I knew she wanted to engage in "god-talk." So at one point I decided to surrender control and when she told me that I had Jesus to thank

for my safe escape from Beijing, I remarked that I was a Jew and thought Jesus had nothing to do with what had happened to me. Her eyes lit up; and a discussion regarding religion ensued. I was exposed to the logic of evangelicals: one line of prose which could be said to constitute the argument followed by one line of biblical text offered as proof of the proposition. Finally we got to the nub of the issue—my salvation. We went round and round about the meaning of life, the inevitability of death, life after death and proof of life after death. Then came the moment of truth in the form of the question designed to play upon human need for certainty. "What if I'm right and you're wrong, Isabel?" she said. I shrugged my shoulders knowing that I needed to bring the conversation to an end. "A bad roll of the dice, I suppose, Brenda" I replied.

The second surrealistic incident occurred in the Chicago Airport Hilton where having missed the last portion of the flight from Chicago to Buffalo we were eating dinner. A businessman sat down at the next table. Before long we struck up a conversation. He was based in Hong Kong and had travelled frequently to Beijing during the past few years setting up joint ventures. He talked at great length about difficulties he had encountered in negotiating with the Chinese but skirted the issue of corruption. He seemed unconcerned about the mounting turmoil.

Finally I asked him about his latest venture; it was a printing plant. I began to talk enthusiastically about the need for books among students. He looked at me bemusedly. "The plant is going to print lottery tickets for the Chinese government—800 million of them on the first run" he said. There were dollar signs in his eyes.



Several weeks after my return the SUNY exchange office in Buffalo received a phone call from a staff person in the Beijing Higher Municipal Education Authority. He wanted to know why I had taken unauthorized leave from my teaching position. "She was fearful for her life and the president of her college told her that he could not guarantee her safety" was the SUNY reply. From the other end of the phone without missing a beat the staff person said "That is not true. There has been no difficulty here. No one was killed." ☹

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### Critical Legal Trivia Quiz

Who wrote the following, and where was it published?

"There is a fair amount of mystification in legal discourse, especially at the judicial and professorial levels. The pooh-bahs of the legal profession exaggerate the neutrality of legal doctrines and institutions; understate the law's political and contingent nature; inflate the competence and disinterest of judges, legislators and other legal actors; and make unfounded claims for the cogency of legal reasoning."

(Answer on page 85)