

THE CALM AFTER THE STORM

BY GEORGE TSEO

"I think the government was...a bit harsh," said Jin, a plump computer consultant with a wispy mustache. The window of our "hard-sleep" train compartment was raised. I pursed my lips in tacit response to Jin's remark and looked past him and the fluttering white lace curtain. Outside, verdant summits towered above a flat, watery expanse of rice paddies. "Moreover," continued Jin, pausing to take a slow drag on his cigarette, "the students were reasonable in their demands."

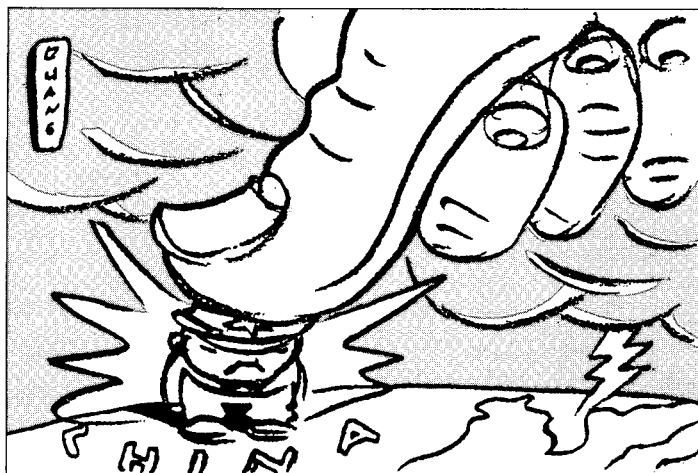
"The students were arrogant," interjected Professor Hu, a lanky, bird-like man. "The regime showed restraint, and in return, the students gloated over a 'victory'! The government had to resort to force. How else could they reestablish credibility?"

Jin lifted his brows as though to say "perhaps," then blew smoke out of his mouth.

During my two-and-a-half-month visit last summer, I discussed Tiananmen only when others raised the subject, which happened perhaps two dozen times. A few testimonials were delivered with bravado. Most were conveyed in normal but perhaps slightly self-conscious tones, and only one was whispered. About half of the people I spoke with still believed in their government; the rest were disillusioned. A few seemed strangely detached, even indifferent; a few were clearly impassioned.

By contrast, during my visit in 1988 *everybody* seemed impassioned. What had happened in the interim to bring about this complacency? How had Tiananmen receded so quickly into the past?

When Jin lost interest in the debate and Professor Hu regained his equanimity, we cut open a watermelon. Its crisp, juicy



slices quenched our thirst, and the conversation turned to a new topic, American cigarettes.

"Life has become untenable, unbearable!" insisted a middle-aged engineer shortly before the new year that would usher in Tiananmen Spring.

"It might have been better had the Japanese won the war," conjectured a People's Liberation Army veteran and long-standing Party member. "We Chinese are finished as a race, and the government's incompetence will ruin us."

A few years ago, one almost couldn't engage in a conversation without triggering a tirade. During my eight-month stay, I heard scores, if not hundreds, of angry declarations. The state was to blame, but the crime wasn't tyranny. It was economic mismanagement. Nobody urged "democracy," and only students responded favorably when I mentioned it. The word on everyone's lips was *inflation*. Prices were rising at about 35 percent a year and at more than 100 percent for some commodities.

Workers relied on work-unit subsidies for meat, fish, fruit, cooking oil, and other modest luxuries. Caggy bureaucrats and state managers offered rare goods and services to those in their favor for a price. Desperate people crawled through the "back door" for such things as television

sets, university placement, and surgery. Some young parents nurtured manipulative traits in their children so that they would one day be able to work the system.

I found anger and greed everywhere. Unemployed young men with time on their hands tried to dress like the toughs they saw in Western movies and picked fights with strangers at the slightest provocation. Shopping was a risky business, as a random

bump in a crowded market could lead to blows. On trains and long-distance buses, merchant bands battled each other for possession of the goods they transported, and innocent passengers sometimes fell victim to bottles and knives.

For university students, graduation meant state-assigned jobs at near-subsistence wages. Entry-level positions more often than not provided trivial duties and idleness rather than challenge. There was no shortage of senior cadres prone to jealousy, and young mavericks were humbled through such devices as assignment to decrepit work-unit apartments, poor school placement for their children, and blocked opportunities for personal promotion, further education, and travel.

State employment amounted to a type of indentured servitude that could never be revoked and only rarely shifted. One could apply to management for transfer, but for a realistic chance of success you would probably need good connections or well-placed cash bribes and "gifts." Alternatively, a rival work unit could bid for you by offering to pay a price for possession of your passport and work certificate, without which you would have no rights to either urban residence or state employment. In April 1989, the students demonstrated in the name of "democracy," but they actually rallied for the sake of professional emancipation. The

workers gathered beneath the students' banners for the sake of their livelihoods.

"On the morning after the massacre," confided a friend, "I saw a column of 40 tanks stalled on the highway. They were all burning. Someone told me that the soldiers had set fire to their own tanks."

The regime had tolerated the occupation of Tiananmen Square for weeks, partly because it wasn't certain that the army could be trusted. After all, inflation had trivialized the meager army pay, and it was only natural to expect soldiers from urban backgrounds to sympathize with the workers. They would join these ranks upon the end of enlistment. Beyond purely military concerns, widespread urban protest had exacerbated a division in the top government leadership. The struggle for predominance must have had a paralyzing effect. Be that as it may, when the humiliation became more than China's paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping, could bear, the troops were sent in.

Force was postponed until a lull in the demonstrations, probably in an attempt to avoid both bloodshed and a test of army loyalty. But the soldiers had no training in riot control; they had no shields, dummy bullets, or tear gas. They had only live bullets and bayonets. When protesters surged back into the streets, pushing and shoving led inevitably to bloody violence.

To truly understand Tiananmen is to understand the mundane factors that produced it. To understand why urban Chinese society has become dormant since the tragedy is again to grasp these everyday realities. Easy credit, which had been flooding the economy, has been stanching. Similarly, fresh currency, which had been printed so liberally that the amount in circulation increased by roughly 30 percent a year, has almost certainly been curtailed. As a result, general inflation has been bridled at about 6 percent, and the primary threat to urban livelihoods has been defused.

The domestic production of large luxury commodities such as televisions and washing machines has been boosted. Their quality has so vastly improved that

the Chinese are now able to obtain near Japanese-quality performance at substantially lower cost. Although Chinese families must still spend large portions of their incomes in order to buy luxuries, these items are within reach. The availability of such goods, coupled with recent government crackdowns on bureaucratic misconduct, has discouraged corruption to some extent.

With improved conditions, public tension has relaxed and public violence has waned. The police appear to be more vigilant. For the first time, armed officers patrol trains, and little freight now travels in passenger carriages. Open-air pool halls, which are often associated with hooliganism, have been banned

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from the public areas in front of movie theaters, although inside the theaters, Western and Western-style action films filled with violence continue to mesmerize prospectless adolescent audiences.

In the short period of 18 months, the "world-champion spitters" of China's cities relinquished that distinction with the help of moderate fines and persistent propaganda. The rivers of bicycles in city streets now actually stop at newly installed traffic lights, sometimes even without a Moses wearing a diamond-shaped badge to raise his arms and perform the miraculous.

In the past, mass transit was not merely crowded, it was jam-packed. It was not uncommon to see a handbag or limb sticking out of the shut doors of a passing bus or trolley. Such sights are becoming rare. During non-peak hours, buses are not necessarily even crammed. This is due in part to the expulsion of peasant vagrants and peddlers from the cities. While these measures were implemented mainly to promote the country's image

during the Asia Games and the justness of some of them is debatable, they have improved the quality of urban life.

Comfort, however, may not be enough. The ghosts of Beijing's great central square still haunt the capital. The millennia-old mandate for leadership in China has been to preserve order, to stave off anarchy and chaos. But in fulfilling this mission, the current leadership has adopted intimidation as its strategy. It is an unyielding leadership that refuses to acknowledge error, let alone guilt. The state's attempt to bury Tiananmen with lies and purges is a constant reminder of the regime's petty arrogance.

Young professionals remain indentured within unreformed work-unit hierarchies. Those with possibly the most to offer the country remain among the most frustrated, their talents and energies untapped. Someday student outbursts could conceivably inspire mass urban demonstrations once again—cause for gratitude that China now has fully equipped riot-control troops. Yet whatever may happen in the cities—however massive an insurrection, however great the fury or deep the blood—it may ultimately prove insignificant.

"On that spring afternoon," intoned an American professor before a small academic audience, "a great serpent of demonstrators—workers and students together—marched through the suburbs of Guangzhou city and out into the countryside. They beat their brass gongs and chanted their slogans, creating a spectacular uproar....The parade passed some peasants in the fields, who were guiding their plows harnessed behind water buffalo. The peasants looked up to see what was happening, as did a few of the water buffalo as well. Then men and beasts returned their attention to the task at hand....At that moment, it occurred to me that from a distance, perhaps from an airplane, this 'serpent'...this animated thread must appear very small indeed against the vast quilt of the fields and paddies."

Eighty percent of the Chinese live in the countryside, and perhaps seven-eighths of these are peasants, whose con-

ditions are quite different from those of city people. They do not depend on work-unit assignments and subsidies because they build their own houses and grow their own food. They hold long-term leases for the land they farm, and they may market for personal profit the crops they harvest, the goods they produce, and the services they provide. Nonetheless,

the unrest of 1989 was confined to the cities, not because the countryside was free of problems, but because the problems had not yet reached critical proportions.

Since the collapse of the commune system in the early 1980s, certain dangerous trends have developed in the countryside. The demise of the collec-

tives has eliminated organized labor sharing during busy periods of the year and thereby increased the need for family labor. Without collective pension plans, children become guarantors for retirement. Not surprisingly, restrictions on family size are commonly violated throughout rural China.

Already, possibly only one-third of adult peasants are fully employed year-round, and the average peasant land allotment is about two-thirds of a hectare. By Western standards, the typical Chinese landholder is more a gardener than a farmer. When the next generation grows to maturity, minimal household tracts will be subdivided further. A significant proportion of the peasants already displaced from the land now work in city factories, but without rights for permanent urban residence. They live apart from their families in cramped dormitories, sending their earnings home and contemplating futures without prospect.

Should the students finally succeed in their bid for professional freedom, which means the right to go wherever they choose in search of opportunity, the government might be compelled to grant similar rights to the peasants. China's cities could swell with shantytowns like those in South America, Africa, and India. On the other hand, if the government continued to confine the peasants to the countryside, their secondary status would be underscored by the university graduates' privilege. China's largely peasant army, whose sympathies naturally lie in the countryside, might come to resent the leadership.

China is not a domino that can be tipped by Poland, East Germany, or even the Soviet Union. It is a country whose isolation and sheer mass impart to it an overwhelming inertia and momentum. The people of its cities cannot by themselves succeed in revolution. Only the army, the peasants, or the leadership itself can instigate sweeping change.

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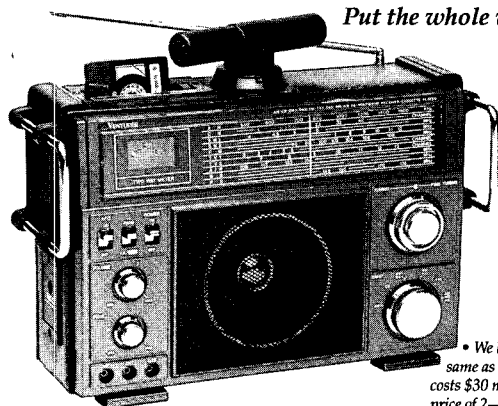
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HINCKLEY AND SON

BY THOMAS SZASZ

Ten years ago, in a well-planned and brilliantly executed attempt to murder Ronald Reagan, John Hinckley, Jr., shot the president, inflicted permanent brain damage on Press Secretary James Brady, injured two of the agents guarding the presidential entourage—and committed existential suicide. The anniversary of Hinckley's crimes was marked by agitation for the so-called Brady Bill, which would establish a national seven-day waiting period for the purchase of handguns. The fate of Hinckley himself was virtually ignored. Yet although Hinckley is as good as dead, his case demonstrates that psychiatry remains our society's most fearsome and most despicable instrument of punishment.

Ostensibly, Hinckley is the beneficiary of the best judicial and medical systems in the world. But let's not forget that Hinckley wanted to plead guilty to his crimes, was forced to plead insanity, and was "acquitted" against his will. Hence, because of the diabolical fictions of law and psychiatry, Hinckley is as innocent of shooting President Reagan as the readers of this column; his deed was not a crime but a symptom of illness; and he is not incarcerated in a prison but is treated in a hospital.

As the symptoms of pneumonia are cough and fever, so the symptoms of Hinckley's schizophrenia were buying a gun, loading it, locating President Reagan, taking good aim, and firing. Since Hinckley is sick, he is in a hospital. The fact that he cannot leave his doctors, just as Saddam Hussein's "guests" in Iraq could not leave their host, casts not the slightest doubt in the minds of many Americans on the validity of the psychiatric fiction that Hinckley is a "patient." Housed in the nation's premier madhouse, Hinckley must be receiving the best treatment for schizophrenia that American psychiatry has to offer. However, his disease must be difficult to treat, as he shows no sign of improvement.

Maybe Clozapine will cure him, though I doubt it. I think it is more likely that he will be discharged via the morgue.

Lest my argument be misunderstood as a defense of Hinckley, let me say that I consider him to be guilty of one of the gravest crimes in law, the attempted assassination of a head of state. He should have been tried, convicted, sentenced to death, and executed—or, perhaps, allowed to kill himself, which is what he wanted and had attempted but was prevented from doing. Perish the thought. After all, every educated person knows that Hinckley's desire to kill himself—expiating his guilt and ending a life wrecked beyond any hope of repair—was

**Under the law, Hinckley
is as innocent of
shooting President
Reagan as you are.**

also a symptom of his schizophrenia. Indeed, thanks to the efforts of John Hinckley, Sr., and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (actually, the National Alliance for the Parents of the Mentally Ill), most Americans now also know that schizophrenia is a brain disease—indeed, "one of the most treatable" diseases. What is the treatment? Psychiatry's magic bullets: the so-called neuroleptic drugs.

The elder Hinckley's participation in his son's life, especially since the tragic events of March 1981, have raised psychiatric charlatanism to unprecedented heights of journalistic, judicial, and medical legitimacy. It was Hinckley *père* who, when his son experienced difficulties making the hazardous journey from adolescence to adulthood, chose to interpret the problem as a symptom of mental

illness, dispatched him to see a shrink, and thus pinned the ineradicable stigma of mental illness to his tail. This critical, initial psychiatric stigmatization had predictable consequences: The youngster's progress toward achieving the powers and privileges of adulthood was further obstructed. But not to worry. The cure was right at hand. It consisted of Valium dispensed by Hinckley *père*'s psychiatrist to Hinckley *filis*.

After submitting to what everyone believed was the best medical treatment for his "illness," John Hinckley, Jr., proceeded to flunk life more dramatically than ever. But, smart kid that he was, he soon saw the handwriting on the wall and apparently decided to stop the charade: He decided (as I see it) to avenge himself against his father by bringing shame on his head and, at the same time, to end his own parasitic and pathetic existence. Everything worked as planned, except for one thing. The hail of bullets from the guns of Secret Service agents, in which he expected to die, did not materialize.

So Hinckley did the next best thing: After being taken into custody, he tried to kill himself. When that effort was thwarted, he wanted to be tried and to plead guilty to the crimes with which he had been charged. Hinckley, Sr., and his lawyers (who are always identified as his son's lawyers) foiled that effort, too.

I shed no tears for John W. Hinckley, Jr. But, to borrow from Thomas Jefferson, I do tremble for my country when I think that God is honest and will therefore not look kindly on a nation that classifies its lawbreakers as sick, its most fearsome prisons as hospitals, its psychiatric jailers as doctors, and some of its most toxic chemicals, forced by the "doctors" on their prisoners, as treatments for nonexistent diseases.

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