



The Tiananmen Papers

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On the night of June 3-4, 1989, Chinese troops violently crushed the largest pro-democracy demonstrations in the history of the communist regime. In this extraordinary collection of hundreds of internal government and Communist Party documents, secretly smuggled out of China, we learn how these events came to pass from behind the scenes. The material reveals how the most important decisions were made; and how the turmoil split the ruling elite into radically opposed factions. The book includes the minutes of the crucial meetings at which the Elders decided to cashier the pro-reform Party secretary Zhao Ziyang and to replace him with Jiang Zemin, to declare martial law, and finally to send the troops to drive the students from the Square.

Just as the Pentagon Papers laid bare the secret American decision making behind the Vietnam War and changed forever our view of the nation's political leaders, so too has The Tiananmen Papers altered our perception of how and why the events of June 4 took the shape they did. Its publication has proven to be a landmark event in Chinese and world history.

The Tiananmen Papers Details

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From Reader Review The Tiananmen Papers for online ebook

Andrew says

Fantastic insider account of Teanamen fiasco. Propulsive, fair and suspenseful! Great job by editors.

Joel says

brilliant window into the inner workings of chinese leadership. the answer why to every question about china's current political climate begins with the tiananmen papers

H says

But the Party also believes it has learned from Tiananmen that democratization is not an irresistible force. There is a widespread view in the West that where globalization and modernization occur, fundamental changes in the Party-state system are inevitable, leading to the rise of civil society and some form of democracy. Whether this is right or wrong, the leaders in power in China do not believe it. For them, the lesson of Tiananmen is that at its core, politics is about force. (xxxix)

Some said that the ten years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) constituted a state of anarchy and that the ten years of reform (1978-1988) constituted a state of government with no doctrine; the former was a decade of turmoil, the latter a decade of aimless change. (17)

At 10 P.M. another report said more than eight hundred students had entered the Square with banners bearing messages such as "Education saves the nation," "Peaceful petitioning," and "Oppose violence." The 8:35 P.M. report said students at the monument were shouting, "Down with dictatorship," "Demand freedom," and "Down with the police." (39)

Today Wang's [Wang Zhiyong, beaten unconscious by officers on Apr 20] bloody clothes were displayed on the campus of CUPSL, and enraged students called for a strike. (40)

1. [fax on Apr 21] The number of students bringing wreaths to the Square in the daytime hours fell off noticeably; the great majority of people milling in the Square were gawkers. (42)

[Zhao Ziyang at Politburo meeting] Second, we must at all costs avoid any incident of bloodshed, because if such an incident should occur it would give some people the pretext they are looking for. But we should use legal procedures to punish severely all who engage in beating, smashing, and robbing. (50)

At 12:50 P.M. [Apr 22], three student representatives knelt on the steps to the Great Hall, the one in the middle holding up a large paper containing seven demands. (51)

[Chen Xitong on fax of meeting Apr 23] At Peking University students are setting up a news center. At Qinghua some students are preparing to set up a broadcast station. This shows that this student movement is a planned, organized turmoil. [You zuzhi, you jihuade dongluan. This is the first occurrence in the

documents of the stock phrase that appeared in the April 26 editorial . . .] (53)

The Associated Press reported that Chai Ling [on Apr 23], spokesperson for the newly formed United Students' Association, said the Peking University students had decided to oppose the original plan to end the boycott on May 4 and now suggested that their activities should have no fixed end date. (55)

[report to party central apr 24] The following is from a conversation State Security personnel had with a student who asked to remain anonymous:

The students said there were five reasons for the rise of this student movement: (1) Many students had been determined to pursue a democracy movement for quite some time, and Yaobang's death was only a catalyst. (2) Students these days feel that Marxist-Leninist theory no longer makes sense. (3) Students are extremely negative about corruption and the general social ethos and have no confidence that the problems can be solved. (4) Students are highly pessimistic about their prospects for job assignment. (5) Students feel strong urges to participate and to make themselves heard. . . . (64)

A few of the extremely radical students have told their parents that "even if I go down, the movement will go forward." Some students have already prepared for bloodshed. (65)

Before the April 25 evening broadcast of the April 26 editorial, there were reports from around the country that the students were growing tired after ten days of demonstrations and that organizers were seeking ways to keep the movement alive. But the editorial created an explosive reaction that pushed the student movement to a new high. (76)

[Yang Shangkun at politburo apr 28] People in Hong Kong are also paying close attention to this student movement, and in their minds they are connecting our treatment of the movement with the return to Hong Kong. Xu Simin, Liao Yaozhu, and other patriotic individuals have been calling publicly for the government to begin dialogue with the students soon and to refrain from taking military action against them. The international reaction to our tolerant handling of the April 27 demonstration has been quite favorable. (89)

At 2:30 P.M. [Apr 29] Yuan [Mu], He, and two other government representatives received forty-five students. Yuan took a hard line throughout. There was no serious problem of corruption inside the Party, Yuan said, and Party leaders were reducing expenditures by canceling the annual Beidaihe meeting at the beach and banning the import of expensive cars. He also denied the existence of a censorship system even though the editor-in-chief of the *World Economic Herald* had just been fired. Demonstrators in Beijing, Yuan claimed, were manipulated by persons behind the scenes who presented a serious threat. He and his colleagues evaded many of the students' questions by changing the subject.

Li Peng and other leaders were pleased with Yuan's performance. Tian Jiyun commented sarcastically that he was an excellent practitioner of shadow boxing. (96)

With Peking University, Qinghua University, People's University, and Beijing Normal University setting the pace, students at forty-five schools were now boycotting class. There were about ninety thousand boycotters, about 70 percent of all college students in the city.

Amitava Mazumdar says

This book provides an excellent study on how governments commit evil. The story it tells is a disappointment (dramatically or theatrically) in that there is no climactic scene in which an evil dictator, sitting in the shadows, utters some malice-filled, murderous instruction like "Let them die" or "Teach them a

lesson". Life is more complicated than that. The final order to crack down on the protesters came about as a result of complex relationships among various bureaucracies and various governing officials. Had it been up to those nominally in charge, the Politburo Standing Committee, the crack-down may never have occurred.

On the other hand, because calls for freedom were inherently violative of the governing principles of the Communist bureaucracy, one wonders whether the crack-down was nevertheless inevitable -- no matter who had the final word.

That's not to say the it was solely the system which was at fault. Some of the decision-makers were clearly concerned with their own well-being, remembering the dangers they faced during the Cultural Revolution. Ultimately, they will have to accept responsibility.

All-in-all, this book would be excellent for students of political science who wish to see how the CCP truly makes political decisions, before the Hollywood version of the incident comes along and reduces the events down to white and black hats.

(This all assumes that the documents are authentic, which the editors readily admit cannot yet be determined.)

Xu Yin says

authentication never verified. unbiased accounts of the whole event.

Jack says

(seemingly reliable) primary sources always make for an interesting read, these internal memos give a unique insider's perspective on dynamics within the chinese government leading up to the tiananmen massacre, and also depict the culmination in an atrocity from the (mostly) reasonable actions of (mostly) reasonable men, a worthwhile read for anyone interested in modern china

Andy says

I think I read this too late. It's a fascinating look at what led up to what I always thought of as a massacre of thousands but which, in reality, could have been less than 1,000 killed. Not that 1,000 is not a massacre but it seemed like such a huge event at the time and that thousands upon thousands had been killed. The inner workings of a closed system was interesting to read about and the closing essay by Orville Schell on the problems regarding the ability to verify the source material is important. Since I have no expertise to judge the authenticity of the material, I rely on the judgements of others which seems to be that the material is genuine. The book gets bogged down in the details at times and I always struggle with Asian names but these are small prices to pay for learning what was possibly going on behind the scenes.

Horace Derwent says

FAILURE OF OUR STRUGGLE FOR DEFECALIZATION OF THE SOUL AND BRAIN OF OUR VERY RACE AND NATION

DON'T CRY, MOM

FAREWELL, MOM

japanese invasion got chinese people killed

communism invasion got chinese soul slaughtered

started in the most peaceful way

ended in the goriest fashion

what's revolution? i tell you, some little group of ambitious people combines with a much bigger group of moody people, what they the two groups do next is REVOLUTION

all those innocent students wanted at the time was freedom, justice and democracy

and the government wanted revolution, or the fortification of their revolution, so their way must've been violent and grisly, still they are, just cuz they are COMMUNIST MOTHERFUCKERS

not the youth who wanted revolution, they just wanted a better and clearer place to live

.....

btw, i invented "fecalization" the word in 2004, of course it means something turning into shit

china is dead for sure, but she's still alive, i mean a living dead, yes

after that massacre, she'd now become a ZOMBIE

they wanted to change the world? uh...i really don't think so

their meek ideal of love for this nation was just to better this society, but all of it and most of them have been massacred at last as you know

a metaphor: a man who's moribund from starvation, he needs a deathcure of some kinda food. and there's a single fruit on a tree not far ahead. the fruit is not ripe, and thus it's poisonous, he says to himself "fuck that!"

and gets his ass up to take a shot at the fruit and his fate

the result is that he dies indeed, but not of starvation
:)

the worse thing is, much worse, china's soul got killed after this event, and then china turned into a zombie, nightmare really comes real

and the puddles of children's blood still shine on the square...

PS: what the fuck else more can i fucking say? just be real, cud you guys? just let your heart eyes see more than your physical ones do, that so hard?

JH says

A very interesting look at how the Tiananmen Protests of 1989 escalated and unfurled. If you have zero knowledge of the modern history of China, it's a good place to start with, and if you're already familiar with it, it will delve deeper than you thought it went.

John says

This book was recommended to me by a political scientist studying in China and I have to say it knocked my socks off. If even part of it is authentic (and I gather that it may well all be the "genuine article" it provides a unique hour by hour window on the Tiananmen tragedy. Many of the "documents" assembled in this volume read like notes or minutes from actual Central Committee meetings & suggest that the massacre was essentially the result of a complex situation spiralling out of control on all sides rather than the deliberate and calculated repression that many of us in the "west" have tended to believe. Even all these years later, I think this is an incredibly important book for anyone who wants to understand the transitions that modern China is going through.

Agung Yudha says

The Tiananmen Papers: A Predictable Controversy.

After the end of the cold war marked by the collapse of the Soviets Union, China has been a considerable political power to match the sole superpower, USA, in the fora of international relations. This has made politics and policy making in China a very sellable topics among international relationists, and this was tipped up particularly by the event of the Tiananmen massacre took place in June 1989. Understanding China had been an interesting yet difficult matter, but how many people can have access to Chinese Government's policy papers or of them by political parties? Well, now almost any body can, thanks to Zhang Liang.

Before the publication of the Tiananmen Papers, many of the international relations academics in the USA used the CIA Research Papers as their "standard sources" in understanding China policy making politics. These "supposed to be confidential" documents are early attempt to understand the decision-making

processes of the Chinese leadership, from the death of Hu Yaobang on April 15, 1989, through the fall of Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang on June 23-24, and assess the impact of the Tiananmen crisis on the concurrent leadership succession struggle within the Communist Party. The research papers estimate the deliberations and intra-Party conflict that produced the martial law order of May 20, the crackdown of June 3-4, and the fall of Zhao, based largely on press reports, but supplemented with other sources not disclosed. But several significant developments, revealed in the book, are worth noting.

In general, The Tiananmen Papers reveals how the most important decisions in China, particularly those surrounding the Tiananmen tragedy, were made not by formal political institutions but by the “eight elders”, an extra-constitutional final court of appeal whose most important voice belonged to Deng Xiaoping. The documents compiled in the book reveal that if left to their own preferences to the Standing Committee of the Politbureau, it would have voted to persist in dialogue with the students instead of declaring martial law.

Considering the development of analysis provides by The Tiananmen Papers compared to other research documents or media analysis regarding the June massacre, it is not an exaggeration when David Vincent of the amazon.co.uk hail this book as “a sensational trove of documents, chronicling events leading up to, and following the violent quashing ... and vividly details for the first time what previously had only been surmised.” Its publication is a landmark event not only for the history of China, but for its future as well.

The Tiananmen Papers may alter our perception and change forever our view of how and why the events of June 3-4 took the shape they did. However, this book is a bit “too heavy” for general readers whose reading activities objected in killing time. This book, despite the editors’ efforts to make it readable by adding a narrative context for the documents, remains dry and dense and need total concentration as well as sound knowledge of China to be understood. This book is for those with deep interest in China politics or in human rights.

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