

Tiananmen Square Massacre and Modern Day China

What Happened?

Tiananmen Square is an open square of space at the center of Beijing. It's one of the top ten largest in the world with an area of 100 acres.¹ It is surrounded by buildings on each side.

On April 1989 Communist party General Secretary Hu Yaobang dies. He was one person that the youth and students in China sympathized with. They agreed with his views of reform and his death was mourned. The students mourned in the square but that quickly became silent protests for “government accountability, restoration of worker’s control over industry and freedom of speech.”^{2,3} But it all became pretty big pretty quickly and there were hunger strikes. By mid-May the protest had spread to about 400 cities⁴ across China and the government couldn’t ignore it anymore.

And that’s what they did. China’s leader Deng Xiaoping declared Marshall Law on May 20 and dispatched about 300,000 troops to Beijing.⁴ Marshall Law means that the government deployed its own military onto its citizens. It is important to note that the government did use the military and general forces to stop protesters and prevent any violence (often resulting in some heated interactions) but nothing extremely serious. But this was the government’s order to stop people by whatever means necessary.

They blocked the square and asked people to leave and vacate the premises. The fighting was extremely one sided. The military used war grade live ammunition. The death toll is very much unknown ranging from hundreds to thousands all over China. It was basically cold blooded murder done by the government of China against its own people.

¹ "Tiananmen Square". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016. Web. 17 Apr. 2016 <[URL](#)>.

² Nathan, Andrew J. (January–February 2001). "[The Tiananmen Papers](#)". [Foreign Affairs](#). Retrieved November 3, 2010.

³ [Tiananmen Square, 1989: The Declassified History](#); George Washington University

⁴ Thomas, Antony (2006). [The Tank Man](#) (Video). PBS. Retrieved July 2, 2013.

Tank Man⁵

On June 5 1989 something happened that will inspire Chinese people ever since. It was a bold statement of rebelliousness and the strength of the people against oppression. On June 5 1989, amidst the government's brutal attempts to clear the square with tanks moving all across the roads, from the rooftops people could see a solitary figure on the road. He got in front of the line of tanks coming towards the square and stopped. There was a moment of silence as people were confused as to what was happening. The tanks approached him but stopped because they couldn't go any further. And as people realized that he had stopped the tanks from moving, people started cheering. The tanks tried to swerve past him but he moved quickly in front of them again to stop them. He kept on doing this and motioning with his hands to get them to go away. At one point he even climbed onto one of the tanks and told the people in it to go away. There are several photographs of this and a video as well. No one knows who he is. But now, he is known as Tank Man. He was an ordinary university student (determined by his uniform) with shopping bags in his hands. That day, even if for a few moments, he managed to stop some tanks with his body that were approaching the square and asking them to go away and leave his people alone. He was later escorted by unknown people and it's not known what happened to him.

Government Response

Now let's talk about how the government dealt with all this. One would obviously expect the people of China to be very upset about all this but to add to that, the government to this day maintains that they did nothing wrong and refuses to accept responsibility about the matter even going as far as to say that the whole massacre never happened and it wasn't as bad as it has been made to look. They claim that whatever they did was necessary to control a 'political disturbance'.⁶

⁵ Thomas, Antony (2006). [The Tank Man](#) (Video). PBS. Retrieved July 2, 2013.

⁶ Human Rights Watch, "China: Tiananmen's Unhealed Wounds", <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/05/12/china-tiananmen-s-unhealed-wounds>

Their government has become really good at dodging the question and prevents any sort of education or flow of information about that event. People born after 1980 are generally unaware about the event. Even though there are videos and photographs of the event and because it was in recent times, global media has made the rest of the world at least very aware of the event, a lot of the people in China have been kept in the dark by their government.

The government has maintained a very strong hold on the internet access in China making sure people do not become too educated about the matter. Internet search results are regulated and censored. Education about the event has been completely banned and even journalists cannot write freely about this unless it's the government's version. The United Nations in 2008 filed a report for the Chinese government regarding the reassessment of the government's position in the massacre⁷ but in 2009 China replied saying that the case has been closed and that their response was timely and effective and correct⁸ and that the people at the square did not act in a heroic way and to label it as such was twisting what actually happened.

But as China has seen a very fast economic growth over the past decades, this has led the people into a sense of contentment with their government so it works in the government's favor and people are more ready to forget about the bad things that happened. There has been a creation of middle class since then and a lot of people have had the opportunity to be well off. It's now the second largest economy and generally things have been going very well.

⁷ [Committee Against Torture. "Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 19 of the Convention: China", CAT/C/CHN/CO/4, page 8, paragraph 21.](#)

⁸ ["Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 19 of the Convention: Comments by the Government of the People's Republic of China concerning the Concluding Observations and Recommendations of the Committee Against Torture", Committee Against Torture, CAT/C/CHN/CO/4/ADD.2, page 13, paragraph 9.](#)

Modern China

“Economic and educational opportunities, readily available telecommunications and the Internet have made the people of China highly mobile, and quite well informed,” but also “more individual-centered and therefore, less committed to traditional extended family and Confucian social ethics.”

-Ling-Chi Wang, professor emeritus of Asian American Studies at Berkeley.⁹

Ancestral worship is not as common anymore.⁹ Although it was decreasing in popularity before the Tiananmen Square Massacre, it became more so around the turn of the century and the massacre had a part to play in it.

Premarital sex is now very common. In a 2007 poll¹⁰ by Renmin University of China¹, more than half the Chinese surveyed in ten provinces found premarital sex acceptable. Only 12.8 percent said it was immoral. In a Beijing study conducted by Li Yinhe, a sociologist at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, nearly three-quarters of residents polled said they had sexual relations before marriage, compared with just 15.5 percent in 1989, the year of the massacre.⁹ There is more sexual freedom now than even a hundred years ago.

It can be seen that the Chinese people have moved from valuing the mind to valuing the body more. The upsurge of fashion magazines, spas, sports clubs and dance clubs show this. This is very new to the Chinese people because since forever Chinese philosophy has revolved around esteeming the brain and the mind over the brawn or the body and now the Chinese have been very quick to do the opposite. According to Mencius, the famous ancient Confucian philosopher, ‘those who work with their brains rule, those who work with their brawn are ruled.’⁹

⁹ Lam, Andrew. *East Eats West: Writing in Two Hemispheres*. Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2010. Print.

¹⁰ Reuters; More than half Chinese say premarital sex ok: poll <[URL](#)>

⁹ Body beautification with surgeries and cosmetics have become very big for women. There is an increase of surgeries for straighter noses, breast augmentation and double eyelids and that has made the beauty of the body more important. For guys, it is also the body that dominates as Chinese men have taken to making fit bodies. Confucian philosophies talked about valuing the intellect over the body and therefore being fit and athletic with ripped bodies was not really a requirement. But modern Chinese don't feel that way anymore. Over the past 100 years, fuelled by the boxer rebellion, Chinese men have tried to be more rebellious against outside forces and that mentality has seeped into the idea of beauty. Men seek to achieve invincibility by training their bodies. Also fashion has made a very bold change in Chinese culture. It was previously long clothing that covered most of the body with jewelries and accessories showing off beauty that was considered beautiful. But now due to western influences, it's more about showing off the body for both guys and girls and the fashion culture reflects that.

The internet has also enabled the people of China to gain a more active role in their community by being more informed and by being able to voice their opinions and make those voices heard to vast numbers of other Chinese people and people outside China alike. Although the government does keep a tight hold on what goes on in the internet in China (which is more restrictive than a majority of the world)¹¹ keeping a tab on searches and browsing, people still find ways to keep informed.

Lastly all we can do now is hope for the best for China. The people have come a long way since that terrible time along with a lot of other tragedies in its history. We can only hope that government realizes its horrible mistake and make appropriate compensations.

⁹ Lam, Andrew. *East Eats West: Writing in Two Hemispheres*. Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2010. Print.

¹¹ Wikipedia; Internet Censorship in China <[URL](#)>