

CHANGSHA, 1989

BY ANDREA WORDEN

A former teaching fellow from the U.S. recalls the atmosphere in Changsha, Hunan Province during the fateful spring of 1989 and its aftermath.

Fifteen years ago this spring, an estimated one hundred million people took part in pro-democracy protests that erupted in more than 300 cities across China. After the People's Liberation Army brought the protests in the capital to an end, demonstrations continued in more than 180 other cities for about a week after the massacre, in large part to protest what had occurred in Beijing.

During the spring of 1989, I was in Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province, nearing the end of a two-year Yale-China Association English teaching fellowship at Hunan Medical University. As the birthplace of many leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, including Mao Zedong and Hu Yaobang (whose death in April 1989 was the catalyst for the democracy movement that spring), Hunan is respected for its revolutionary credentials. Changsha satisfied expectations in 1989 with daily protests, a bold local media, hunger strikes, and even calls from some local government officials for Hunan to secede from the PRC.

I remember being awoken in the early hours of June 4 by students pounding on the door of the house where the Yale-China fellows lived, yelling up to us the news of the massacre. We grabbed our bikes and headed to May First Road—the nerve center of the protests—and read VOA and BBC broadcasts that had been hastily transcribed on large posters, which detailed the horrific events in Beijing the night before. Anger and desperation led to escalated protests in Changsha: students blocked train tracks, major traffic intersections and factory gates, and urged factory workers to go on strike. Despite the shutdown, which made daily life very difficult for Changsha residents during the days after June 4, most people expressed support for the students' actions. But news that troops were positioned just outside the city, coupled with a call from student leaders in Beijing for an "empty school" movement, eventually led students to withdraw from the streets, and soon thereafter from Changsha itself.

The sense of despair among the students after the Tianan-

men massacre was overwhelming; it was despair not only for their country, but also for themselves. Almost every student had participated in some way in the events of spring 1989, and they had no idea what awaited them. Possible fates depended on level of involvement and leadership, and in the end, students in Hunan faced a range of punishments: leaders were arrested or sent off to re-education through labor, most students were subjected to political education and forced to write self-criticisms, and some were punished internally within their universities. The entire graduating class of Hunan Medical University in 1989 was sent to the countryside.

After June 4, Fang Lizhi and his wife went into hiding in the U.S. Embassy in Beijing and the People's Daily ranted about "hostile foreign forces" stirring up the recent "turmoil" in China. Some friends and colleagues in Changsha expressed concern that China would return to the anti-foreign and violently dogmatic days of the Cultural Revolution. Another friend warned me that rumors were circulating that I was a spy (someone had been calling foreign news sources about what was happening in Changsha, and I guess I seemed a likely candidate). I recalled an encounter with an undercover officer from the state security bureau one day while I was observing the protests. He appeared out of nowhere, brandishing a sophisticated camera and expensive zoom lens (tipping me off that he was not an ordinary Changsha resident out supporting the protestors) and snapped 10 or so photos of me from different angles. When he was done, he turned and left with a slight wave and a look that seemed to ask me to understand—he was just doing his job.

When I learned that the Yale-China Association had decided to evacuate us from China, I was overcome with a sense of both relief and profound sadness. As we were getting ready to leave Changsha on June 11, one of the many people who stopped by to see us off was an acquaintance I had met a year or so earlier in town, and with whom I occasionally had a meal. Without saying a word, she handed me a note through the window of the van that was about to take us to the airport and away from Changsha. She wrote:

Today when we part, perhaps it will be forever. In this life, in this world, it will be hard to meet again. I have lost a friend from another country, and my country has lost so much, too

much . . . There's so much I want to say, but I am unable to utter any words. I don't know whether it's tears or blood that's flowing from my heart, and I don't know which month, which year, if ever, it will stop. In silence, I wish you a safe journey home.

The Chinese leadership wishes that people would simply forget June 4th and concentrate on making money, but their heightened vigilance beginning in mid-April every year indi-

cates that they know it has not been forgotten. A new regulation went into effect in Beijing on April 20, 2004, which calls for strict control of the Tiananmen Square area and preparations for possible "emergencies." The regulation also prohibits activities that "disturb social order" or "jeopardize public security," and warns that those who engage in prohibited activities will be punished. But sometime in the not-too-distant future Chinese citizens will take back the Square—it's just a question of when and how.

I'm Calling You, Mother

Note from Andrea Worden: The following poem was given to me by a medical student in Changsha on June 9, 1989. Aware that I would be leaving Changsha two days later, he wrote in a note accompanying the poem: "On your departure, all I have to give you is a passionate heart dedicated to fighting for democracy and freedom. I'm hopeful that my country will become strong and prosperous, and I hope that you and I, my teacher, will meet again one day in a world that is democratic and free."

Good mother, why do you close your eyes so tightly?
I hear your heart beat like thunder
Why do you hold everything in?
Your heart will be destroyed by the sound of thunder
The children you raised will have no place to rest
The mountains and rivers you embrace will turn red
with fresh blood
Why do you close your eyes so tightly?

Good mother, open your eyes, good mother,
The longer you keep them shut, the more likely your
thoughts will harden,
The longer you keep them shut, the more likely you'll
be fooled by others,
The longer you keep them shut, the more likely the life
of spring will turn into the darkness of winter.
Why do you keep your eyes shut so tightly?
Your children reach out their hands, covered with blood,
And fall before your eyes.

Good mother, my good mother, are your eyes open now?
You've opened them in the past, but today, you cannot
bear to look at your children
who shed blood for you and fight for freedom.
You cannot look at their faces,
in a pool of blood, they lift up their hands, and present
to you the flower of democracy.
Your children pledge their lives unwaveringly, and yearn
for freedom and democracy. Open your eyes and
look around you, the scene stirs the soul.
My good mother, who wears a dragon necklace
Your broken heart is also bleeding.

Good mother, perhaps—no—you must, remember.
Seventy years ago, your children used their lives to
destroy the chains of authoritarianism
and raised the flag of democracy and science.

And they also used fresh blood to forge their beliefs.
You opened your eyes then and radiated a matchless
universal light.
Our hands were like pillars, lifting you up,
in the darkness, your children advanced wave upon
wave for today's light.
Your children made it through the brambles, but are fac-
ing an even more difficult challenge ahead.
Your bloody children are embracing you, why won't
you stand up and embrace your children in return?

Good mother, today, after seventy years, why did you do
this?
Were you kidnapped by savages?
Or was it that your children have shed so much blood
that your heart couldn't hold any more sadness?
You let the blood flow freely and you let dignity and justice
be crushed,
You let your children's corpses lie on the solemn heart of
the Capital,
You let your children cry until they go blind,
You let fresh blood flow until there's no more.
Good mother, how can your fragile body ever become
strong and powerful?

My good mother, good mother! Your children are calling,
Your children are fighting for you,
Your children are not afraid of guns nor are they afraid of a
5,000 year-old legacy.
All those who participated cried, wept, shout and fought.
My good mother, good mother
There is blood under your feet and scars on your body
This is a difficult time, a critical juncture
My good mother, open your eyes, I will fight for you until
the end . . .

Translated by Andrea Worden and Ivy Su