

UTMUN



Tiananmen Protests, 1989

Dissidents

DIRECTOR

Steve Zhu

MODERATOR

Michael Elliot

CRISIS ANALYSTS

Zoe Grossman

Maria del Mar Cuevas

Para Babuهران

CHAIR

Zihan Pang

CRISIS MANAGER

Subhi Jha

Contents

Content Disclaimer	2
UTMUN Policies	3
Equity Concerns and Accessibility Needs	3
Students' Position	4
Causes of Conflict	4
Interests And Objectives	5
Questions to Consider	6
Other Bloc Positions	7
Intellectuals	7
Journalists	8
Workers	9
Bibliography	11

Content Disclaimer

At its core, Model United Nations (MUN) is a simulatory exercise of diplomatically embodying, presenting, hearing, dissecting, and negotiating various perspectives in debate. Such an exercise offers opportunities for delegates to meaningfully explore possibilities for conflict resolution on various issues and their complex, even controversial dimensions – which, we recognize, may be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with.

As UTMUN seeks to provide an enriching educational experience that facilitates understanding of the real-world implications of issues, our committees' contents may necessarily involve sensitive or controversial subject matter strictly for academic purposes. We ask for delegates to be respectful, professional, tactful, and diplomatic when engaging with all committee content, representing their assigned country's or character's position, communicating with staff and other delegates, and responding to opposing viewpoints.

The below content warning is meant to warn you of potentially sensitive or triggering topics that are present in the formal content of this background guide, as well as content that may appear in other aspects of committee (e.g., debate, crisis updates, directives), so that you can either prepare yourself before reading this background guide or opt-out of reading it entirely:

Given the sensitivity of current events in the People's Republic of China and the suppression of previous attempts at democratization in China, delegates may find the contents of debate to be unsettling. If at any time the delegate finds the need to step out or talk to a staff member, they are encouraged to do so; necessary accommodations will be made. Subject matter such as racism, police brutality, general violence, state sanctioned massacres and death are included in accordance with historical context. We trust that delegates will approach these topics with the necessary solemnity and respect.

If, because of this committee's content warning, you wish to request switching committees and you registered with UTMUN as:

- a) part of a group delegation, please contact your faculty advisor and/or head delegate with your concerns and request.
- b) an individual delegate, please email our Equity Officer at equity@utmun.org with a brief explanation of your concerns based on this committee's content warning and your request to switch. You will be contacted shortly regarding your request

UTMUN Policies

We ask for your cooperation in maintaining order, both inside and outside of committee session, so that we may provide a professional, safe, inclusive, and educational conference.

Throughout the conference, please note that delegates shall only:

1. Wear Western Business Attire (i.e., no costumes, no casual wear)
2. Embody their assigned country's/character's position, not their mannerisms (e.g., no accents, no props)
3. Use laptops or electronic devices during unmoderated caucuses to draft paperless resolutions/directives (subject to their committee director's permission)
4. Opt for diplomatic, respectful, and tactful speech and phrasing of ideas, including notes (e.g., no foul language, suggestive remarks, or obscene body language)
5. Make decisions that contribute to a professional, safe, inclusive, and educational space for debate

The rest of our conference policies can be found on our website at <https://www.utmun.org/conference-policies>. By attending all or part of a UTMUN conference, attendees agree to abide by all of our conference policies.

Furthermore, delegates' efforts to contribute to a culture of collaboration, inclusivity, and equity at our conference, both inside and outside of committee session, will be considered by the dais and Secretariat when determining conference scholarships and committee awards.

In cases of failing to adhere to any of UTMUN's policies, the Secretariat reserves the right to take any action it deems necessary, including rendering delegates ineligible for awards, taking disciplinary action, and prohibiting delegates from participating further in the conference.

Equity Concerns and Accessibility Needs

UTMUN 2020's Secretariat and Staff are committed to ensuring every attendee has an enjoyable, comfortable, and safe experience and is able to participate fully and positively at our conference.

If you have any equity concerns (e.g., concerns about barriers to participation) or accessibility needs now or during the conference, please do not hesitate to contact your committees' dais and/or our Equity Officer at equity@utmun.org.

Students' Position

Dramatic social changes and economic disparity created wide-spread discontent and angst in universities. Besides political concerns, Chinese university students in the 1980s faced various other challenges, such as dissatisfaction over outmoded curriculum, dismal living conditions and problematic campus security.¹ Reforms in the college job placement system and opaque civil service recruitment caused wide-spread worry and discontent among students as well.² There were small scale protests in response to murder and alleged assault cases against Beijing students. These non-political demonstrations indicated frustration among university students and prepared them for the Tiananmen Square protest in 1989.

Causes of Conflict

Several political incidents preceded and built up to the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest, such as the Li Yi Zhe manifesto of 1974, the 1976 Tiananmen Square incident, and Democracy Wall movement of 1978-1979.³ Li Yi Zhe manifesto refers to the big character poster titled "On Socialist Democracy and the Legal System" appeared in Guangdong. "Li Yi Zhe", the signatory of the manifesto, was a collective pen name of a Red Guard faction. The authors demanded democracy, human rights protections, and a socialist legal system. It also extended the Marxist class antagonism theory to China's state-society relation, criticizing the excessive state-sponsored oppression during the cultural-revolution. The Democracy Wall Movement and two Tiananmen Square protests inherited these demands and criticism.⁴

The 1976 Tiananmen Square Incident resembles its 1989 counterparts in various ways. Both protests were reactions to the death of respected yet persecuted leaders and authoritarian rule. Leading participants of the 1976 protest were students and intellectuals as well who later contributed to the Democracy Wall Movement. Deng Xiaoping initiated the Democracy Wall movement as a leverage against hardliners. It soon developed beyond his original intention. Activists of the movement printed and circulated numerous underground journals to advocate for democracy and to oppose leftism in the Party. However, they identified themselves as belonging to "the lower echelon of the society"⁵, liaison between the party and the people, and reformists instead of revolutionaries. They also explicitly rejected the dissident identity to emphasize their support for socialism. The 1989 protest inherited some of their ideas and missions.

1 "Cries For Democracy", 5-8

2 Li Yang, "Tiananmen Square Protest and College Job Placement Reform in the 1980s," https://journals-scholarsportal-info.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/details/10670564/v23i0088/736_tspacjpr1.xml#FN0004.

3 Luari Paltemaa, "Individual and Collective Identities of the Beijing Democracy Wall Movement Activists, 1978-1981," <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0920203X05058506>.

4 Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard, "The Democracy Movement in China, 1978-1979: Opposition Movements, Wall Poster Campaigns, and Underground Journals," <https://www-jstor-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/stable/pdf/2643619.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ab2838cb169c6f3fab7d259d955d53e33>.

5 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0920203X05058506>

Interests And Objectives

Students' initial demands were vague and elusive. Early Big Character Posters filled with emotional slogans such as "long live the people," "patriotism is not a crime". Some early expressions even sound contradictory from hindsight. For example, the Provisional Students' Federation's slogan were "support the Communist Party and socialism" and "long live democracy"⁶. Later, these sentiments solidified into several demands, re-evaluating Hu Yaobang, freedom of the press and demonstration, permitting higher level of intellectual freedom⁷, and disclosing governmental officials' income. Students also consistently demanded dialogue with the government and recognition of the Beijing Students' Autonomous Federation throughout the movement.

Given the historical context, students had a unique interpretation of "democracy", a frequently used term during the protest. First of all, they demanded short-term reform instead of long-term and thorough overhaul of the political institution. Student protestors commonly associated democracy with market-orientated economic principles. Contemporary issues, including corruption, nepotism, and economic disparity, occupied most students' minds rather than fair elections. Their understanding of democracy is distinct from western discourses and contemporaries. Most students, even the graduates, had relatively inadequate knowledge of various types of democracies and their practical function. Thus, there was no concrete plan for institutional changes.

However, students clearly understand the basic principle of democracy, such as public participation in political decisions, individual freedom in personal choice and values, limitation of governmental power by the rule of law. By early May, the students gradually recognized that the current political system and ideology is an antithesis of democracy.⁸ Moreover, the students had diverse political opinions, especially regarding westernization. Majority of them preferred Chinese style democracy instead of wholesale westernization. The communist party still remains in power, while opening to intra-party democracy, transparency and critical debates. Nevertheless, there were sharp critical voices challenging the legitimacy of the Party. For example, a graduate law student argued that it is necessary to question the Four Cardinal Principles for political democratization and economic freedom.⁹

6 Cries for Democracy, 73.

7 Specifically opposing anti-bourgeois liberalization and anti-spiritual pollution campaigns initiated by conservative Party leaders in 1983. These campaigns attacked western culture and ideologies, such as individualism. Cries for Democracy, 9-10

8 Ibid, 139

9 Four Cardinal Principles are: adherence to socialist path, upholding the leadership of the Communist Party, upholding Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought, and the people's democratic dictatorship. Ibid, 163-170

Questions to Consider

1. Given the lack of any sort of collective leadership among the student protestors and the clash of ideas between student groups, how will you make the movement more legitimate in the eyes of the government?
2. The protests have attracted the wider attention of Chinese society, how will you use this momentum to recruit more of the public to participate in the protests?

Other Bloc Positions

Intellectuals

The Chinese communist party had a complex relationship with the Chinese intelligentsia since the early 20th century. It needed the intellectuals to establish legitimacy and improve administration, while fearing academic freedom debasing communism ideology. Hence, the party sought to control the intellectual community through thought-moulding and co-opting during the civil wars and early years of the PRC. Deng's administration faced the challenge of regaining the intellectuals' confidence since the party has been extremely hostile to them in the Cultural Revolution. Deng recognized the importance of intellectuals in his power struggle with the hardliners and in China's modernization. Thus, he openly supported the development of social sciences and co-opted many prominent intellectuals.

Intellectuals, motivated by traditional sense of social responsibility and hopes to reform Chinese political system, cooperated with the government initially. They promoted the professionalization of administration and limitation of the Party's power. The government incorporated some suggestions, such as abolishing life-long tenures and establishing a merit-based human resource system, into their official agenda. Nevertheless, Deng and the hardliners were wary about suggestions on restraining the executive power, limiting the impact of "Four Cardinal Principles" and the fifth modernization (aka. political reform and democratization).¹⁰

The struggle between intellectual dissident and the state is not explainable by simple ideological dichotomy. The reform era witnessed both the continuation of clientelism and emergence of intellectual autonomy. Clientelism refers to exchange of service for political support and protection. It was common for Chinese intellectuals to speak on behalf of factions of the Communist Party. Thus, intellectual debates of the Maoist and early reform era were a reflection of internal conflict of the party instead of genuine academic disagreement. For example, Deng supported both official and non-official reformists thinkers, such as Yan Jiaqi, to counter the influence of Maoists in the party. Nevertheless, intellectuals started to gain autonomy around the late 1980s. For example, Fang Lizhi, an outspoken supporter for total westernization and a sharp critic of the party-state, was not sponsored by any political faction of the Party.¹¹

Interests and Objectives

Deng's four modernizations were received well by the intelligentsia, who appreciated the depoliticization of science and support for arts and humanities. Chinese students went

10 Stephen K. Ma, "A Dangerous Game: Deng And The Intellectuals," https://journals-scholarsportal-info.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/pdf/10670564/v02i0002/53_adgdati.xml

11 Clientelism, Foreign Attention, and Chinese Intellectual Autonomy, <https://journals-sagepub-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/doi/pdf/10.1177/009770049802400404>

abroad to study in foreign institutions and the scientific community received increased financial backing and modernized equipment/facilities to develop China's lagging technological base. Non-Maoist perspectives in the social sciences were permitted for the first time since the cultural revolution but dissenting voices against government policy remained largely off limits. Public criticism without the patronage of prominent party members against the government was still regarded as treasonous, and academics were still frequently reprimanded for speaking against official party policy.

Although some freedom was granted to academics (primarily in the sciences), vocal advocates like Liu Xiaobo vigorously protested the lack of progress towards full academic freedom. Although institutional support for academics increased under Deng's reforms, professors and teachers only received modest increases in their earnings which struggled to keep up with the soaring rates of inflation. Combined with the perceived corruption of government officials, the intelligentsia were often unsatisfied with the rising inequality in Chinese society, a complaint they often shared with the student protestors.

Questions to Consider

1. Academics were considered leaders in promoting democratic values and progressive socio-economic policies among the dissidents, how will you use this to create a more unified dissident movement?
2. Some academics have connections with party officials and others maintain a great deal of clout with the general populace, how will you use this as leverage in negotiations with the government?

Journalists

The journalist advocated for reinstating Qin Benli, the editor of World Economic Herald, allowing factual report of the demonstration. They also protested the false statement on freedom of the press by Yuan Mu, a member of the State Council. Dismissal of the liberal-minded editor Qin Benli and the closing of World Economic Herald triggered the journalists to participate in the protest.

Interests and Objectives

The long-term demand of the journalists was the freedom of the press. The communist government imposed strict political control over journalists and all other publishing industries since 1949. In the 1980s, the reformists who sought public support granted some autonomy to the press. The newspapers were permitted, if not encouraged to expose official profiteers, since these reports aligned with the Party's anti-corruption agenda. However, the partial liberation also legitimized criticizing the government and frankly discussing public grievances unintentionally.¹² The desire for free expression also stemmed from the younger journalists'

¹² Steven Mark, "Observing the Observers at Tiananmen Square: Freedom, Democracy, and the News Media in China's Student Movement," in *Culture and Politics in China*, ed. Peter Li, Steven Mark, and Marjorie Li, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 259-284

education. They benefited from the restoration of secondary education in the 1970s and received professionalist education that “encouraged questioning and experimentation.”¹³

Questions to Consider

1. The government maintains stringent control over all forms of media, how would you circumvent censorship to give the public a less biased depiction of the unfolding events?
2. Journalists were both observers and participants of the protest. How do they balance professionalism reporting and articulating their own interests and demands?

Workers

Interests and Objectives

The Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation (BWAF) exhibits a unique political attitude, different from the mainstream expression during the protest. Their populism and working-class trade-union mentality sharply contrast with the elitism student and intellectual participants. The workers had three major goals, ending corruption and privileges, stabilizing prices, and winning the right to fight for workers' interests.

Lavish lifestyle of officials and economic hardship preoccupied the worker demonstrators. They attribute heavy indebtedness, income inequality, and declination of standard of living on incompetent governance and rampant corruption. They questioned how much does national leaders and their families profited privately from the economic reform. The workers specifically demanded the explosion of national leaders' income.

The workers were critical of inflation as well. They denounced “the dictatorial bureaucracy” for excessively issuing treasury bonds “to take away forcibly what little income the workers have.” They express grievances of being the disadvantaged of economic reform. However, the workers' criticism of economic reform fueled their conflict with students and intellectuals who advocated for enlarging economic freedom. The disagreement reflects the collective anti-elitist and populist identity gradually formed among the workers.

The workers proposed radical changes in workers' rights and workers' role in governance. They considered the official workers' union failed to represent their interest. Thus, they demanded an autonomous workers' union that negotiate for workers' interests, defends workers' fair representation in the workplace and protects workers rights in both private and public enterprises. Politically, the workers articulate their ideal of democracy very clearly and distinctly. They advocated for the workers' group to supervise the communist party and its legal representatives in enterprises.

¹³ Frank Tan, “The People's Daily: Politics and Popular Will—Journalistic Defiance in China During the Spring of 1989,” *Pacific Affairs* 63, no. 2 (1990): 156.

Questions to Consider

1. Workers are the least represented of all the major social groups, how will the demands of the workers for better labour laws and wages be heard in the larger conversation?
2. How will you compromise with the intellectuals and students? Should the workers relent to the demands of further economic liberalization?

Bibliography

- Brodsgaard, Kjeld Erik. "The Democracy Movement in China, 1978-1979: Opposition Movements, Wall Poster Campaigns, and Underground Journals." *Asian Survey* 21, no. 7 (1981): 747-74. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2643619>.
- Han, Minzhu. *Cries for Democracy: Writings and Speeches from the Chinese Democracy Movement*. Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Ma, Shu-Yun. "Clientelism, Foreign Attention, and Chinese Intellectual Autonomy." *Modern China* 24, no. 4 (1998): 445-71.
- Ma, Stephen K. "A Dangerous Game: Deng and the Intellectuals." *The Journal of Contemporary China* 2, no. 1 (1993): 53-65.
- Paltemaa, Lauri. "Individual and Collective Identities of the Beijing Democracy Wall Movement Activists, 1978-1981." *China Information* 19, no. 3 (November 1, 2005): 443-87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X05058506>.
- Yang, Yi. "Tiananmen Square Protest and College Job Placement Reform in the 1980s." *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, no. 88 (2014): 736-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2013.861171>.