Review Article

The Tiananmen Papers, compiled by ZHANG LIANG, edited by ANDREW J. NATHAN and PERRY LINK, with an afterword by ORVILLE SCHELL (New York: Public Affairs, 2001).

Recent publication of *The Tiananmen Papers* (hereinafter, *TP*) by the Public Affairs Publishing House in New York, synchronized masterfully with the publication of excerpts of the 513-page book in the journal published by the prestigious Council on Foreign Relations,[1] and with generous coverage in the world press, was an event transcending its importance to the community of China scholarship. It seems fair to say, in view of the book's provenance, that this was not only a contribution to our understanding of recent history, but an instance of "using the past to serve the present"; those responsible for this publication are in the position to insist that the events associated with the crackdown of the night of 3–4 June 1989, though still unmentionable in public, are relevant to the generational succession being arranged in preparation for the 16th Party Congress in October 2002.

And yet nearly everything about the documents is still controversial. First, are the documents authentic? Secondly, what do they reveal about Chinese politics that we did not already know? And thirdly, what will be the impact of this publication on political developments in the PRC? The first question in a sense is of course key to the other two (at least it should be). The second question is the only one to which China scholarship can claim relevance – though scholarship can perhaps also inform speculations about the third. And the third question, in many ways the most tantalizing, is in a sense a wild card, contingent not so much upon authenticity as on plausibility, wide journalistic currency, and political backlash effects, the whole gamut of intended and unintended consequences.

Although the question of authenticity is key, it is frustratingly difficult to resolve in this case. Authentication is a defined procedure in which a questioned document is compared with the original, or to an authenticated copy of the original. In this case, the compilers and editors of this collection had no opportunity to make such a comparison, because they did not have the original documents; indeed they saw no proof that the originals existed. They apparently did not have what they call the "minutes" (not "transcripts") in question, the accounts of meetings, telephone conversations and other communications that China's top leaders had with one another within Zhongnanhai during mid-April to 10 June 1989, as allegedly hand-copied by a variety of Chinese secretaries and officials in several ministries and other state organs. What they had, according to Mike Wallace's anonymous 7 January CBS interview with "Zhang Liang," was a collection of computer disks allegedly containing

1. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (January/February 2001), pp. 2–50.

copies of a portion of these hand-copied documents, which had been smuggled out of China.

In view of these constraints, authentication of the documents disclosed in *TP* involved two alternative procedures. First, the editors interviewed Zhang Liang, many times in fact, and came to believe in his sincerity. There is no way for the rest of us to judge to what extent this psychological assessment of personal authenticity has been swayed by intersubjective agreement between compilers and editors on a shared political reform agenda, as we will not have the opportunity to interview Zhang Liang, for the unexceptionable reason that his security must be protected (China's State Security agents are reported to be looking for him). Secondly, the editors verified the information disclosed by these transcripts by comparing it with what is already known to be true on the basis of previously compiled evidence. There is now a considerable body of such evidence, consisting of eyewitness accounts, photographs, collections of "leaked" documents, and so on.[2] With certain exceptions, considered in greater detail below, the *TP* materials are indeed consistent with such evidence. This makes it unlikely that *TP* will share the fate of *The Conspiracy and Death of Lin Biao* by "Yao Mingle," another sensational exposé lacking full authentication, which lost credibility because its story was inconsistent with what we already "knew" (plus subsequent Russian evidence from the crash site).[3] However, this form of authentication has the unfortunate drawback of ensuring that the version of events being authenticated will offer no dramatic departures from what we already believe to be the case. We risk becoming implicated in a Borgesian paradox, in which authenticity requirements trap us in a repetitive recycling of authoritatively accepted facts.

For their part, the CCP authorities have roundly denounced the publication of *TP* as a "fabrication," reaffirming the June 1989 decision to "clear the square." But they might be said to have a clear conflict of political interest, in view of their own complicity in that decision. No detailed critique or refutation has been published by Beijing, nor is it

2. This literature is now voluminous, and the following list hence unavoidably selective: Michel Oksenberg, Lawrence Sullivan and Marc Lambert (eds.), *Beijing Spring, 1989: Confrontation and Conflict: The Basic Documents* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1990); Minzhu Han (ed.), *Cries for Democracy: Speeches and Writings from the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Tony Saich (ed.), *The Chinese People's Movement: Perspectives on Spring 1989* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1990), Yi Mu and Mark V. Thompson, *Crisis at Tiananmen: Reform and Reality in Modern China* (San Francisco: China Books, 1989); Scott Simmie and Bob Nixon, *Tiananmen Square* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1989); George Hicks (ed.), *The Broken Mirror: China After Tiananmen* (Chicago: St James Press, 1990); Peter Li, Steven Mark, Marjorie H. Li (eds.), *Culture and Politics in China: An Anatomy of Tiananmen Square* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1991), James A. R. Miles, *The Legacy of Tiananmen: China in Disarray* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); and Suzanne Ogden, Kathleen Hartford, Lawrence Sullivan and David Zweig (eds.), *China's Search for Democracy: The Student and Mass Movement of 1989* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1992).

3. Yao Ming-le, *The Conspiracy and Death of Lin Biao*, trans. from the Chinese with an introduction by Stanley Karnow (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983). For a persuasive critique based on fresh evidence, see Qiu Jin, *The Culture of Power: The Lin Biao Incident in the Cultural Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

likely that a set of authentic documents will be revealed to demonstrate *TP*'s fraudulence, if we can presume that the problem from Beijing's perspective is not so much that this or that detail is inaccurate so much as that the crackdown occurred at all, and they would prefer not to be reminded of it. In view of the impenetrable uncertainties involved in authentication, and in the fact that three distinguished China scholars have been willing to put their own reputations at stake, the reader is inclined, in accord with the norms of scholarly courtesy, to accept their claims – at least pending publication of the more compendious Chinese draft of the documents.[4]

Although that will also be my inclination here (after all, no one has yet hypothesized a convincing motive for the compilers to risk capital punishment in order to publish a fraudulent account), this does not altogether dispose of the reviewer's obligation to exercise due diligence. The documents may be sorted into at least two different categories. Those originating from the Beijing municipal Party committee, the Education Commission, the Department of Public Security, the Department of State Security and other such organs were quite widely disseminated at the time of the protests, and may generally be accepted as authentic, but neither are they breath-taking in their originality. Indeed, many have already been published elsewhere, such as Deng Xiaoping's speeches of 31 May and 16 June,[5] the 25 April meeting that generated the decision to publish the harsh 26 April editorial,[6] or Zhao Ziyang's 4 May speech to the Asian Developmental Bank meeting in Beijing.[7] In those cases where all or matching portions of a document appear in *TP*, comparison with extant translations tends to corroborate them. But by the same token, the discrepancies raise warnings. There are for example major gaps in the *TP* versions of the 25 April meeting minutes and in the transcript of Zhao Ziyang's exculpatory 24 June speech to the Fourth Plenum of the 13th Central Committee,[8] and Deng's 31 May talk with Li Peng and Yao Yilin is inexplicably chopped into several pieces and inserted into the text at different places. Moreover, according to my conversation with a knowledgeable Chinese informant, the discussion of the Xu Qinxian incident (General Xu, commander of the 38th Group Army, whom Yang Shangkun incorrectly identified as the son of Xu Haidong, resisted the order to impose martial law and was later

4. *Zhongguo liusi zhenxiang* (*The Truth of China's June 4th*) is scheduled for publication in three volumes on 15 April (the 12th anniversary of the death of Hu Yaobang) in Hong Kong.

5. *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (*Deng Xiaoping's Selected Works*) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), Vol. III, pp. 296–301 and 309–314, respectively. The 31 May speech is also reprinted in Oksenberg *et al.*, *Beijing Spring*, pp. 333–38.

6. *TP*, pp. 71–73; cf. Oksenberg *et al.*, *Beijing Spring*, pp. 203–206. The *TP* excerpts leave Deng in a mild, passive position, omitting the parts of his remarks in which he refused to allow the late Hu Yaobang to be lauded as a "great Marxist" (in the public funeral speech), denounced the student demonstrations as "turbulent" [*dongluan*], and clearly signalled his inclination to deal with the student movement by force.

7. *TP*, pp. 115–16; Oksenberg *et al.*, *Beijing Spring*, pp. 254–56.

8. *TP*, pp. 441–46; the full text of the speech was published in the Hong Kong *Xin Bao* (*Economic Journal*) in Chinese on 4 June 1994, and translated in the *Eastern Express* over 6–7–8 June 1994; I owe this information to a March 2001 website posting by Robert Delfs.

disciplined) is inaccurate in its details, albeit not in summary import.[9] The allegation (p. 261) that Peng Zhen nominated Wan Li as Zhao's successor, though consistent with Peng's choice of Wan to succeed him at the NPC, seems implausible juxtaposed to the notice (pp. 223, 263) that on the very same day Wan (who had been making public statements sympathetic to Zhao's interpretation of the protests) was being telegraphed to return home early via Shanghai. Inasmuch as such discrepancies may be attributed not to the editors but to the compiler,[10] we may infer that the writers or the compiler may have interpolated their own suppositions into the text and/or that in some cases the documents were perhaps abridged by the authorities before being distributed. It is also conceivable that the compilers were not highly enough placed to have been privy to more complete or accurate drafts of the documents.

If so, this begs the question of how then the compiler obtained access to the second category of documents – those that purport to be minutes of Politburo Standing Committee meetings, or "sitting committee" meetings of the "elders," some of which were held in Deng's residence. These are easily the most interesting materials in the book, but access to this type of material is exceedingly limited. In fact, according to my informants, the minutes of Party committee meetings above the county level, which are recorded and kept by the secretary under the office secretariat, are under the exclusive jurisdiction of the first Party secretary. If the meeting made decisions which needed to be disseminated to lower Party committees or sub-branches, minutes might be printed for that purpose, but they would be very simple and would never narrate the details of the meeting or record who said what – certainly not disagreements, as in the 31 May discussion of candidates to replace Zhao, or foul language, as in the quotations of Wang Zhen's (pp. 208, 357) execration of the protesters; anything of this sort would risk impugning the "face" of participants and hence not be recorded. If my information is correct, we may hence dismiss the possibility that this second category of documents represents a compilation of official "minutes." In addition to minutes, however, the participants in high-level meetings, both voting members and non-voting auditors, would be in a position to recount what they had witnessed with more or less accuracy, even if not allowed to take written notes in the meeting. We may perhaps infer that the materials translated in *TP* consist of an amalgam of hearsay and remembered conversations similar in provenance (though no doubt more carefully vetted) to the stories from highly placed mainland informants that routinely surface in the Hong Kong media. The fact that they coincide with what has been independently verified tends to bolster their credibility, as it seems quite

9. *TP* (pp. 213, 219, 239–240) reports simply that Zhou Yibing received a report that Xu Qinxian, commander of the 38th Army, was unwilling to carry out the order to implement martial law, and was hence reprimanded and later sentenced to five years in prison. According to my informant, Qin Jiwei talked to Yang directly (not Zhou Yibing), whereupon Yang told Qin to tell Xu that as a communist and a commander he had no choice but to obey the order, which he then did.

10. According to March 2001 e-mail transmissions from the editors.

implausible that the authors and compiler would have been sufficiently familiar with the English language documentation to concoct plausible forgeries.

If we provisionally assume (as I assume) that the *TP* materials are generally accurate, what do we learn about Tiananmen or about the nature of Chinese politics that we did not know before? Surely the book's major contribution is to provide a fuller and more finely textured depiction of China's inner-Party decision-making process at a time of national crisis. Although those who followed the original events and the first wave of analytical publications reasonably closely will not find too much new in terms of specific empirical disclosures, there are some. For example, it had previously been reported that Deng Xiaoping had absented himself from the capital during preparation for the crackdown after 20 May, but according to *TP* all participants remained on site. Contrary to the imputation that *TP* was aimed at Jiang Zemin, we find that Jiang had practically no personal involvement in the crackdown (Jiang was previously thought to have spent much of May in Beijing, but he seems to have come only at the end of the month, for purposes of orientation). The graphic depiction of the selection of Jiang to replace Zhao as Party Secretary reveals not only that this was unconstitutionally decided upon by Party elders a month before official approval at the Fourth Plenum of the 13th Party Congress, but that his patron was not Deng Xiaoping (who initially supported Li Ruihuan) but Li Xiannian, supported by Chen Yun (after Song Ping failed). This makes Jiang's conservative political orientation before Deng's "southern voyage" in the spring of 1992 more understandable. Whereas Zhao's public announcement on 16 May revealing the special resolution to the effect that all Politburo decisions were contingent on Deng Xiaoping's final approval was publicly televised at the time, we now know that Zhao's colleagues deemed this a self-serving breach of protocol (in my view correctly) and that it became a major count in Zhao's political indictment.[11] Finally, the constant stream of Public Security and State Security reports to the centre from various trouble spots, replete with detailed statistics, foreign press reports and public opinion surveys, makes clear that these agencies, together with Xinhua, function as a vast mirror image of the media apparatus: *neibu* rather than public, data flowing up rather than down, and in contrast to the media's seamless optimism having a stark "realist" bias, highlighting "contradictions" (analogous to Western journalism). Special fact-finding commissions like that ordered by Li Peng on 1 June and conducted by Beijing Mayor Chen Xitong and Party Secretary Li Ximing (pp. 330–38) reflect the interests of the politicians who lead them, much like American congressional investigative committees.

The depiction of structure of power within the Politburo, and the

11. Ironically, the special resolution giving Deng the right of final approval was presented by none other than Zhao Ziyang, at the First Plenum of the 13th Central Committee in 1997. The Party constitution had to be revised to allow Deng to retain his position as chair of the Central Military Commission although he was no longer (nominally) a member of the Politburo.

dynamics of interaction within that structure when confronted with a crisis, seemed to me quite revealing. The decision-makers consisted of two organizationally distinct clusters, the five members of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) and the eight members of the "sitting committee"; interestingly, the full Politburo seems to have been totally excluded from the discussions. The sitting committee was so decisively superordinate to the PBSC that, like Hu Yaobang before him, Zhao did not even have personal access to Deng Xiaoping (his putative patron), and had to rely on Yang Shangkun to relay messages or arrange trilateral meetings, or in case of important decisions to write a letter to Deng and/or the other elders to solicit approval. This ungainly leadership tandem faced three critical decisions: the decision to impose martial law on 20 May, the decision to to replace Zhao on 27 May, and the decision to use lethal force to clear the square on 3–4 June. But we learn from *TP* that in the flux of events, these three decisions collapsed into one: the decision to impose martial law. After weeks of frustration. Deng boldly outlined this solution to a PBSC session held in his home on the morning of 17 May, and he clearly expected obedience. Li Peng accepted this monocratic decision-making model, but Zhao took the procedural model of collective leadership sufficiently seriously to resume the meeting (without Deng) on the same evening, and to call the question. The PBSC deadlocked 2–2, with Qiao Shi abstaining (Yang Shangkun and Bo Yibo attended as non-voting members). At this point Zhao and Hu Qili withdrew in despair and Deng assumed command to implement his solution, with the rump of the PBSC folding into an adjunct of the sitting committee. When the masses on the square unexpectedly refused to yield to martial law troops, this was blamed on Zhao's defection and the level of violence was sufficiently escalated (more than sufficiently escalated) to crush their resistance. Only one central meeting is reported after the invocation of martial law to discuss necessary additional measures, the 2 June meeting of the elders and rump PBSC, which approved the plan to "clear the square" with no real discussion. The leader had spoken, there was no reconsideration of the options or perceived need to arrive at a fresh decision (but note the sudden disappearance of Chen Yun).

I also found *TP* to be a useful model for testing various models of factional dynamics. Though also permitting other interpretations, I think the documents lend themselves to a conception of factions as crisis-engendered conflict groups. Whereas diverging general proclivities were apparent by the time Zhao left for North Korea, these had not yet crystallized into hard and soft "lines"; thus Zhao, in accord with formal protocol, left Li Peng in charge of the centre's response on 23 April and telegraphed his unstinting approval of Deng's tough 26 April editorial, and Li Peng, Li Xiannian and Yang Shangkun all endorsed Zhao's mild 4 May speeches (though they did unsuccessfully suggest inserting the phrase "oppose bourgeois liberalization"). Despite their differing orientations, they were still willing and able to work together. What seems to have caused real factional polarization was a combination of a crisis intractable to either approach, and the Gorbachev visit, which made the

problem's prolongation too humiliating to tolerate. The nub of the intractable crisis was of course the massive sit-in at the square, which attracted widespread social support and refused to yield either to the threats articulated in the hardline 26 April editorial (followed the next day by a massive demonstration) or to the softer line articulated by Zhao on 4 May (followed by the hunger strikes). By 16–17 May, the two leaders' "face" had become too clearly identified with their respective "lines" to retreat, and the contradiction became all-or-nothing. At this point the leaders mobilized their respective constituencies: Deng Xiaoping contacted the elders and the CMC,[12] Li Peng convoked his supporters,[13] and Bao Tong warned his think-tank, the Office for Research on the Economic System (resulting in his later prosecution for breach of security, when the information leaked to demonstrators).

What was the animating purpose of *TP*, and what will be its political impact? The compiler, "Zhang Liang," ostensibly represents a reform faction that survived the post-Tiananmen purges and hopes to use the issue as a vehicle to make a comeback at the 16th Party Congress. Which precise grouping Zhang Liang represents has been the object of considerable speculation, ranging from American (or Taiwanese) intelligence agencies scheming to revive the Cold War to the disgruntled children of Deng Xiaoping. One of the more intriguing theories implicates the family of Yang Shangkun: at the time of Yang's fall in 1992, one rumour attributed Deng's unanticipated betrayal of his old crony to Yang's accumulation of a cache of secret documents incriminating Deng, and in fact Yang does emerge from this account (which includes tête-a-tête meetings between Yang and Deng, and Yang and Zhao, contributed by an anonymous "friend of Yang") looking not only like a pivotal figure but a far more sympathetic one than in the early 1990s. The targets of the publication are presumably the surviving hardliners who arranged the crackdown, led by Li Peng, who has reportedly been manoeuvring to cling to power despite the scheduled retirement of the "third generation" in 2002. Perhaps Jiang Zemin's future could also be adversely affected by disclosures of his clouded accession. Even more explosive in view of China's increasingly unsettled social milieu would be a rehabilitation of the demonstrations as "patriotic," as Zhao Ziyang has long demanded, following the precedent of the 5 April 1976 Incident whose rehabilitation at the Third Plenum of the 11th Party Congress legitimized the rise of Deng Xiaoping.

It would seem superficially preposterous to expect all these political repercussions from the publication of a book discussing events over a decade old, telling a story already familiar to the elite who will have sole

12. After the morning meeting Deng telephoned Chen Yun, Li Xiannian and Peng Zhen and had his secretary reach Deng Yingchao, Hong Xuezhi and Liu Huaqing (deputies secretary general of the CMC), and Qin Jiwei (minister of national defence), notifying them of the Politburo's decision and inviting them to attend the next day's meeting. *TP*, p. 190.

13. That afternoon Li Peng invited Li Tieying, Li Ximing, Yan Mingful, Chen Xitong, Luo Gan, Yuan Mu and He Dongchang to a meeting to let them know that Beijing was headed for martial law. *TP*, p. 190.

access to it. After all, the CCP still effectively monopolizes the PRC media apparatus and the book can hence be expected to have very limited popular impact, even in its Chinese edition. In February 2001 Jiang convened a 2,000-member work conference in Beijing at which the PRC leadership reportedly issued a joint denunciation of *TP*, demonstrating that reformist conspiracies can trigger a powerful political backlash. Yet it is well known that China's growing involvement in world markets has been accompanied by its ensnarement in international electronic and interpersonal communication networks. The ultimate outcome (if any) remains to be seen. But surely one of the lessons to be drawn so far is that the politics of monopolizing power by creating an information vacuum inadvertently also heightens the fascination with and the consequent explosive power of the information that has been banned.

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