Beijing and Pyongyang a Year After Tiananmen

Nakajima Mineo

A year has passed since the Tiananmen incident, and the world is gazing at China, trying to figure out the current situation there and the prospects for the future.

The historic democracy movement that was suppressed on Tiananmen Square on June 4 last year was, in my view, tantamount to a counterrevolution staged by students, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens awakened to a new political consciousness. In this sense, the movement was not merely seeking short-term political reform; it was fundamentally challenging the one-party dictatorship of the Chinese Communist Party. This explains why senior Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and other party executives acted with such decisiveness to suppress it.

The crowds of demonstrators in the square posed an especially serious threat to the Chinese leadership because around the time of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Beijing in May, the popular movement became tied up with an internal power struggle in the party. This power struggle was evident, for example, in remarks made to Gorbachev by then General Secretary Zhao Ziyang distancing himself from the regime's actions under Deng and Premier Li Peng. Around the middle of May, we may conclude, the Chinese leadership was splitting in two. This set the stage for the tragic events of June 4.

The seriousness of the situation can be surmised from the fact that the People's Liberation Army deployed some 350,000 regular troops around Beijing in addition to using some 100,000 soldiers to rout the protesters on the square, whose numbers had by then dwindled to a mere 3,000. This display of force was not just to quell the dissatisfied students; it was part of a serious political drama—verging, in fact, on a civil war—in which the party's hard-liners moved to oust the reform faction led by Zhao Ziyang and eradicate the forces seeking democracy and reform.

In the months that followed, the government unleashed a sweeping reign of terror, and even after martial law was lifted on January 11, 1990, security officers working with the Chinese People's Armed Police Force continued to guard against disturbances in Beijing. Still now, a year after Tiananmen, the stance of wary vigilance has not been relaxed.

Tiananmen Square 1990

The mood of Beijing under this state of emergency was quite palpable to me when I went there in late April and again in early May. The democracy movement last year had gained significant momentum on the anniversary of the famous May 4 Movement of 1919, when students had first gathered to denounce the government and demand democracy and modernization, but this year the day passed uneventfully. About all there was to be seen on

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Tiananmen were the red flags commemorating May Day and the large statue of Sun Yat-sen in the center of the square.

As it happened, I had just returned to Beijing from North Korea. In the evening I took a taxi from my hotel to Tiananmen to see what was going on, and because I wanted to take some photos, the driver kindly made a right-hand turn to stop the car in front of the Great Hall of the People. But it seems that right-hand turns were not allowed there. A policeman immediately came over to the taxi, asked the driver for his license, and took him away for nearly half an hour. I was also questioned by the security personnel—which caused me some very anxious moments—but the rest of the time I was left alone in the car.

Awaiting the driver's return, at one point I happened to glance up and see a large contingent of the People's Armed Police marching by. Arranged in a succession of groups, each composed of several dozen officers, the police troops materialized out of nowhere to the south of the hall, headed across the square, and disappeared in the direction of the Museum of Chinese Revolution, which is still being used to billet them and PLA personnel and is closed to the public. Altogether several hundred personnel passed as I watched.

The Chinese authorities have adopted a policy of severity mixed with lenience. Though poised to crush any resurgence of the democracy movement, they recently released over 200 activists arrested in connection with Tiananmen. Among them was Dai Qing, a reporter for the daily *Guangming Riba●* who played an active role in last year's movement. But Professor Zhang Xiaoping of the China Politics and Law University in Beijing, arraigned on charges of antirevolutionary agitation directed at the students on the square, has been sentenced to 15 years of penal servitude.

Recently, meanwhile, Chai Ling, a Beijing Teachers' University student who was one of the stars of the movement, managed to slip through the security cordon and depart from China, surfacing in Paris. Her escape seems to have been a painful slap in the face for the Chinese authorities.

Premier Li Peng has tried to play down news of this sort. "Because China's so big," he has observed, "it's only natural that a few people get away." Nonetheless, the powers that be have been doing everything they can to contain the dissidents. The Ministries of Public Security and State Security have tried to cover every corner of the nation with a blanket of informers, enlisting the cooperation of all organizations down to the level of the watchdog neighborhood committees. The fact that Chai Ling escaped despite this effort indicates that an underground resistance organization still exists in China and that it is opposing the communist regime with the help of networks of regional and family ties and of sympathizers.

Bottling up explosive forces

China insists that it will resolutely uphold socialism and preserve the leadership role of the Communist Party. It feels that it must desperately defend itself from the historic changes taking place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the wave of democratization that has reached as close as the neighboring People's Republic of Mongolia. It remains to be seen, however, how long the present authoritarian system will last.

Recently, the authorities' policy of extreme retrenchment has caused a severe slowdown in the Chinese economy. The so-called township enterprises that appeared in great numbers after the rural communes were dismantled have been hit hard by the inconsistencies resulting from piecemeal steps toward a market economy, and many have gone bankrupt or closed down. The workers in the disbanded enterprises cannot go back to their old farming jobs, since agricultural reform has produced a new class of productive (and well-to-do) farmers. As a result, many of these people have joined the ranks of the jobless.

The number of people now drifting around the country without regular employment is estimated to be between 70 million and 100 million. Under the influence of the money-worshiping attitudes inculcated by economic liberalization, these people go wherever they think they may be able to earn even slightly higher wages. Congregating in vast flows, they have been flooding into the cities and creating a tide of "economic refugees" attempting to find work in other countries.

I happened to see James Lilley, American ambassador to China and an old acquaintance, during my Beijing stay. He confirmed the reports that the number of drifters is rising toward 100 million, a development that the U.S. Department of State is undoubtedly watching with concern. It was Lilley who made the decision to grant asylum to the famous dissident astrophysicist Fang Lizhi when he sought refuge in the U.S. embassy last year. Freedom for Fang to leave the country was naturally one of the topics discussed when U.S. National

Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft visited China in July and December last year for secret negotiations on mending the rift in Sino-American relations.*

Another pressing problem is the debt burden China has built up over the past decade of its open-door policy. The repayments are now beginning to fall due, and during 1990 they may reach nearly $10 billion. Already there have been reports that some regional governments are in arrears in their repayments to Japanese banks, and the situation is probably serious throughout the country. The days of galloping inflation are past, but inflationary pressures remain strong. Faced with fiscal constraints and shortages of foreign exchange, the government has been printing huge amounts of paper money, and the resulting overhang of cash will continue to pose a threat to price stability for some time.

In summary, the strong measures taken by the Chinese government are keeping the lid on the situation for the moment, but potentially disruptive factors remain. Depending on developments in the economy, there could even be a mass uprising of some sort in the not-too-distant future.

Playing the waiting game

Having experienced the tragedy of June 4, the activists and intellectuals in the democracy movement can be expected to proceed with the utmost caution. In view of the advanced age of their opponents, moreover, time is on their side. Deng Xiaoping's eighty-sixth birthday is coming up, and Chen Yun, another important behind-the-scenes actor, is almost as old and also infirm. Elder statesmen Li Xiannian and Peng Zhen, as well as State President Yang Shangkun, who controls the army, are all very old men. China's first generation of revolutionaries will be fading away before long.

The advocates of democracy and liberalization will also be matching their timing to changes in economic conditions. If the centrally planned socialist economy reaches an impasse, dissatisfaction is likely to spread nationwide instead of being confined mainly to Beijing and a few other cities, as was the case last year. Thus, though the first anniversary of Tiananmen passed quietly, grassroots opposition could explode quite suddenly if the necessary conditions gelled.

In the context of this uncertainty, serious fissures have appeared at the center of the Communist Party. Deng, in the background, appears to be trying to balance the struggle between such veteran party executives as Li Peng, Yao Yilin, and Qiao Shi and the newcomers who have risen to the fore since Tiananmen, notably the new Politburo Standing Committee members Jiang Zemin, Li Ruihuan, and Song Ping. These two groups can be seen as having taken clearly opposing stands on the decision to lift martial law and the measures adopted to tighten the economic reins.

At present the focus is on the confrontation at the top between Premier Li and Jiang Zemin, the new general secretary. The split between these men is becoming increasingly apparent. But the rise of Li Ruihuan, a former mayor of Tianjin, is also drawing attention. He is emerging as a leader of the liberal forces who may one day reach the top. He and the other newcomers may be aiming to consolidate secret ties with the reformist followers of Zhao Ziyang and map out a strategy to restructure the Chinese leadership in a way that fits the changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In this way a renewed battle for power cannot be ruled out in the context of China's current political confusion and social stagnation.

Factors like these may well have had an inhibitive effect on China's students and intellectuals, encouraging them to bide their time rather than gear up for another futile show of force on the first anniversary of Tiananmen. Sooner or later, though, China is bound to be affected by the upheaval in the former Soviet empire and the economic and social development in the Chinese societies of Taiwan and Hong Kong. External pressure of this sort will eventually become irresistible.

North Korea's abnormal atmosphere

From April 28 to May 4, between my stays in China, I visited Pyongyang, capital of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, for the first time with a group from the Japan Association of International Relations.

North Korea, like China, is approaching the time for a transfer of power. But many people doubt whether the planned hereditary succession from President Kim Il Sung to his son Kim Jong Il can indeed be carried out smoothly given the storms of change that have occurred elsewhere, especially the downfall of the Ceausescu dynasty in Romania and the transformation of the socialist states from Eastern Europe to Mongolia.

*The Chinese authorities allowed Fang and his wife to leave for Britain on June 25 this year—Ed.

Many Western observers seem to agree in the view—or the hope—that either China or North Korea will soon be the next domino to fall. The drama of the historic moves away from communism, which began in Eastern Europe and is passing through the Soviet Union and Mongolia, will reach its final act, these people assume, when the regimes in China and North Korea come tumbling down. In my view, though, North Korea may be an exception. My impression on visiting Pyongyang was that the country is in a very abnormal situation. Kim Il Sung's personality cult is so strong and his dictatorship so absolute that political fissures and uprisings from the bottom may well be totally impossible for some time to come. The self-contained system that has emerged is more than a simple dictatorship of the Korean Workers' Party. It is a unique regime of ethical and moral leadership exercised on a national scale through the ideology of *juche*, or self-reliance.

The country's 20 million inhabitants seem to have been so thoroughly indoctrinated in the worship of Kim and his *juche* ideology that they have succumbed to a state of self-intoxication resembling a sort of religious fervor. One can imagine that it is the kind of mood that might have resulted if the wartime spirit of imperial Japan had been maintained for a much longer period. What has been built is a true dynasty, one where myths encouraging Kim Il Sung worship have been created everywhere.

Many monuments linked to Kim's life have been erected, including the enormous Juche Tower and the Kim Il Sung Arch of Triumph, far larger than its counterpart in Paris. The tower was built to celebrate Kim's seventieth birthday using 25,550 slabs of granite, or one slab for each of the 365 days in Kim's 70 years of life. The arch, meanwhile, commemorates the period from the day when Kim left Pyongyang to fight against the Japanese in China until the day after World War II when he returned to Pyongyang in triumph. Viewing these massive memorials, one gets the impression that at some point Kim decided to turn the entire nation into his personal property. And the general atmosphere enveloping the North has a strongly Confucian air of submission to authoritarian figures and respect for the patriarchal system.

Charting a course of self-reliance

What is the nature of this *juche* ideology that Kim's regime has employed to unify this closed and strangely silent nation? We spent a total of eight and a half hours in friendly, informal talks on this and other topics with Hwang Jang Yop, head of the Korean Association of Social Scientists. Hwang, reputedly one of the authors of the philosophy of self-reliance, has been a mentor to the younger Kim, presided over the Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party, and served as president of Kim Il Sung University for 15 years. Hwang is well versed in the scholarship of both East and West; he spoke with us in Japanese.

Hwang stated that the *juche* ideology might be seen as a religion teaching belief in human beings in order to perfect them. As such, this school of thought negates the historical materialism of Marxism, affirming instead a sort of spiritualism or idealism. When I observed that in that case he must be

Kyodo

The Kim Il Sung Arch of Triumph in Pyongyang commemorates Kim's return to Korea at the end of World War II after spending 20 years in exile fighting the Japanese.

more interested in the work of Ludwig Feuerbach than in Marx's own writing, he enthusiastically agreed. "Feuerbach," he asserted, "is a far more interesting and outstanding thinker." This remark is unusual, to say the least, coming from the top ideologue of a nation that espouses socialism and communism. Hwang went on to explain Kim's personality cult in terms of a theory in which the country's leader, the party, and the masses unite in one perfect organism.

Whatever the merits of the *juche* ideology, I myself cannot accept a system that deifies its leader and hands power down from father to son. Such personal feelings aside, however, I have to acknowledge that today's North Korea is indeed an exception among the nations of the world in the way that it has fashioned an imposing personality cult complete with myths, charts its own course in disregard of the wishes of allies like the Soviet Union and China, and maintains a strict authoritarian regime based on economic autarky and a self-centered set of guiding ideals. The 20 million people of the North are in a sense like the enraptured followers of the leader of a new religious cult.

Insofar as I was able to tell from what I saw in Pyongyang, for the time being there is no room for any serious power struggle within the Korean Workers' Party, let alone a democracy movement. At one time the party had a variety of competing voices, but these have been completely silenced. Yet even as it finds itself increasingly isolated internationally, North Korea seems to be seeking new friends.

Hwang said to us, "Japan now has truly great power, and Japanese scholars have an important mission. It's scholars from Japan more than from any other country that I'd like to meet and discuss our troubles with." Behind these words, which hint at the extent of the North's isolation, I sensed a feeling of serious concern regarding the changes taking place in today's socialist world.

North Korea does not seem to be getting along well with either the Soviet Union or China. To find a way out of this impasse, it is looking for a breakthrough in its relations with the United States. The reports that Ho Dam, the Politburo member in charge of diplomatic affairs, may soon be visiting the United States were thought at first to be rather speculative, but the impression I gained is that this visit, the first by a high-ranking North Korean official, is indeed likely to take place. The country also seems to be taking active steps toward exchanges with American scholars.

All in all my week in North Korea gave me many insights into the strange circumstances that enable this country to be divorced from the changes in the socialist world even as it exists in the midst of them. My conclusion is that the present setup will continue at least for as long as Kim Il Sung is alive and well. But this also means that if the transition from Kim to his son occurs in the near future, some difficult problems are likely to arise, and they could even cause the present system to collapse suddenly. There are, moreover, reasons to doubt that a regime led by Kim Jong Il can function smoothly after the senior Kim is gone. This outlook might change the country's future in one of two ways.

First, in a hard-landing scenario, the people of the North might revolt against the dynasty before the succession is completed, and the Korean Workers' Party itself could fall apart. Second, Kim Jong Il might introduce a more flexible policy of his own accord. In this soft-landing scenario, the Kims might avoid the fate of the Ceausescu family in Romania. The transition in that case might proceed along the lines of the succession in Taiwan, where the dictatorship of Chiang Kai-shek gave way to the authoritarian rule of his son Chiang Ching-kuo, who eventually initiated a democratization process resulting in the present democratic administration of President Lee Teng-hui. If North Korea followed that course, its socialist system would change tremendously.

Whatever the future may hold, we cannot ignore the presence of this exceedingly unusual country on our doorstep. For most Japanese, Pyongyang is a distant capital, psychologically much farther from Japan than Beijing. We should remind ourselves that, in fact, Pyongyang is a next-door neighbor located geographically at the midpoint between Beijing and Tokyo.

Looking for new friends

Visiting both China and North Korea at this critical juncture gave me much to think about. On the surface, the two countries are maintaining the close relations they have had since the Korean War of 1950–53, although North Korea, as I have suggested, certainly no longer regards China as its "elder brother." Pyongyang is also not hesitant to aim harsh criticisms at Moscow, and the distrust of the Soviets that it has harbored since the Korean War is still in evidence.

As long as the North strives for an independent political and social system under the *juche* ideol-

ogy, it will be seeking to dilute the long legacy of excessive Chinese influence. More fundamentally, today's *juche* posture may be seen as the result of a desperate attempt to escape from China's shadow. Outwardly, of course, as Kim Il Sung frequently stresses, the country will defend socialism stoutly, and to this extent it will give full support to the present regime in China. This, however, is for public consumption; in private the country's leaders seem to be distancing themselves from both China and the Soviet Union.

For its part, the Soviet Union has recently been extending an olive branch to South Korea, and moves are afoot that may soon lead to the establishment of diplomatic ties between these two countries. All the East European countries except East Germany have already set up embassies in South Korea. Should the Soviet Union open diplomatic relations this autumn, China may follow suit.

The North Koreans I met asserted that the Soviet Union and China will never take such a step, but it was my impression that they were inwardly indignant at the extent to which these two countries have already warmed up to Seoul. The North's weakest point is that while it has considerable mineral reserves and agricultural and industrial resources, it lacks oil. For much of its energy it depends on the Soviet Union and China, and that prevents it from lashing out at Moscow and Beijing too openly. To extricate itself from this dilemma, the North is now seeking breakthroughs in its relations with Japan and, even more, the United States.

While talking with Hwang I observed that Seoul's rapprochement with the Soviet Union and China was straining its relations with Taiwan, opening the way for an interdependent relationship between North Korea and Taiwan. The North, I pointed out, was in great need of the intermediate and consumer goods Taiwan has to offer; in Taipei, I continued, President Lee Teng-hui was guiding his government in a very intelligent fashion. Hwang's reaction to these remarks was not, as I had expected, a flat denial that Pyongyang would even consider ties with Taipei. Far from brushing off my suggestion, Hwang listened to it attentively.

Like the remote regime in the North, Taiwan was once under Japanese colonial rule. Both are countries that even today have some people who can converse in Japanese quite comfortably. Yet Japan's diplomatic relations with both remain severed. I have been wondering whether it is right for Japan to ignore these two neighbors. And while pondering this question, I have come to suspect that Pyongyang and Taipei might just possibly reach out to each other, perhaps even in the near future.

In this connection, it may be useful to compare North Korea with China, focusing on the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party and the Korean Workers' Party. To begin with China, it seems fair to say that today, 41 years after the Communists took over, the party has little legitimacy left. Its standing in the people's eyes has been undercut by long years of misguided policies, setbacks in socialist construction, and corruption within the party.

North Korea's situation is different. The party there also has its problems, as evidenced by the recent strengthening of the campaign to eliminate excess bureaucracy, but the way it has directed socialist construction has not been equally problematic. At the very least, the party never forced the country through the sort of nationwide upheaval that China experienced in the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, the North's absolute dictatorship has closed the country tight, blocking inflows of information so thoroughly that the people know little about the outside world. Even as the monuments glorifying Kim Il Sung have gone up, the population has been fed on a diet of propaganda about South Korea. In the South, people are told, anti-American movements are spreading to break the yoke of American imperialism, serious strikes are precipitating a crisis in the big business conglomerates, and students everywhere are in an anti-government mood. As long as this ignorance of outside realities continues, the legitimacy of the Korean Workers' Party will not be questioned.

North Korea has thus far warded off all the germs of foreign ideas so successfully that it has achieved an extraordinary degree of "purity." What it needs now is to build up its resistance so that it can cope with the changes that the future is likely to bring. Japan can help it acquire such resistance by expanding exchanges on a variety of levels. As yet the North-South conflict is intense, but just as the Berlin Wall fell quite suddenly, the two Koreas could decide abruptly one day to bring their quarreling to an end. Whether the truce led to a loose confederation of North and South or a reunited republic, Japan might be faced with a troublesome neighbor in which anti-Japanese feelings ran deep. To deter this contingency as well, Japan should take active measures to make North Korea a friend. (Courtesy of PHP Institute)

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East Asia's Communist Die-hards
The Underside of the Resort Boom

Tackling the Impediments to Trade

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Cover: This drawing depicts a scene at an Edo-period clothing store, the predecessor to today's Matsuzakaya department-store chain. The signs on the pillars proclaim the store's adherence to a policy of fixed prices, which was an innovation at the time. Now Japan's retailers are poised for a new round of innovation as some of the restraints on commercial activity—seen by other countries as an impediment to trade—are coming under review. (Courtesy of Matsuzakaya Co., Ltd.)