

such as 'big brother [i.e. the workers] has come' (*dage lai le*) or 'the people of the city support the students' (*shimin shengyuan xuesheng*). Marxist orthodoxy was remolded to become what it had been originally: a theory for revolutionary action. This struck at the very foundations of the Communist Party's legitimacy, and, even more significantly, provided a mechanism through which to enshrine the movement in China's tradition of protest. As one of my informants put it during a group discussion which I taped on 21 May:

To oppose this [movement], I feel the government cannot do it this time. Why is that? Because this time it has come to be a movement of the whole people. It is not only a movement restricted to students, it is a movement of the whole people. It is a movement of a total scope (*quan fenwei*). China has three million soldiers.... At a big city like Beijing they have at least 200,000. Moreover, not all troops will want to maintain order. So this movement, even if it can subside temporarily it will rise up again later. This is not easy to [word indistinct], I absolutely [think] this movement, even though the army may break it up (*qusan*) by force, it cannot quell (*pingxi*)²⁸ it. (Tape 38: 2)

With the active participation of 'the people' and 'the workers' the movement had become more than just a protest movement; it became a landmark in the Chinese people's heroic struggle for a righteous government. In other words, the mass demonstrations of 17 and 18 May served first and foremost as a mechanism to decontextualize the primary moral and cognitive legacy of the students' movement. By demonstrating, the ordinary people of Beijing had actively committed themselves to the ideas and ideals of the students. Their commitment will be a very powerful resource for future political movements. Dissident students or intellectuals will be able to appeal to (i.e. recontextualize) the People's Movement's tradition of protest and the martyrs of 4 June to mobilize anew the people of Beijing.

The mass demonstrations followed the same pattern as the earlier demonstrations of students and journalists. A difference was that because of the much larger numbers the problem of maintaining order became more acute. The students were forced into a new role: policeman. Some even went to the extreme of wearing fake police uniforms, but most of the time the by

now familiar head-bands were a sufficient indication of student-activist status.

The new role of the students also had important symbolic value. First of all, it invalidated the government's rather transparent argument that the demonstrations had to be stopped because they created chaos at and around the square. Second, it showed that the city was no longer under the control of the government, but that now the students were the legitimate authority in Beijing. Essential was the fact that demonstrators and bystanders behaved in an orderly fashion and complied voluntarily with the instructions of the student-policemen. In fact, as many people pointed out with a combination of glee and pride, under the students Beijing was safe and orderly as never before.

As far as the demonstrations themselves are concerned, the most striking element was the role of the work unit. People demonstrated not as individuals, but as members of the delegation (literally 'demonstration troops', *youxing duiyu*) of their work unit. These delegations in turn were often part of larger demonstrations of the 'system' (*xitong*, see Chapter 3) to which the work unit belonged. System and work unit were almost always indicated by means of banners, usually red,²⁹ with their names written in black or gold.

The delegations were strictly separated from other delegations and especially from the bystanders along the route. The first couple of weeks this was done by a ring of demonstrators walking hand in hand at the four sides of the demonstration (*shoulashou juchui*). Later people started using strings supported by the demonstrators at the edges of the delegation. Some of the better organized delegations had two or more people walking ahead of the delegation ordering the bystanders to make way. They often wore armbands, faithful copies of those worn in urban China by people whose official duty it is to keep public order, such as local guards, watchmen, bus conductors and policemen. The front section of the area sealed off by the ring of demonstrators was often left empty except for one person wielding a banner or placard with demands or slogans, or a home-made satirical³⁰ device (a marionette with Li Peng's face, a cartoon). Behind this person, two or three people supported the identifying banner of the delegation, followed by a person (sometimes standing on the platform of a transport bicycle, and

more often than not a young woman) shouting rhythmically the appropriate slogans of the day, repeated in chorus by the other members of the delegation around her.

The spatial organization of the demonstrations was a creative reworking of the pattern set by the 1976 Tian'anmen incident, and reflected the social organization of society as it was understood by the participants in the movement. The same was true of the student delegations at the square. From the start of the hunger-strike until the army forced them to leave on 4 June, the students kept the square permanently occupied. Quickly, a pattern emerged which would become only more pronounced over time. Because the students were the initiators and leading force of the movement, and at a certain point in time even of the whole nation, they occupied the symbolic political centre of the nation: Tian'anmen Square. The student leaders in turn occupied the platform around the Monument of Revolutionary Heroes: higher and even more central. Moreover, their organization and activities were all oriented northwards in the direction of the Tian'an Gate of the imperial Forbidden City, the symbolic location of the movement's opponent, the authorities. The supporting demonstrations by 'the people' were all bound for the square. Upon arrival, the delegations walked around the square one or more times after which they returned to the work unit they had come from. The result was a continuous revolution of the people around the pivot of the nation, the students.

Around the Monument of Revolutionary Heroes the headquarters of the delegations from the participating universities, first mainly from Beijing but later from all over the country, were set up. Each delegation sealed off a section of the square using strings tied to bamboo poles or potted plants. At the front a 'gate' was left which was closed off with only one piece of string. Usually a member of the delegation was left to stand guard there to keep an eye on the people going inside the 'compound'. On the territory fenced off in this way a makeshift shelter was constructed using plastic foil, bamboo poles, cloth and rope. As closely as possible, given the circumstances, a miniature copy of a Chinese work unit compound was thus created. Not all students permanently resided in their compounds. The aim was only to keep the square occupied. With the exception of the hunger-strikers, the students took turns

staying at the headquarters, while the others went elsewhere to get some sleep, to eat, to demonstrate, or to attend meetings.

At first, the people of Beijing were allowed to walk around freely between the fenced off compounds. At different places people stopped to listen to the student broadcasts, a speaker, or a discussion. When the audience became too large for the people at the back to hear or see anything they started shouting rhythmically 'One, two, get down; one, two, get down' (*yī, èr, zuòxià, yī, èr, zuòxià*) until the people at the front squatted or sat down on the pavement.

On 19 May, however, things suddenly changed. The students sealed off the whole square, so that ordinary people and visiting anthropologists had to be content with watching from a distance the sea of delegation-identifying flags around the monument. The student leaders only allowed holders of student or journalist IDs in, even going so far as setting up an impromptu office, where people could have one made for them by student-clerks.

The reason given for this was that the hygiene at the square had deteriorated so much that an outbreak of epidemic diseases was feared. More likely, however, was that on 19 May it became known that Zhao Ziyang had finally lost his struggle with his conservative opponents within the leadership. Now that it had been confirmed that a compromise with the authorities would no longer be possible, the more radical students of the Command Post of the Hunger-Strike Group grasped the opportunity to take over completely from the more moderate leaders who had come from the ranks of the Autonomous Students Union and the Dialogue Group. Wu'er Kaixi, for instance, the most famous of the leaders who had risen to prominence during the early days of the movement, was forced to resign from the leadership (Nick 1989: 67; Shen 1991: 306).

The new, radical leadership of the Command Post gave up the hunger-strike³¹ and prepared for the unavoidable violent confrontation with the authorities. A new organization was set up to lead the student movement: The General Command Post for the Defence of Tian'anmen Square (*Baowei Tian'anmen Guangchun zongzhibu*). The leadership of this organization was largely identical to the Command Post of the Hunger-Strike Group.³² Its establishment must therefore be interpreted as their final and complete victory over the earlier student leaders. The occupation of the square had become a military operation.

Subversive military operations do not, in the first place, depend on propaganda work for their success and they can do very well without government spies. As a consequence, the square was sealed off. Only several days later were people allowed on the square again which by now resembled a semi-permanent settlement. The territories of the delegations were relocated in such a way that clearly recognizable alleys and streets were left open. Moreover, the territories no longer had to be indicated by strings stretched between poles. Most delegations had been able to acquire real tents, mainly sent by sympathizers from Hong Kong. Only the *sanctum sanctorum*, the platform around the monument, remained out of bounds and sealed off by strings. Here the leaders of the Command Post and the headquarters of some of its subordinate organizations, such as the Propaganda Department, could be found.

Earlier on it was pointed out that a strict separation between demonstrating delegations and bystanders was maintained. The division of social space at the square reflected the same pattern. The reasons for this are complex. In both cases the explanation given by most people was that it was needed to ensure order. If not, riotous elements could enter and create trouble, providing the authorities with a splendid justification for suppressing the demonstrations and the occupation of the square. In my opinion, however, there is more involved in this than just a practical matter of crowd control.

As I have pointed out in Part II, in social life a Chinese is not first and foremost an independent individual, but a member of a family, a kin group, a village, etc. The Chinese fear of chaos also derives from this collectivism. Within the group there is harmony, trust, and order. Outside the group, fear, cut-throat competition and chaos reign supreme. Maintaining the boundary between the realms of harmony and chaos, between inside and outside, is an important preoccupation for almost all Chinese. Real or imagined, the demonstrators also saw the most immediate threat to their movement in the unpredictable mass of bystanders without identifiable social positions. Although the bystander role was the most important political invention of the movement and its greatest source of strength, it was still treated with a distinctly Chinese fear for the unknown.

Fortunately, maintaining this strict separation between demonstrators and bystanders, even after the majority of the people

of Beijing had started demonstrating, proved to be an unexpected political resource. It meant that one and the same individual could participate in the events in two different roles. After first having been 'demonstrator' with the work unit, one could return to the square again, alone or with friends or family members, as 'bystander'. The use and political force of this distinction would only become clear to me after the proclamation of martial law on 20 May. This made work unit demonstrations impossible once more, but failed to curtail the continuing support of the bystanders (see below).

These observations about the primacy of the collective in Chinese culture also shed a different light on the role of the work unit during the demonstrations. In Chapter 3 I mentioned the dominant role of the work unit in urban China. This is not only a consequence of the bureaucratic nature of China's social structure, but also of the importance of the group in Chinese culture. The message the demonstrations were supposed to convey was that the whole society had seen enough of the present leadership. Chinese society however is not all citizens, but all groups and organizations making it up. To be effective, the demonstrations had to be organized by these groups and organizations, that is, the work units and the *xitong* to which they belong.

Of course, there was also a more practical reason to demonstrate in delegations, namely the fear of future repercussions. Using the name of the unit, and participating as a member of its delegation, one was no longer individually responsible. The responsibility was shared with all the other members and ultimately rested with the leader of the unit. Therefore, demonstrations under the name of the unit needed either the permission or the passive consent of the unit's leader, or else enough pressure had to be exerted by the leader's superiors in the bureaucracy and/or by the members of the unit themselves to neutralize his opposition.

The workers of the guest-house where I was staying, for instance, were forbidden to demonstrate by the unit's leader. They were told that the political risks for the unit – and presumably for the future career of the leader – would be too great. Instead, they had to be content with the role of bystander, which the leader did allow and in any case could never have monitored effectively. In this case, the workers were unable to overcome

THE ORDINARY AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

the opposition of their unit's leader, which had probably a lot to do with the fact that most employees were young girls, working on contracts, who had a weak bargaining position with the leader.

In many other units, however, the balance of power was different, and leaders allowed demonstrations, or even organized some themselves. At my host organization, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, most demonstrations were organized by self-appointed activists at the various research institutes which made up this *xitong*. The leaders were content with merely not forbidding their activities. On two occasions (18 and 24 May), however, the *xitong* and *dantuei* leaders officially sponsored the demonstrations, asking every unit to invite its members to participate.³³

Even though the role of *dantuei* and its leader is crucial to understanding the way the demonstrations developed, this does not mean that the demonstrations were merely orchestrated by the members of the Zhao faction, using their personal connections with unit and system leaders to get people out in the streets in a last desperate attempt to win what seemed to be a losing battle within the top leadership. Attributing so much does not agree with the insistence of the student leaders and most Beijing citizens that the demonstrations were spontaneous. Moreover, it greatly exaggerates the importance in Chinese society of the top leadership's factional divisions. The people I talked to almost never thought about ordinary individuals or *dantuei* in terms of belonging to one faction or the other. As I have showed in Chapter 3, important political decisions by unit leaders, including organizing, allowing, or opposing demonstrations, are the result of weighing many factors against each other.

The position of a unit leader is extraordinarily complicated and requires a considerable political intelligence. On the one hand, he or she is the leader of a *dantuei*, whose interests have to be defended against other *dantuei* and higher levels of the bureaucracy. On the other hand, the leader is subordinate to these higher levels, and has to appease their continuous pressure for compliance to their policies and targets. Added to this are the pressures applied through the informal network of personal connections the leader has built up to circumvent the inefficiencies of the rigid bureaucratic structure. A leader has to

THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

have the ability to balance all these interests and pressures without damaging his credibility with any of them. On top of that, the leader needs an almost intuitive sense for the political wind blowing through the bureaucracy and the top leadership in Beijing to ensure that the *dantuei* and his or her own career survive the unceasing swings of the political pendulum. A leader's personal loyalty to a higher level leader and through this person perhaps a certain commitment to either of the factions at the top may therefore be important, but is by no means the only factor involved.

Zhao and his followers may have wanted to manipulate and use the movement for their own interests, but that alone can never explain the readiness of so many ordinary citizens to demonstrate. Within the *dantuei* in Beijing tensions had been building up over the weeks, only contained by the political prudence their members and leaders had accumulated over a lifetime of political campaigns. The most probable reconstruction of what happened between 15 and 18 May is that a flood of other demonstrations were unleashed after followers of Zhao gave the green light to some selected *dantuei* directly loyal to them (newspapers, research institutes, universities, the Capital Iron and Steel Company). Owing to the example set by these *dantuei*, other *dantuei* leaders could no longer resist the pressure of their unit's ordinary members. At this juncture, many of the *dantuei* leaders may even have judged it politically expedient to allow demonstrations; one does not want to seem too rash, but neither too cautious.

Zhao's influence over the movement was imperfect at best. This is also borne out by the fact that he was unable to stop the hunger-strike and the demonstrations on 17 and 18 May, when that would have given him a very powerful position within the leadership. Once started, the demonstrations gathered their own momentum and could not be stopped overnight. Paradoxically, only after Zhao had lost the power struggle at the top³⁴ did his supporters get a firmer grip on the movement. His personal appearance at the square on the morning of 19 May, and especially the declaration of martial law that night, not by Zhao, but by Li Peng, made clear that Zhao had lost and that his conservative victors were bent on cracking down hard on the movement.

Suddenly, Zhao became the hero of the movement and the

THE ORDINARY AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

saviour of the nation. The development of the slogans of the demonstrators between 15 and 20 May supports this reconstruction. The original demand was for the collective resignation (*jiti cizhi*), or retirement (*lixiu*) of the group of leaders, including Zhao, who were collectively responsible for the refusal of the government to talk to the students. On 17 May the demand for the resignation of Deng Xiaoping was added. This was a direct result of Zhao's remarks to Gorbachov on 16 May, singling Deng out as the person responsible for the hard line taken against the movement. For example, one banner read 'grandfather Deng is old, give him a plot of land in Sichuan [*this home province*] to retire to'. After 19 May, this was changed to the demand for the dismissal (*xiaiai*) or even downfall (*daobao*) of first of all Premier Li Peng, and secondly Deng Xiaoping and President Yang Shangkun. Another slogan called for the downfall of the 'false government of Li Peng' (*Li Pengde weizhengfu*), implying that now there was a true government as well. Not only had the wording become tougher but now individual leaders were being singled out.

At this juncture, the commitment of the movement to one of the factions within the leadership, one of the strategic pitfalls the students had carefully avoided for so long, had become a fact. This happened only after developments within the leadership itself left the movement with no other option. The strategy of forcing a dialogue with the leadership had failed. A confrontation had become unavoidable, and it was no longer necessary to maximize the movement's credibility in the eyes of the authorities by staying out of the party leadership's internal factional struggle. On 19 May, the same day of the declaration of martial law and Zhao's final defeat, the students therefore terminated their hunger-strike. A hunger-strike is only useful when the possibility exists that the authorities can be forced to make concessions. Zhao's defeat and martial law had made it clear that such was no longer the case. The conservative leaders made it clear that they no longer wanted to be held accountable for their actions in terms of the primary moral order of the movement and that they were preparing for a radical breach with it.

It can nevertheless not be stressed enough that the open alliance between Zhao and the students became a fact only *after* the conservatives in the leadership had closed all other options.

THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

In the propaganda produced after the military crackdown on 4 June much ink has been wasted on denouncing the conspiracy of Zhao and a handful of dissidents who used the patriotic students to stage a counterrevolutionary turmoil (*jiangning dongluan*). If there ever was such a conspiracy, however, it was brought about by the conservatives themselves.

6. MARTIAL LAW

In the days after the proclamation of martial law it became impossible for an increasing number of *danwei* leaders to allow the demonstrations to continue. Demonstrating now would be illegal, and thereby constitute an open challenge to the authorities.³⁵ Meetings of leaders within the *danwei* had to study the *People's Daily* 26 April editorial, preparing the way for a new Anti Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign aimed at ferreting out the activists in each *danwei* who had organized the demonstrations. The old system of political control reasserted itself.

Meanwhile, very different things were happening in the streets, showing that the people had learned from their experiences. Although demonstrations by work units could be curtailed, the informal demonstrations, which the support of the bystanders had by now become, were beyond the reach of the *danwei*-centred control system. After martial law the threat of an army invasion changed this passive, mandate-giving role into an active one: protector of the students at the square.

The students themselves realized only too well that this was the last trump-card they held. During the first two days they dispatched propaganda teams asking the people to leave their homes in the evening and assemble at street-corners to block the army's path.

At Chongwenmen a group of students is writing small pamphlets which call upon the people to support the students tonight and prevent the army from entering the city. I manage to take a couple of these leaflets home. One reads:

SOS

Dear Beijing, our beloved fatherland is in a most critical period now. It is possible that the field army sent by the government will have already entered tonight. We

THE ORDINARY AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

ask the citizens to go outside this evening. Save the students.

5/20.³⁶

The students say that the metro entrances are closed now, because the personnel have stopped the trains in the tunnels and have switched off the electricity to prevent the army from using them to sneak their way into the square. (Fieldnotes, 20 May 1989: 1)

To bolster their appeal, the students spread the (probably incorrect) story that Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng had said that it would be permissible to kill 20,000 people if this could ensure 20 years of peace and order.

After martial law, the frustrated citizens of Beijing had no other recourse but to assume the role of anonymous protector and confront the suppression head on. They were forced to go to work and keep quiet while at the *danwei*, but after work they stood guard at street-corners, waiting for the army which would come sooner or later. Others mounted their bikes and rode downtown to the square. The following song was sung again and again by thousands who rode up and down Chang'an Avenue late in the evening of 22 May:

As long as Li Peng does not step down,
We will come day after day.

Those who sleep at night will come by day,
Those who sleep by day will come at night.

(*Li Peng bu xiatai;*
Women tiantian lai.
Wanshang shuijiao baitian lai;
Baitian shuijiao wanshang lai.)

(Fieldnotes, 22 May 1989: 5)

In this way the students at the square were protected by millions of people who were prepared to give their lives.

After dinner I go out on my bike again. The atmosphere is like I have never experienced before, a unique mix of tension and solidarity involving the entire population of the city. Everybody is out in the streets, sitting, standing, talk-

THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

ing, and waiting. Buses with deflated tyres are blocking the main intersections and streets. The orderliness, the sense of discipline and the peacefulness of all Beijingers is stunning. The common threat of the army has erased all social cleavages, Beijing has become one big family. (Fieldnotes, 20 May 1989: 2)

However, the exhilaration of that night rapidly disappeared as people began to realize that all the rhetoric about heroism, righteousness, and martyrdom might have very real consequences. On 21 May the invasion of the army seemed imminent. That evening a mixture of fear of dying and determination to fulfil one's moral obligation towards China pervaded the people's mood and talk, a sensation which would be the same only on the evening of 3 June when the army was again expected to enter:

This evening the mood is very different from yesterday. Instead of a feeling of universal brotherhood, a sense of crisis is acute now. The following speech by two students is characteristic:

Student 1: I am a high school student, and by participating in the movement I am risking my future, my chances to enter a good university and to study abroad, but I think that I will have to sacrifice this when necessary.

Student 2: I am 19 years old, have not even reached 20. Of course I am afraid of dying, but if it is to happen tonight I know I will not have died in vain.

Another woman I meet tells me: 'I want you to tell the whole world', after which she bursts out in tears and can speak no more. I put my arm around her, but suddenly I realize again I am in China and look up to see the stupefied expression on the faces of the people around us. Ashamed and confused I hurry away. (Fieldnotes, 22 May 1989: 1)

The words of these two students express a central theme of the People's Movement which has been mentioned on several occasions already. Participating in the People's Movement is not presented in terms of interest promotion or outrage about

wrongs suffered, but rather in terms of a general moral duty to which one has to sacrifice one's own interests.

The woman's insistence that I 'tell the whole world' what has happened in Beijing bears on another, but related, theme about which I will have more to say in the concluding section of this chapter. The movement was not in the first place about petitioning the government and thereby changing its policies. Rather, the movement's main concerns were to create and influence audiences (such as the people of Beijing, people elsewhere in China, foreign public opinion). Another intention was to construct (decontextualize) a historical record of the events which could be enshrined in the sacred tradition of protest and be used (recontextualized) by later protest movements.

The words of both the woman and the two students also show how difficult it was for many to act out the movement's impersonal moralistic selflessness. After all, the participants were also ordinary individuals with ordinary ambitions, plans, and interests. Others, however, were more successful at keeping up the extraordinary moral and cognitive frame of the People's Movement:

At Dongdan a man in a military uniform is making a speech. He says that he is a soldier, but that he supports the citizens and that he opposes the decision to send in the army. (Fieldnotes, 22 May 1989: 1)

A student at Tian'anmen Square comes up to me and says: 'We hope you will stay here with us tonight, to witness China's history'. (Fieldnotes, 22 May 1989: 2)

These two people talked as players of certain roles, namely 'soldier' and 'student', and not as private personalities. Their dignified, impersonal bearing intended to suggest that their actions were no longer the result of personal choices. They were compelled to carry out their duty by the force of 'history', the fate and the consciousness of the Chinese people.³⁷ The immediate impact of such role-playing is especially evident in the case of the soldier. By presenting himself as a soldier, his denunciation of the army carried much more weight than if he had spoken as an ordinary citizen. This message was not lost on the people listening to his speech, who said to each other things such as 'He is a soldier!' or 'Even the army disagrees!'.

The army and the people of Beijing confronted each other during two different periods. During the first two days after the declaration of martial law, on 20 and 21 May, it seemed as if the impossible would happen. Everywhere in the city barricades of fences and buses with deflated tires blocked the main thoroughfares leading to the square. Army units of the Beijing regional command entered the city from the west and southwest, but were stopped about 5 kilometres from the square by the population led by the students' propaganda teams.

Hardly any violence erupted during these confrontations. In line with the students' earlier interpretations of the situation, the student propaganda teams portrayed martial law as evidence that some individual leaders had lost touch with the people. Just like the party earlier on, the army was the innocent instrument. During a discussion with some citizens at the square a student activist formulated this as follows:

Student: When we heard the news [*about martial law*] it was bad. Against a government like this, they [*the hunger-strikers*] had to go that far, they could not go on hunger-striking. Hunger-striking was no use any more. They [*i.e. the government*] are totally inhuman (*mei you ren dao le*). They said we have to rise [*in rebellion*].

Bystander: The government's heart is too black (*Zhengfu de xin tai hei le*).

Student: They had to rise. (word indistinct) government, (word indistinct) the whole government, or at least the policy makers, the heart is too black, they have no normal human feelings (*mei you renxing*).

(...)

Student: They [*the soldiers*] don't know anything. (We) have enlightened [*jiukai*, literally to untie, to unbutton] them (...). When the soldiers heard it they cried. Afterwards old women and small children came out to persuade them. You cannot talk to them like that, because it is said that these soldiers have not read any newspapers for three days. Because the newspapers of the last three days were important newspapers. For three days they have not read newspapers. (Tape 36: 3)

The above two quotes illustrate several points. First of all, the claim that the soldiers had not read any newspapers, and

THE ORDINARY AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

the importance attached to that by the student, illustrates the vital role of propaganda and the media, which I have discussed before. This also illustrates that the movement was primarily a dramatized event, which gained its impetus from its impact on the audiences which it had constructed.

Secondly, the hunger-strike was indeed terminated because the declaration of martial law had shown that it was useless to continue while the government refused to subscribe to the discursive frame of the movement which the hunger-strike had both constructed and upheld, and without which it would be meaningless.

Thirdly, and I will come back to this point below, the refusal to go along with the hunger-strike's moral discourse branded the government as amoral, non-accountable. The government had disqualified itself as a social actor, that is, it had become inhuman, and it would thereby be justified to use the violence against it for which the ex-hunger-strikers were preparing. In such a context it would of course have been strategically and tactically suicidal to admit that the government denied the legitimacy of the movement's primary discursive validity because it entertained its own tertiary moral system, i.e. Leninism.

The way the participants in the movement dealt with the new realities of martial law was in keeping with the students' interpretation that the army had been deluded by the party and government leadership. At road-blocks the students and the population tried to convince 'the soldiers who are our sons and younger brothers' (*zi-di bing*)³⁸ not to raise their weapons against their own people, and gave food and drink³⁹ to the soldiers to express the bond between the people and the army. The soldiers and their commanders were very sensitive to this appeal, because many of them came from Beijing or had been stationed there for a long time. One rumour had it that the commander-in-chief of Beijing's regional command had himself refused to order his troops to use violence.⁴⁰

After a couple of days, the party leadership understood that using local troops would lead to nothing. An almost surreal period ensued, during which nothing seemed to happen. Although the students' numbers gradually decreased, they continued to occupy the square, while the population continued to leave home in the evening to protect them. Everybody was

THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

convinced that very soon the army would come again, but nobody knew when or how.

For the first time, the initiative was no longer in the hands of the students or the other participants in the movement. The people of Beijing, too, realized that they could do little more than wait, and the high spirits of the movement's discursive order again yielded gradually to the earthiness and cynicism which are some of the greatest assets of the Beijingers. This was succinctly put into words by a young man who watched a student carry a banner which read 'The trial of history' (*Lishi shenpan*), adding to his friends: 'Well, history is pretty slow' (*Lishi ting man!*).

The students tried to maintain the appearance that they were in full control of the city. At the square, they erected the now-famous replica of the Statue of Liberty, the 'Goddess of Democracy' (*Minzhu nushen*). This again gave the foreign media something to report which went down extremely well with their audiences back home. Better still, it succeeded in aggravating the authorities yet further. Nevertheless, it could not conceal the fact that at this juncture the political machinations within the party leadership had become the only decisive factor.

It is still unclear what exactly happened within that select circle of top leaders during the days before the massacre on 4 June. Certainly there must have been strong opposition to the use of violence to enforce martial law. This forced the party veterans, who had been made to resign by Deng Xiaoping from their formal positions several years before, to come out in the open. They had to apply all the power and influence they could muster in order to avert the fragmentation and collapse of the party, the army and the state. The role of these veterans was admitted on 9 June, when Deng Xiaoping delivered a speech in which he praised the successful suppression of the counterrevolutionary rebellion. Next to him were seated, apart from a couple of younger conservative leaders such as Li Peng and Qiao Shi, leaders like Li Xiannian, Peng Zhen, and Bo Yibo, who were supposed to have retired from active politics years ago.

An especially prominent role in the preparation and execution of the military suppression was played by Yang Shangkun, the President of the People's Republic and Vice-Chairman of the Party Military Commission. On 24 May, after the initial attempts to capture Beijing had failed, he made a speech at a special

THE ORDINARY AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

meeting of the Party Military Commission⁴¹ to secure the support for the crackdown from all leading military figures. After this had been done, new preparations to take Beijing could be made. Large-scale troop-movements were carried out around the capital, and troops from all over China were trucked or flown in.

Crucial to the whole operation was the 27th Army which was stationed in Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei province which surrounds Beijing municipality. The 27th Army was made up of professional soldiers, and had become nationally famous for its role during the Chinese-Vietnamese border war in 1979. Most importantly, its commander was a relative of Yang Shangkun, and it was often referred to as the Yang family's private army. It was this army which carried out the massacre on the night of 4 June. As far as is known, all the other armies – reportedly more than 150,000 troops in total (Beaver & Harney 1989: 22) – only fulfilled supporting roles. After the massacre, the 27th Army disappeared from Beijing in a matter of days, and other armies, without blood on their hands, took over the occupation of the city.

Concerning the roles of the 27th Army and Yang Shangkun much is still unclear, and we will probably know the full story only after the current leadership has been replaced by a less conservative one. The facts which are currently known allow at least two different reconstructions. The first scenario assumes that Yang acted without the prior consent of the other military leaders, and sent in his 27th Army to present the others with a *fait accompli*. In support of this reconstruction are the army's resumption of its non-violent march on Beijing on 2 and 3 June, the sudden change to a *Blitzkrieg*-strategy and cold-blooded mass-murder in the evening of 3 June, and the chaos during the days following the crackdown, including (unconfirmed) reports of army units confronting each other. In this scenario the excessive use of violence during the suppression was caused both by the inexperience of the 27th army in dealing with civilian unrest, and the necessity of not giving the other armies around Beijing the time to intervene.

The second reconstruction of the events of 3 and 4 June rests on the assumption that Yang, on behalf of his long-time patron Deng Xiaoping, had reached an agreement with the other army leaders. The 27th Army would do the dirty work while the

THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

other armies would not intervene, thereby avoiding any direct responsibility for the massacre. In this reconstruction, the fact that the suppression took place on Saturday night and Sunday morning, and was preceded by two days of non-violent and largely useless offences can only be explained by the leadership's desire to get as many people as possible out in the streets to show for once and for all who was in charge. A stealthy occupation of Beijing – which seemed to have been possible and would probably have been a lot easier – would not have been a sufficient deterrent. After all, the aim of the crackdown was not simply to suppress the movement, but rather to eradicate it totally and erase it from the historical record⁴².

In any event, the need to resort to military means in order to put an end to the movement was caused by the inability of the leadership to deal with it in a more sophisticated way. During the course of the movement the leadership time and again showed itself to be either unable or unwilling to accept the moral and cognitive parameters of the movement as they were constructed by the students and the other participants. Their unwillingness to accept the students as partners in politics served as a self-fulfilling prophecy, because it allowed the movement to radicalize and forced all the adversaries of the conservative party leaders to join each other in a grand alliance.

The conservative party leaders obviously did not have the intellectual and ideological flexibility to grasp the significance of what was happening. They were prisoners of a world view which elevates the leaders' own judgement to the level of absolute truth and recognizes only three kinds of people: friends, enemies, and friends in need of correction. Given these limitations the leaders could probably react in no other way. They saw only a lethal threat to their power – largely the product of their own inflexibility – and defended that power in the same way they had conquered it 40 years earlier: with violence.

Today, 3 June, everybody seems to be convinced that tonight will be the show-down. At around 8 p.m. I ride my bike to the square (...). At the southeastern corner of the square I run into a large crowd blocking the road. Several Western cameramen are filming from transport bikes or portable ladders. Their floodlights are reflected by the helmets of a

THE ORDINARY AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

battalion of soldiers about 30 yards from me. The people around me ask if I don't want to go over there, too. The soldiers will never dare to shoot at a foreigner, so my presence will stop them from advancing any farther. I decline the honour. I point out that, although the cameramen are getting paid handsomely to become revolutionary martyrs, I am not. After a couple of minutes the crowd moves up towards the soldiers who, apparently under no orders to shoot, retreat in the direction they have come from.

(...)

I run into a colleague from Leiden and together we walk in the direction of Dongdan. We pass by another road-block. Behind a bus parked across the street a battalion of nervous soldiers with peasant faces endure passively the insults of the crowd and the feverish speeches of a student propaganda team.

(...)

At 1.30 a.m. the two of us, together with a couple of others, walk back to the square (...). People coming from the opposite direction tell us about 30, 60, 200 casualties farther down. When we arrive at the Peking Hotel, about 300 to 400 yards from the square, we hear heavy machine-gun fire very close by. The crowd in front of us runs back in panic (...). Walking back through the small alleys off Chang'an Avenue we meet groups of people who still don't know anything about what is happening at the square. When we tell them, their reaction is remarkably subdued. After all, this is what everybody knew to be inevitable. (Fieldnotes, 4 June 1989: 1)

Although everybody in Beijing knew that violence was unavoidable, the students and the people of Beijing refused to be the first to resort to it. Only after the army opened fire on the evening of 3 June did the people of Beijing change to violent and often gruesome behaviour themselves. Even so, their violence happened within a moral and cognitive frame, just as the earlier

THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

non-violent behaviour had done. The army invasion constituted a breach of the earlier non-violent frame, and established a new one in which violence was the dominant means of signification.

Violence here was not a simple life-and-death struggle, but the expression of a moral outrage. Soldiers were not just disarmed and taken prisoner, but were pulled out of their tanks and beaten to death or, in some cases, hanged from trees or light-poles. Moreover, violence and resistance continued for days after Beijing had been taken by the army, long after they could possibly have had any impact. Again and again people blocked roads by dragging whatever they could find across them, or set fire to abandoned army trucks, actions which made little sense in terms of a direct means-to-an-end rationality. The violence was therefore simultaneously excessive and irrational, and patterned and significant. It was patterned on a new moral and cognitive order of retribution. At the same time, it was excessive, the result of moral outrage, rather than calculated actions to achieve specific goals.

The nature of the violence of the people during the suppression of the People's Movement can best be understood in ethnomethodological terms. The violence of the army constituted an illegitimate breach with the earlier, non-violent primary order which had been established by the People's Movement. The declaration of martial law two weeks earlier had already been interpreted by the students as the leadership's dismissal of the moral order created during the movement. The leadership and the participants of the movement no longer acted on the basis of the same moral and cognitive frame, and they therefore no longer considered each other as legitimate social actors, i.e. as human beings⁴³. Now that the army had also ignored the appeals to refrain from using violence, the people of Beijing drew the conclusion that the soldiers, too, were less than human:

(...) another Armed Personnel Carrier rolled into the square, this time from the southeast (...). It stopped momentarily, got its tracks caught, then tried to back away. But the crowd was on to it in a fury. Smashing metal bars against its side and further entangling the tracks, the mob then piled clothing and other material atop the hull, doused it with gasoline and set it on fire. When some of the students objected that the driver would be incinerated if he

THE ORDINARY AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

was not permitted to get out, the crowd shouted back, 'It's okay. He's not a human being.' (Morrison 1989: 48)

The pattern of violence and especially the struggle over its interpretation served important political goals beyond the immediacy of the event itself. Both to the authorities and to the participants in the movement, the 'facts and truth' (*shishi zhenxiang*) about the massacre were not so much concerned with what had actually happened, but were designed to serve as the moral basis of future actions.

As far as the participants in the movement are concerned, the truth about the death of so many innocent people confirmed the wickedness of the authorities and the legitimacy of future protest. People therefore made a point of displaying the dead in front of photographers and cameramen. Moreover, narrating to each other what happened or what one had heard from others was an important way of ensuring that the massacre would not be forgotten. Already during the massacre, the writing of its history had started.

Immediately afterwards, written or audiotaped eye-witness accounts perpetuated the process. The most famous of such accounts was the one by Chai Ling, the leader of the hunger-strikers, which was put on tape and smuggled out of China. With a perfect sense of drama, she recounts the bloodshed and the heroism and discipline of her comrades-in-arms, while at the same time establishing the truthfulness of her own reconstruction and the moral superiority of the students, as opposed to the moral bankruptcy and perfidy of the authorities:

The command post [of the students] decided to withdraw all the students (...). But then these butchers did not keep their word, and, while the students were retreating, soldiers with helmets, soldiers with bayonets attacked the three terraces leading to the monument (...). Our loudspeakers on the monument were already riddled with bullets, and this is the monument of the people! This is the monument of the people's heroes! (...). [The students] were so exhausted and were still in their tents [at the square] (...). The tanks made mincemeat out of them (...). I think I am the most qualified to say whether we students are violent rebels or not. Each upright Chinese, place your hand on your chest and think. Young children, sitting peacefully arm-in-arm

THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

and shoulder-to-shoulder below the monument, could they have been violent rebels? (...). The fascism has already reached the stage that they, with a straight face and against the voice of their consciousness, can lie, can lie so unrepentantly.⁴⁴

In this way, what almost immediately came to be called 'six-four' (*liu-si*), i.e. the crackdown on June Fourth, was constructed. The movement was placed firmly, as had been intended all along, within the tradition of protest of the 'five-four' (May Fourth 1919) and 'four-five' (April Fifth 1976) movements (see Chapter 5).

The authorities, too, invested much effort in the construction of its history, but naturally with exactly the opposite purpose. The crackdown had to be portrayed in such a way that the People's Movement could not be enshrined in China's tradition of protest. In the official propaganda after 4 June the violence is blamed not on the students or the population of Beijing, but on a handful of counterrevolutionary 'bad' and 'violent elements' (*daitu* and *baotiu*), leaving the army no option but to use measured violence. The media presented the soldiers who had died during the Battle of Beijing as heroes, who had given their lives to protect socialism against a counterrevolutionary turmoil.

Furthermore, the official propaganda took great pains to establish the validity of its account of the crackdown. However, unlike more normal times, the propaganda bureaucracy did not have the monopoly of truth. Too many people had seen what had actually happened, and many leaders of the movement had not yet been arrested or had already fled abroad. To regain the monopoly of truth about the crackdown the propaganda had to enter into an indirect debate with its opponents: fugitive student activists, intellectual dissidents, and anonymous rumours. In this sense, both the official propaganda and the fugitive leaders of the movement faced the same task: discursively defeating one's adversaries by establishing the truthfulness of one's own version of the history of the massacre. The following quotation from an official account is therefore very similar to the earlier quotation from Chai Ling's eye-witness account, because both explicitly deny the truthfulness of the accounts by the opponents⁴⁵.

THE ORDINARY AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

Thanks to the heroic struggle of the officers and men of the People's Liberation Army who had come to enforce martial law, and thanks to the officers and men of the military police and the cadres and police of Public Security, and thanks to the cooperation and support from the people, the suppression of the riot has already scored its first victory (...). At the moment all kinds of rumours are being spread in society, and many of the masses still have an insufficient grasp of the real state of affairs (...). It is therefore necessary to explain the truth about this counter-revolutionary riot (...). After having listened to the declaration [by the troops, which stated that the square would be cleared] the several thousand students remaining at the square started organizing their troops and appointed pickets. At about five o'clock they started to leave the square in an orderly way, each [unit] under its own flag⁴⁶ (...). At 6.30 a.m. the task of clearing the square had been completed (...). Of the students who had occupied the square not a single one had died, including those who finally had to be forced to go. The so-called 'river of blood at Tian'anmen Square' is total nonsense.⁴⁷

As the above quotation shows, a central theme in the propaganda war was whether any deaths had occurred at the square itself. After the massacre, rumours spread of hundreds, maybe even thousands of casualties at the square when the army's tanks rolled over the tents where the students had slept. The official propaganda, on the other hand, denied that anybody had died at the square.

After several days the various reports of foreign journalists and other eye-witnesses could be compared, and it transpired that the official propaganda was probably right⁴⁸. The government had taken great pains to construct and later present the event to its best possible advantage. A massacre at the square would have been sacrilege, and, since the square had been the students' stronghold it would be impossible to maintain that only *baotou* and *daitu* had been killed. Moreover, the propaganda suggested that if all the dramatic stories about a massacre at the square turned out to be unfounded, wouldn't all the other stories about bloodshed elsewhere in the city also be lies?

By resorting to (excessive) violence the army had committed

THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

an illegitimate breach with the moral order of the People's Movement. For this the authorities paid a heavy price. The army and party leaders had not only placed themselves outside the actional framework of the movement, but had disqualified themselves as responsible (accountable) human beings. In this way, they had also destroyed any common moral ground for a future dialogue with their own citizens.

An elderly woman tells me that the ordinary people hate the troops because of what they have done. What happened shows that the leaders are no longer human. Even in April, she continues, the people did not know what democracy was and did not care about it. The only reason they came out in the streets was to support the students. Now that the crackdown has happened, however, they know that China will need democracy, they know that a system in which only a few decide is no longer possible. (Fieldnotes, 8 June 1989: 1)

As this example shows, the suppression had destroyed the faith in the credibility of the party and its ideology. Because of this, the People's Movement's moral order has at least the potential to become a viable alternative to this ideology, rather than just serving to correct and rejuvenate it. In my opinion, this breach with the official ideology, and the resulting emancipation of the tradition of protest, are the most important results of the movement. It will give the movement a historic significance far greater than that of any of its predecessors, which have always remained trapped in traditional Chinese assumptions about the goals and nature of protest.

The principal task of the government propaganda was to repair this damage. For this reason it was vital to reconstruct the violence of the army as something which had to be employed. It was not the army, but the counterrevolutionaries who had committed an illegitimate breach, and who had therefore had to be severely punished. In the reconstruction by the authorities, the breakdown of the People's Movement's moral order could be blamed neither on the army nor on the students and the people. By constructing a fictitious category of 'counter-revolutionary bad and violent elements', inhuman according to the morality of both the movement and official Marxism, the discursive collapse on the night of 4 June was reduced to the format