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Readings on 1999’s "May 8th Tragedy"

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The events that began with the May 4th protests and the struggle that took place seventy years later during the lead-up to the June 4th Massacre loom largest in the history of Chinese youth activism in years ending with the numeral 9. But there were also protests involving university students in other years ending with that number, including 1999. These took place soon after the 80th anniversary of the may 4th Movement was marked, and they were triggered by NATO missiles hitting the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, killing three PRC nationals. The Embassy was hit on May 7 European time, but by then it was already May 8 in China. So, following a time-honored tradition, the term “May 8th Tragedy” was used for the event. Here are links to five accounts of the protests of that year (some by people whose names will be familiar to many readers of China Beat). They remind readers of what happened ten years ago and offer differing interpretations of how the demonstrations of 1999 should be contrasted with and in some cases can be linked to the student-led actions of years such as 1919 and 1989:

1 and 2. Two news accounts from the time (one by James Miles, another to which Rebecca MacKinnon contributed).

3. The closest thing to a blog post at the time (a Salon.com piece by a foreign student who was at Beida).

4 and 5. Two later analyses: one by political scientist Peter Gries, and one by Jeff Wasserstrom, which looks at the 2005 anti-Japanese protests, but includes discussion of earlier demonstrations, including those of 1999.