June 4th Around the World: Notes from One Week After the Anniversary

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive

Part of the Asian History Commons, Asian Studies Commons, Chinese Studies Commons, and the International Relations Commons

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive/461

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the China Beat Archive at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The China Beat Blog Archive 2008-2012 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
A week (or so) after the anniversary of the "May 35th" events (as some Chinese netizens put it to circumvent automatic blocks on mention of a highly charged date), we got several more responses to our request to Friends of the Blog for word on how June 4th was commemorated, discussed, or ignored in various parts of the world. The most substantial (reproduced in full below) is a second contribution to the series (click here for her first) by Paola Voci (an Italian-born, American-trained, New Zealand-based specialist in Chinese visual culture whose book, China on Video: Small Screen Realities, is due out later this year). [Her post explains the eye-catching image we are running here, which she sent to us along with her e-mail.]

We also heard from a couple of people regularly or temporarily based in Central or Eastern Europe, both of whom noted how relatively little interest there was in looking back to Tiananmen and connecting China's 1989 to the upheavals that took place in that same year in the region.

Gabriella Ivacs, a Budapest-based archivist at Central European University's extraordinary Open Society Archive (it has holdings on human rights, the history of Communism in Europe in particular, and other topics that are too special to try to summarize, so we’ll just encourage readers to make the jump and explore their website, where they’ll also find information on the innovative exhibitions OSA has mounted, some of which have dealt at least in part with China) wrote to say that "Hungarian papers and online news portals were not particularly interested in Beijing events" last week. She stressed that "Hungary is going through a serious political crisis, and [the press in] early June was focused on [the] EU election campaign." She notes that there were occasional articles on the anniversary, including one in a "left wing daily," Nepszabadsag, that placed the Massacre "in the context of 1989…the symbolic year of Transition in Eastern and Central Europe," but, "(i)nterestingly," claimed that the "1989 changes in Europe had no direct connection" to the contemporaneous "Beijing events."

A. Tom Grunfeld, an American scholar spending the year in Romania (and at two-time past contributor to this site before), confirmed this sense of relative lack of interest: "Apart from CNN and a single article in every Romanian and Hungarian paper on the appropriate day (edits from the wire services as best as I can make out) there is no interest here."

Here’s Paola’s comment in full:

Yesterday I got my copy of The New Zealand Listener (the 13-19 July issue) in the mail and, to my surprise, "Has China learnt from the Tiananmen Massacre?" was included as part of a much longer feature story on "Wealth: How Chinese consumers could drive our recovery?" While NZ seemed uninterested to remember June 4th when most other countries’ media were covering the anniversary (i.e., just before or on that very day), one of NZ most popular national magazines chose to have a
reflection on those events 10 days later, when almost every other national media had moved to different topics. But maybe, rather than reading this choice as a belated answer, one can interpret it as an attempt to look at the event outside the specific temporality of the 20 year anniversary and frame it instead in the on-going economic and political engagement of NZ with China. Tiananmen becomes a provocative footnote to the economic partnership that is both needed and feared by many in NZ.

The Tiananmen anniversary was discussed from two main critical angles: firstly, the issue of forced memory loss imposed by the Chinese government and how, despite the government’s efforts, many are still remembering; secondly, much more interestingly (I think), June 4th was remembered with a piece on Zhao Ziyang’s Secret Journal (an edited extract from the book’s preface (by one of the three co-editors, Adi Ignatius).

But, possibly even more interestingly, the magazine’s cover itself was particularly surprising as the image (attached) clearly evokes the visual rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution posters; one wonders how familiar this visual metaphor is to the Kiwi readership. I personally find the cross-cultural mix (or mess?) that the image conveys is really intriguing and open to quite contradictory readings. See and judge for yourself.

Tags: Tiananmen