

# The struggle between continuity and change in tiananmen square essay sample

[Politics](#), [Communism](#)



The events of Tiananmen Square in 1989 present the struggle between continuity and change through the clashing ideals of the Communist party and the civilians, especially the students, of China. The students, who leaned towards western ideals, demanded for political and economic reform that would ultimately lead to a more democratic and free society. They also campaigned against corruption, and this resulted in much support from the working class who had been exploited by the government. The westernised ideals of the students however, completely contradicted the views of the existing government of China. The communist government, which had ruled since 1949, was based on a socialist system and was the complete opposite of a democracy. To grant the students' demands required a change in government, an unlikely scenario, as government officials gained much wealth from their positions and therefore had no reason to change Chinese society.

The events of Tiananmen Square began with the death of Hu Yaobang who was "considered the most reform-minded member of the post-Mao leadership." Many students gathered in Tiananmen Square to mourn his death and to hold a commemoration but it soon escalated into a "protest for far-reaching change." The students demanded constitutional freedoms, the right to establish independent newspapers, a democratic system and economic reform.

The protest in Tiananmen Square was not only influenced by the death of Hu Yaobang but also by the market reforms that had been introduced by Deng Xiao Ping ten years earlier. The reforms caused high inflation rates of up to

30 percent and this resulted in a general sense of insecurity among the people. In fact, for many years before the Tiananmen Square protests, the desire for change had existed among the Chinese. In late 1985 and 1986, there were smaller organised protests against the government and the state of Chinese society. The push for reform that had been ignored by the government for so long resulted in a strong build-up of the desire and need for change. The

The Communist government on the other hand, was the party pushing for continuity. The main reason why the government pushed so strongly for continuity was because the Communists were fundamentally socialist and simply could not adhere to the demands of the students without relinquishing their power over China. Also, the corruption that existed in China meant that government officers gained much wealth from their positions and therefore strongly rejected the democratic political system that the students wanted by stating that Western cultural influences were “spiritual pollution”

Driven by the desire for continuity, the government attempted to sway the growing support for the student movement by releasing an article in the People’s Daily. They stated that the movements were a “well-planned plot to confuse the people and throw the country into turmoil.” The publication, which was released with the intention of diffusing the protests, only reignited the student movement. Citizens pointed out that “blame for the demonstrations ultimately lay in the failings of the party itself, without which the students would have no need to protest.”

The students who were frustrated by the lack of government action taken to reach their demands, decided to launch a hunger strike in retaliation.

When it was clear that the students would not relent with their demands or cease their hunger strike, members of the Communist government visited Tiananmen Square to negotiate a compromise. However, fact that their ideals were so different meant that neither side could come to an agreement. The students would not give up their desire for reforms and a democratic system nor could the government give up their communist system.

After the failed negotiations to end the student protests, the government declared martial law. Troops moved towards Tiananmen Square to cease the growing support for democracy and to reinforce the Communist rule over China. Initially, the government decided to use the army for intimidation purposes. An anti-riot squad used rubber bullets and tear gas cans to force the students out of the area. The crowd, believing that they would not be seriously harmed in the confrontation, pressed forward and threw rocks and cans at the soldiers. When these tactics failed, the government believed that force was the only option and declared martial law, which was unusual at the time.

In their quest to retain power over the country and stop the uprising against communism, the government sent armoured cars, army trucks, soldiers and tanks into the square. The army was ordered to “ crush demonstrations and protests by the country’s students and workers, and end their demands for

political change.” Those who refused to move out of the square and resisted the army were gunned down. The Communist leader of the time, Deng Xiaoping, justified his party’s decision to use martial law was a reaction to stop the “ counter- revolutionary rebellion” that aimed to topple the government.

The struggle between continuity and change can be seen through the events of Tiananmen Square and the opposing views of the participants, the students and the government. The students, the party favouring change, desired political reform while the government, which was communist, was reluctant to come forth with the reforms. Though attempts were made to negotiate a compromise, the contrasting views of both parties meant that there was failure to reach an agreement. From this particular struggle between change and continuity, the stronger party, the communist government, achieved its goal of continuity.