

Modern China Lecture Series featuring Jeremy Brown and Louisa Lim –
Reassessing June Fourth: New Approaches and Sources on the Tiananmen
Protests and Beijing Massacre, September 14, 2021

– I think we'll wait another minute or so, and then get started.

– That's a lot of people, 100.

– It's about to grow a little bit more. Okay. I think we get started. So hello and good evening from Cambridge. I should say our two speakers actually are joining us from two very different time zones. So I should add a good afternoon and a good morning as well. Welcome to the Fairbanks Center's Modern China lecture series. My name is Arunabh Ghosh, and I teach the modern Chinese history here in the History Department at Harvard. I'm also the convener for the series. This event is the first of five exciting events we have planned this semester. So before I introduce our two speakers for today, I want to give you a quick heads up on talks we have lined up in the coming weeks. On October 5th, Isabella Weber from UMass Amherst, will speak about her recently published book, "How China Escaped Shock Therapy", the history, economic history of the 1980s. On October 19, we have Fang Xiaoping from Nanyang Technological University, who will tell us about the history of cholera in post-1949 China. On November 2nd, Eugenia Lean from Columbia University will speak about our ongoing work on Xiangmao honey soap, and its ties to the histories of global capitalism. And then our final talk on November 30th will be Joan Judge from York University who would speak on print, vernacular languages and reading practices in the long Republic. So please look out for formal announcements of these talks, which will include information on how to register. Today, I'm delighted to welcome professor Jeremy Brown and Dr Louisa Lim. As many of you know, both have published fantastic monographs on different aspects of Tiananmen, Louisa in 2014 with "The People's Republic of Amnesia, Tiananmen Revisited". And Jeremy, just this year with "June 4th, The Tiananmen Protest and Beijing Massacre of 1989", which is right here on my desk. Today, they'll be engaging in a conversation about Tiananmen as history, how we might study it and what sources we can use to do so. So since you're here to actually hear them speak, what I'll try and do is give very brief introductions to each of them. And then again, get to the real sort of interesting part. Jeremy Brown is professor and freshly appointed Chair of the History Department at Simon Fraser University. He's a social historian of the people's Republic of China. He has published extensively on topics, such as the urban rural divide, accidents, social movements, grassroots history, and also on how to teach highly sensitive topics, including the history of Tiananmen, actually. He's the author of two monographs and two edited volumes and a whole host of articles. I only mentioned a sampling here. I'll mention the monographs actually. His first monograph, "City versus Countryside in Mao's China: Negotiating the Divide", was published by Cambridge University Press in 2012. In it, Jeremy

compellingly showed how instead of narrowing the urban rural divide, Mao era's policies serve to actually exacerbate many of the existing inequalities. The most recent volume also published by Cambridge University Press is the volume on Tiananmen that I've already, that I just mentioned, and of course the reason why we are gathered here today. In addition to being a prolific historian, Jeremy is also a member of the PRC History Group Advisory Board. And until recently he was also one of the editors for the Cambridge University Press series, studies in the history of the People's Republic of China. And he also served as a board member on the Esherick-Ye Family Foundation. Our second speaker, Louisa Lim, is an award-winning journalist and senior lecturer in audio-visual journalism at the University of Melbourne. A long time TV and print journalist, she has worked for Eastern Express newspaper, TVB Pearl and the BBC World Service. And from 2003 to 2013, she was a NPR correspondent reporting all across northeast Asia, China, Japan, Mongolia, and of course, North and South Korea. Along with Graham Smith, she co-hosts "the little red" podcast, which they described to use their own words as interviews and chats, celebrating China beyond the Beijing beltway. She's also a freshly minted PhD having just earned her doctorate from Monash University's School of Film, Media and Journalism. So, many, many congratulations. In addition to that journalism and teaching, Louisa is the author of two monographs. The first is "The People's Republic of Amnesia", which I mentioned a few minutes ago and this book was widely recognized. It was an Economist Book of the Year, and shortlisted for the Orwell Prize for political writing as well. Her second monograph on another sensitive and timely subject is entitled "Indelible City: Despair and Dispossession in Hong Kong". It is slated to be released in April of next year. So a very warm welcome to you both. And thank you for doing this. Before I hand things over, I think Louisa is going to ask the first question to get the conversation going before I hand things over to her. Just a quick few words about format. So Jeremy and Louisa will engage in a conversation for about 30, 35 minutes. And then we follow with a Q&A session for roughly the same amount of time. So the plan is to finish by about 9:15 Eastern Standard Time or thereabouts. If you have questions, please write them up using the Q&A function. I will try and make sure that we get to answer as many of them as possible. I'll try and curate as best as possible. Ideally, if you can, before typing your question, we would appreciate it if you identified yourself, but we are being recorded. It's also being a livecast on YouTube. So if you prefer to stay anonymous, that is of course perfectly fine as well. So with all of that set and done, Jeremy and Louisa, welcome again, thank you so much and over to you, Louisa.

- Thank you so much. Before we get started, I'd just like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land from which I'm speaking to you. I'm here at Melbourne University. It's built on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. I also like to thank you at the Fairbank Center for holding this discussion, in particular to Jeremy, for asking me and our map for organizing to Michael Szonyi for

support and to Mark Brady and James Evans for their help. I just, given the events in Hong Kong, it's really important that we're able to discuss historical events in academia and to have the foreword to do so. So I'm really happy to be here today, especially talking about Jeremy's incredible book. And I want to start with this line actually, right at the very end of your book, Jeremy. The view of the independent researcher Wu Renhua who's told you that he believes June 4th is more consequential to China's fate than May 4th. I mean, do you agree with that?

- Thanks for the question and thanks to Harvard and Fairbank for organizing this. Do I agree with that? For him, it's true. I mean, for him and for people whose lives were changed so drastically and unpredictably by what happened in June of 1989, it's definitely true. And so for a generation it's true, for us as China scholars or journalists who study China, it is just such a watershed moment in terms of it affected how and when I went to China, it affects how and when the students I teach here at Simon Fraser University, which I should acknowledge is on the unseeded traditional ancestral territory of the Squamish Musqueam, Tslei-Waututh and Kwikwetlem peoples. They wouldn't have come to study here without that event, pushing China in a new direction and study in the way they're studying. So, yeah, I mean, May 4th is more than a hundred years ago. I would say, June 4th is at least as consequential as May 4th. But the point that Wu Renhua was making was, where's the June 4th center for June 4th studies. Where's the book series? Where's the journal articles? It's not here yet, but he thinks that it will be and he predicts that it will be because it's so important.

- I mean, one of the big differences is that difference in source material, isn't it? I mean, I remember when I started writing my book, I kind of naively thought, oh, you know, there's going to be so much. Academia would have been all over what happened in 1989. There's going to be this massive body of work to draw on. And then when I started looking for it, you know, there was this huge sort of gaping hole in academia. As you point out some of the best work actually dates back to right after 1989, Timothy Brook's "Quelling the People". And you know, when I went online, I checked in Google Scholar, I checked May 4th, had 27,000 matches June 4th, like barely 3000. You know, there's a huge difference in the treatment by Western academia. Why do you think that is?

- Well, part of it's just time and the way that the field of history, especially the history of the People's Republic starts to look at things. So the first draft of The History of The People's Republic, and then if we're talking about history of the 1950s and 60s is written by journalists on the ground. People writing memoirs, social scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, did the history of the fifties and sixties. And then only recently in the past 20 years, has it have historians come along and say, it said,

we're going to look at this as history, meaning we're going to look at the archives. We're going to do oral history. We're going to look at places that those social scientists didn't look at, whether it's more bottom up grassroots, whether it's, you know, minority regions. So that's been happening in a really exciting way in the field of PRC history since the late '90s and early 2000s. And it's really a growing field. And now it's just the turn of the 1980s, right? It's social scientists started to write about 1989, not that many. So there is something different. I think you're right. There is something different. Journalists wrote a lot. People wrote memoirs, and now it's been 30 years plus. Historians need to look at the 1980s using historical methods, doing archival research, during oral history research and trying to look at well, what have people neglected in their previous studies, and how can we fill in the gap and maybe tell stories in a different way. But yeah, June 4th is different because it is a forbidden zone, as you show so amazingly in your book. And so it's not a safe topic for a graduate student to work on as a history student. It's not a safe topic to work on if you have family inside China, because we know that's part of this regime of repression, as your family members will be threatened and mobilized to stop you if you're a PRC citizen from doing it. And so the people who are doing the research are people who have already lost everything like Ding Zilin whose son was shot on June 3rd and killed. Liao Yiwu, who was imprisoned multiple times and he's put together some amazing interviews. Wu Renhua, you know, had to flee China and has been so obsessed with this, that he's self published three books that are actually the best three books about this topic. And so, and then me and what am I? I don't have family in China. I'm a tenured professor in Canada where I have this amazing freedoms and protections for academic freedom. So now, if you are a tenured professor outside of China, you can do it. Why not? You should, right? It's the '80s, its history. We have the sources. And in fact, there's an amazing number of sources on this topic, but you can't quite do the same type of research that I was doing in China in the 2000s on the rural urban divide, just going and talking to people openly, because as you found in your research, you got to be real careful to protect your sources, right? And you don't know because there's so much fear around this topic, it's actually pretty hard to talk about openly, especially with somebody you've never met before.

- Then, it did strike me how unorthodox your sources are if from an academic perspective, right? These are not people who were sort of cited, you know. You've got Ding Zilin and Tiananmen Mother. You've got Liao Yiwu, a former political prisoner. You've got Wu Renhua, who is unaffiliated with any institution. And these are some of the best sources of information. What does it say about, you know, scholarship that, you know, these are the best sources yet. They seem, you know, somewhat unplumbed by Western academia, unused, you know, unexamined.

- It's troubling that this important moment has gone unexplored. And I

think it is partially just the social scientists we're done with it. The historians haven't quite caught up with it. It's partially fear. And it's partially maybe a bit of bias against these unprofessional historians who are doing really professional, excellent work. And what I'm able to do or what anybody else is going to be able to do if they want to check the threads that I've started unravel is look at the patterns when you put these things together. So Ding Zilin and the Tiananmen Mothers, not just Ding Zilin but all of the Tiananmen Mothers, and Liao Yiwu have gone out and found who died, where they died, what they were doing when they died of almost 200 people, which is maybe a 10th of the people who died on the high end, and maybe a quarter of the people who died on the low end. But what scholars are able to do is just look at that as a source and look at the patterns. And so the patterns that I found were people with cameras who are taking pictures, seem to be at risk and got shot and killed. People who went out to help and watch. They were curious. They got shot and killed. People who wanted to go to breakfast or set up their watermelon stand or get medicine for their children. They just didn't know what was going on. They went outside, they got killed. People inside their homes who went out to their window to see what was going on, or to close their window because it was too loud, got shot and killed. And so what Ding Zilin, Liao Yiwu and Wu Renhua are providing, is it's a huge amount of data that then we can look at as scholars and say what's the pattern here, what are we seeing, and what's new and different. And I think that's part of the problem, too. When we look at 1989 is I guess a lot of there's a lot of common sense wisdom about it that isn't necessarily correct, or that's quite narrow. Just the idea that the student movement is the thing to talk about and look at and the student movement for me is important, but not central necessarily. There's a much broader, bigger movement in Beijing among citizens, among workers. And then there's a nationwide movement that we have to look at as well. And there's sort of a reproduction of the students' own elitism in the way that scholars have looked at the student movement, and discounted all the other things that happened, that I think we need to push back against as well.

- And you did that really consciously, didn't you? You said you were not gonna talk about Tankman. You were not going to talk about the goddess of democracy because these things said more about the Western observers they do about the movement themselves. And once you start, we focusing the movement and looking at it through a wider lens, you know, not just students and the elite. What what does that, how does that change our understanding of it, do you think?

- I think it actually reflects a much broader variety of complaints and grievances in China's 1980s than we had thought about before, because we usually think about it as a student democracy movement where the students are demanding freedom of the press. But when you look at the grievances of people beyond the students, there's a huge amount of personal anger and trauma related to the one-child policy

that surprised me, that I think predisposed certain participants in the movement to be really mad at the Communist Party that they had been violated in a very visceral way by the one-child policy or by the strike-hard campaign, which was this arbitrary campaign to arrest and execute people during the 1980s. So there's a history there, sort of the prehistory of the 1980s that helps us to predict who was mad enough to hit the streets and organize. And it's not just about student issues and it's not just about Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary who died and people felt mad about him. It's not just about intellectuals wanting to get paid more. There's, and it's about workers as well. So workers are feeling like they're losing a voice in their factories and their unions not working for them. So that's another level of it. So just there's, there's tremendous diversity and outside of Beijing, Muslims are feeling insulted and not listened to. Tibetans had been massacred and killed in Tibet in March of 1989 when they were marching to commemorate the 1959 uprising there. So there's ethnic issues that, it was really striking how people in Beijing, Han people in Beijing were not making the connection between martial law and Lhasa in March of 1989 to what might happen to them, right. That it just seemed like, oh, that's far away. That's what happens on frontier regions. There might be shots fired. I mean, People's Daily reported in March shots were fired, we had to shoot because the Tibetans were being bad. That was in the People's Daily, just three months before shots were fired in Beijing, martial law. That pattern seemed like a success to Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping. And so it's not really a surprise that they went to martial law in Beijing, but it was a huge surprise to people in Beijing because that doesn't happen to Han people in the capital, was their, their wrong assumption.

- Yeah. That was a really interesting through-line that you drew the way in which the events in Lhasa were not just in forum, but actually informed the leadership's response to, to the protests in Beijing and elsewhere. I mean, how much do you think those events inform the way the crackdown in Beijing?

- Well, I hope that some other scholars would come along and really do the research on this. And I hope that we can get more sources about it in the future. But what happened in Lhasa was widespread March. The People's Armed Police and Public Security shot into the crowd. And that led to more people coming out to because they were mad and they wanted to see what was happening. And only after that was martial law declared and DPLA came in from afar. They had to come from Sichuan to get in there and from other places and Tibet. And so it wasn't actually the PLA doing the shooting, but the PLA was, was such a massive force that this situation had basically stabilized. But it was declared a success. This is what happened. And the word "turmoil" was used repeatedly by Li Peng in describing the need for martial law and the success of martial law. So when you see turmoil again, and when Deng Xiaoping, who is really the ultimate leader and decider in 1989, says turmoil, turmoil, turmoil, what do you do with turmoil? Well, you

would go to what worked in Tibet, because now turmoil is in the capital and not just in the capital, but Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng are really nervous about rioting in Changsha and Xi'an as well in late April. And they were scared that it was going to spread nationwide.

- And the events that happen in Changsha and Xi'an are quite unstudied, aren't they? There's not a lot of research on them, certainly an area that could be looked into in a great deal more depth, right?

- And those we've actually heard of is the ones that you haven't heard of before. I mean in Changsha, Xi'an, crowds rampaged, looted buildings, set some things on fire. And then that was cited in the April 26 editorial, which Deng Xiaoping, basically came from Deng Xiaoping's word. So the whole world, or all of China read about Changsha and read about Xi'an on April 26th in People's Daily. But what they didn't read about was everything else. And so I had these amazing sources that were sort of leaked to "daily situation report" sent to the, put, compiled by the Ministry of Public Security from reports sent to them by public security bureaus in the provinces. And what you find when you look at all over China is so many provinces had groups of protestors actually breaking into the leadership compounds, busting through the gates and sitting on the desk of the Party Secretary and breaking windows and throwing chairs. So many places in the provinces had hunger strikes and sympathy with hunger strikers in Beijing. So it really does give you a sense of, if you can imagine the leadership in Beijing reading this and saying, this is out of control. And so you can start to understand the stress that the leadership was under as well.

- I mean, you know, you talk about those new sources coming back to the idea of source material. I think that's one thing that you seem to hear quite a lot. Oh, there's nothing new to say. There's no new sources about June 4th. You can't get anything, but I think your work shows that's really not true at all. You know, in collections in libraries, there's quite a lot of new documents, but aside from that, the other thing that you use that I was also using, whether these new memoirs that have come out by, you know, Li Peng and Chen Xitong, people like that. Li Peng, of course was Premier. Chen Xitong was Beijing Mayor. And one of my problems was knowing how credible and how to judge the credibility of these, these kinds of leak diaries, particularly diaries, like Chen Xitong's, which seem to have been kind of rewritten afterwards to try to remove his responsibility as far as possible, you know, in particular saying, oh, you know, when I gave this report to the standing committee, you know, I couldn't even change a single piece of punctuation. I just stood up and read it. So he totally painted himself as a puppet. And you know, when you look at these kinds of material, I guess, you know, you have questions about, is it, you know, is it credible? Do we know that this was written by Chen Xitong? You know, how credible is it, how much of a sort of

rewrite of history is it? How did you sort of navigate those kind of questions?

- Well, I do social history more than the history of elite politics. So this was a real challenge for me to look at the memoirs of Chen Xitong, the Li Peng Diary, the leaked recordings of Zhao Ziyang, and try to put them together and try to understand what new they were telling us. So I relied a lot on, there's a political scientist in Taipei named Zhong Yanlin who's written about these and use them and says that, yes, we can trust the Li Peng and Zhao Ziyang diaries. Chen Xitong's is the most sort of pathetic one of all as you mentioned. Chen Xitong was Mayor of Beijing. And if you look at all the other sources, it actually becomes pretty clear that he wasn't doing a whole lot. So his account seems credible when we put it together, together with all the other sources. He was pretty impotent, pretty frustrated. He issued a bunch of orders to the Beijing Police to have them stop the marchers. It didn't work at all. He was humiliated. So he was kind of a minor player trying to persuade Li Peng and others to have a harsh crackdown. So he wanted things to stop and he wanted there to be a crackdown, but he was not even close to the ear of Deng Xiaoping. I mean, Deng Xiaoping probably barely even knew who the guy was at the time. So he's, Chen Xitong's memoir is the least useful of all. But Li Peng and Zhao Ziyang's are such golden sources because you put them together and they loathe each other. They really have a hard time working together. And so they're talking about each other every day, and insulting each other, or just talking about their frustrations with each other. And so you put those things together and we know what they were doing and what they were talking about because they both are comment at it from a different angle. And if you look at Zhong Yanlin, Joseph Torigian, Julian Gerwerts, these are all scholars who know elite politics and who are using them and, who deemed them credible enough to use with the caveat that they're incredibly self-serving. And, you know, Li Peng's diary is meant to show that it wasn't his fault, and it was all Deng Xiaoping, which is actually pretty convincing to me that yeah, Li Peng was trying to do a lot of maneuvering, but he was also not super competent. And he was kind of clueless about what to do. So he was happy to say things to Deng Xiaoping, and then have Deng Xiaoping be decisive, because then Li Peng could take that and run with it in a way that he felt supported by. And Zhao Ziyang comes across as a fairly wishy-washy, ineffective politician as sort of smart as he was, but he was in such an impossible position as the General Secretary, top leader, who wasn't the real leader. And so he kind of felt obligated to ask Deng Xiaoping. He had a hard time getting meetings with Deng Xiaoping. And he could tell Li Peng what to do, but he had a hard time being clear about that as well. So you put those sources together and they're great. They're great. And so it was a great exercise for students of history to read what Li Peng said on this day, read what Zhao Ziyang said on this day. What do we make of it when we put them together?

- I guess we should also talk about the sources you didn't use, in particular Tiananmen Papers. And I too, I wasn't, you know, I found it difficult to judge how to treat that because, you know, even at the time of its publication, there was a, you know, there was a long discussion in China Quarterly where Alfred P. Chan raised lots of doubts about it. But when I started asking around, you know, it's still used as a teaching resource in a lot of institutions around the world, but you chose not to use it at all. Talk me through how you made that decision and why.

- Well, I've taught a seminar about Tiananmen Square four times at Simon Fraser university. You came to visit us once to talk about your book. And the first couple of times I did assign that book because it takes us through a narrative of elite political decision-making. It's pretty good for that. But a lot of the reports from the provinces and sort of the "daily situation reports" about what's going on in Beijing, those are coming from those Ministry of Public Security reports that I want to just look at the originals that I was able to get elsewhere. And so it's reprinting a lot of things and what's original about it, are just a couple of, sort of word-for-word verbatim minutes of conversations of meetings, or even private conversations between Deng Xiaoping and Yang Shangkun, who was another elder, elderly leader. And it's just impossible to verify. It's, seems a bit implausible that those conversations would have been recorded word for word, if they were indeed private conversations or if they had been, how would they get out in a form that they, how would they get out of China in the form that they got out of China? So it's important to read them, to see what this particular source is claiming, but we know from other sources that yes, a meeting or a conversation did happen on this day, and then we know what happened afterwards. So I'd rather just look at what we do know and put aside that somewhat dubious or implausible word-for-word conversations that are the really the only unique thing about Tiananmen Papers. Now that we have so many other things, I don't think we need it. And now that we're getting the story of elite politics from the diary and the memoir, first of all, I don't think we need to go to Tiananmen Papers for the elite politics. And we also have this new book, The Last Secret that came out in Hong Kong recently. And also just, I'm a little bit tired of looking at A, the student movement and B, elite politics as the center of our story. So that's why I think it's just that we can put aside Tiananmen Papers and look at other new stuff, workers, ethnic minorities, stuff outside of Beijing who died, where they were, when they died. Tiananmen Papers has nothing really about those things. And that's where I think I want to shift attention to.

- And the other really new documents that you had, were the purge documents describing or illustrating how the purge after the crackdown happened and how different it was in different work units. I mean, how did you find the documents like that? And you know, what can we learn from them?

- Yeah. So if you are a historian or if you're a PhD at a university and you read my book, that part of the book is going to be the most fresh and interesting to you because it is sort of classic history research using archival documents and some interviews to talk about this thing that I call "the purge". And I don't know what else we're supposed to call it in English, and Chinese, it's called "the double Qing", the qing li qing cha gong zuo, so clearing and sorting out work, and it's not called a "yundong". It's not called a movement. It's called "gongzuo". And what it means is everybody who marched in a protest march, or who went to a sit-in, or who carried banners around, or who gave money to the students to donate to them, to eat food, or to buy some tents. Everybody who participated in any way was required to confess and report on their mistake and understanding, and they standardized forms for this. And I was able to see some of these standardized forms at the East Asian Library of Stanford University has one file from one work unit. So you get to see the work unit level files and at least see what the forms look like because the contents of the forms are really bizarre. I mean, you have the same person with the same handwriting, filling out forms for multiple people because their bosses don't want to fill it out. You have just constant repetition. And, but the policy-level documents are indeed held in libraries outside of China that have been leaked since then. And they're really interesting because it's not only everybody has to confess, but every Party member in China at the provincial level, at the central level and in urban Beijing has to re-register their Party membership as part of this purge to re-pledge their loyalty. And you're not allowed to request to leave the Party during this process. And you're not allowed to not re-register. If you request to leave, you will be expelled. So it's really, there's really weird set of rules. And most people just go through the motions or lie about what they did. And only a few people actually stand up and say, it was wrong. Mao said, don't use the army against the people. So there are, but these are sort of elder, elderly Party members who were so horrified by the massacre and felt like they didn't have anything to lose that they just said I quit, basically, but we do have some of those voices as well in that chapter.

- And one of the really interesting comments was this line from the lawyer, Pu Zhiqiang who said that, you know, the purge wasn't really about loyalty, but more about making people bow down to the post-massacre reality, that it's kind of a culture of debasement by forcing people to say things that are untrue. I mean, did you see that in the papers that you were looking at?

- Definitely. Pu Zhiqiang is one of the people who refused to do that, but most people just said, yeah, I marched, but that's just because everybody else was marching. Or I didn't do what I wasn't supposed to do, all these weird circumlocutions. But people know the cost of standing up. And so very few people will stand up, but the Party still

wants people to go through this exercise just to remind them who's in charge and remind them that this is, this happened. It was, it was correct. Remember that is correct. And that is sort of colored the entire period since then, is that, you say what safe to say, you say what you're supposed to say, what you might actually think and say in private to your family and friends, it really does mark this turning point in Chinese history where lying to protect yourself or saying nothing to protect yourself or saying certain things in the privacy of your own home versus what you say in public or at your workplace are different, right? That purge represents this moment of you're forced to submit in public to an order that was imposed violently by an army that came and shot the people. And you're not allowed to say that was wrong. Or in fact, you're not really allowed to talk about it at all. You have to make this deal. And that's the deal that still continues through 2021.

- Right. That was probably the most startling sentence of your book for me, when you wrote, a purge that persists, continued into the next year and persists to this day. Talk about how you see, you know, how you see the purge is continuing to this day.

- Well, at a very literal level, people like Pu Zhiqiang or who want to protect the memory and preserve the memory and commemorate the protest movement, the hope that it represented the tragedy of the massacre, they are monitored, surveilled and taken on forced vacation outside of Beijing every year in June, because the authorities are afraid they're going to threaten stability and make trouble. And it's not just activists, it's survivors and the relatives of victims. So Ding Zilin, imagine this, your teenage son gets killed. And the government's response is to treat you like an enemy and treat you like a political prisoner because you had the misfortune to have your son killed, right? So every year that's still happening. So literally the purge still continues, but much more broadly speaking, that deal of what, you don't talk about politics. You don't talk about what you really think, unless you're really in close company with people that you trust. You don't, you kind of, there's a performance of debasement and subjection that has become sort of naturalized and normalized ever since then. And that's one level. The other level is the winners of the purge. There were people who in certain working units stood up and said, I knew all along that the student movement was bad. I knew all along that it was a plot. I knew all along that Zhao Ziyang was trying to split the Party and all you were wrong and you're going to be punished. And those are the people that get promoted afterwards. And it goes all the way up to Jiang Zemin and Jiang Zemin, the new General Secretary after Zhao Ziyang is taken down. Jiang Zemin gets his position because of this basically unconstitutional, illegal purge of Zhao Ziyang. He gets his job from that. That's how he's General Secretary and every General Secretary since that point, got their job because of that moment. So the purge is something that every, the top leadership and their patronage networks and their underlings are

forced to continue doing because it actually is in their self-interest to maintain their positions. And they got their positions because of June 4th, all the way up to this day.

- So how much do you think that purge has actually extends into Western universities? I mean, I'm just thinking back to this one conference that I went to, a European conference where a very well-known European scholar of China, you know, a professor at a European university stood up in front of a roomful of people. And he said Tiananmen no longer matters, except as an individual memory of personal suffering. He said, because I made notes at the time I was so astounded. He said it has no political significance. I mean, is that sign that this purge is sort of, you know, even in Western academia, if you look at the lack of sources, the lack of scholarship, the way in which the subject is kind of, it's radioactive. Has it also become part of the purged?

- Yeah. I mean, that's a provocative statement, but I think you're right. I think you're right. And I think it's gotten a little bit, it's gotten more intense over the past since Xi Jinping came to power, so over the past 9 to 10 years. I couldn't have done the research that I did in Beijing. and in other parts of China now that I was able to do it at the sort of immediate, pre-Xi Jinping and very early Xi Jinping-era, in terms of, if I was in Beijing, into the Central Library in Beijing and asked for everything they had and they photocopied it for me and gave it to me without batting an eye. And that was I think, 2012, summer of 2012. So something is changing in China and I'm not sure about outside of China. I think part of it is what's changing in China is just those private conversations that I could have in China. I didn't have many. I had many more outside of China, but those private conversations that I could have in China that you were able to have with your book are now almost impossible to have safely. And so if you are a Western academic who wants to do research on this, you can't really go to China and do it. So yeah, the purge extends to us in terms of, you know, one, will you get a visa, two, if you do, how can you talk to people safely? You really can't. So that's a sad truth, but just in terms of the topic, being purged as a legitimate topic of academic research, that's quite troubling, right? That's quite troubling, and I don't know, since I am an academic and I'm a liberal academic, right? I mean, I'm sort of a progressive liberal academic who likes to think about open inquiry and making progress on a topic, gathering as much as we can and learning as much as we can about it. That's quite troubling. I mean, what do you make of it?

- I mean, I just remember sitting there at that conference and being quite astounded that anyone would say such a thing in front of a roomful of people and not really be challenged that much. To me, it was a sign that, you know, there are these areas that is still taboo even in Western academia. But I guess the thing that worries me now is

looking at events in Hong Kong and worrying whether that taboo, that silence, the spread of it, how far is it going to go? I mean, we've seen in the last few weeks, seven organizers of the alliance that organized the vigil in Hong Kong being detained, three of them for incitement to subvert state power. It's clear that the vigil absolutely will no longer be allowed, but even seeing the police raiding the Tiananmen Museum in Hong Kong was really, for me, it was really quite a heartbreaking moment because for example, I know, among the exhibits they have there is, so I wrote about Zhang Xianling, who's one of the Tiananmen Mothers who co-founded the Tiananmen Mothers with Ding Zilin, and the helmet, the motorcycle helmet that her son was wearing when he was killed, that's in the museum. And I knew this whole backstory that there'd been this disagreement between the Tiananmen Mothers, whether or not to donate it outside. China got this museum in Hong Kong and that Zhang Xianling had wanted to send it there because she thought it would be safe there. She thought that, you know, that would be preserved. And now all of these things have been confiscated as evidence, you know, will they be destroyed? You know, we're seeing, you know, that purge is seemingly spreading in all kinds of ways, which, you know, 32 years after the fact just sort of quite astonishing. I mean, what do you think about when you see what's happening in Hong Kong?

- Well, I couldn't have written the book without Hong Kong having been a separate system, separate from the mainland in terms of the number of almost all the books that I'm talking to you about that were published in Chinese I bought in bookstores in Hong Kong when I went there. And so many of the sort of ephemera or newsletters from the student movement and from the workers movement were held at the university service center, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which got shut down just last year and I made promises of, yeah, we'll preserve the collection. We want to maintain access, but of course under the pandemic, nobody knows whether you can still get access. And then it's just, so yeah, Hong Kong, we have to consider it now, at least as a memory repository for June 4th and as a place of research on June 4th. We have to consider it basically it's the same as a mainland Chinese city, like Beijing and Shanghai. So I was able to do some stuff in Beijing back then. And so maybe Hong Kong right now is like Beijing 2012 and not Beijing 2021. So there may be still a level of conversation that you can have. The universities are still home to great scholars in Hong Kong universities, great scholars committed to academic freedom, working under very difficult situation. And so, yeah, it's really sad because Hong Kong is looking increasingly like a mainland Chinese city, where if you talk about June 4th, if you commemorate June 4th, if you organize around June 4th, if you publish on June 4th, you'll be subject to legal consequences. And that's truly sad. So now Harvard Yenching Library archive, Harvard Fairbank Fung Center Library, those are our repositories now for, and there's a ton of great stuff, UCLA East Asian Library, Stanford East Asian Library. So it's sad that Hong Kong is going in that direction. And there's, so

then the question is, well, where can that helmet go next? Where can Wang Nan's helmet go next? Can we get some of those materials out to places where they can still be safely preserved?

- Yeah. And I would even argue that Hong Kong today is more dangerous than Beijing because the lines are so unclear. The red lines, you know, they're everywhere, you know, it's a sea of red lines and it's not really clear what is permitted and what isn't permitted and the cost of violating the National Security Law, which is so ill-defined, is so incredibly high that you know, the risks are just almost impossible to quantify. I think we've talked too long already. I think we should probably hand it back to Arunabh, then opening up for questions because I do see there's a lot of questions coming in.

- Thank you. Thank you to both of you. That was really interesting. And I wish actually we had more time because it would be great to sort of hear you guys continue the conversation. And it's interesting how so much of what you've actually talked about, many of the questions. I don't know who anticipated whom in the sense that the questions are coming in and then often, you know, a few minutes down the road, you actually touched upon that topic in some way or the other. So it's been quite interesting to see sort of that, the progression in tandem, but before we get to some of the questions that I thought we could have both your responses to, I wanted to invite the audience members if you want to sort of, please feel free, the forum is open. It's been open actually since we began. So please use the Q&A function to ask questions. So there's a really interesting question here. That's, let me see if I have my timestamps right? So this one about essentially the, what you were talking about, both of you talked about sort of the ways in which the history of Tiananmen has been silenced. And there is sort of both a lack of sources, but also a lack of conversation. And there's a question from an anonymous attendee. It's timestamped 8:30, if you want to read it, too, but I'll read it out for the audience. The question goes, this June, the Global Times ran an op-ed that praised the June 4th crackdown as a political vaccine that inoculated the Chinese people. You see or anticipate a shift in recent years under the Xi regime, under Xi from censorship and silence, who has open acknowledgement and outright celebration of the massacre. That's sort of in some ways inverting what we are seeing at this point. So I'm wondering what each of you thinks about that.

- I can go first. For me, when I look at that kind of language, the political vaccine and inoculation, I find it really alarming because this kind of discourse of disease of epidemiology and, you know, the body politic being diseased is just, its usage in Chinese, newspaper editorials is such a bad harbinger, right? This is the kind of language that we saw in Xinjiang, you know, before they started, you know, setting up, you know, when they started setting up the political re-education, indoctrination camps there. And, you know, it is the language that we have been seeing in Hong Kong. So I think it

certainly presages a harder line. I don't know whether it's a line that would celebrate the massacre, but I think it's definitely a harder line.

- There's a historian named Glenn Tyfort, who has written an article speculating about Xi Jinping's views about June 4th. And he actually argues Xi Jinping loves what Deng Xiaoping did, because it was just the decisive action that China needed from a really strong leader at that moment to save the future of the Communist Party and Xi Jinping, as apparently obsessed with the fall of the Soviet Union, a fate that China and the Communist Party avoided. So if you believe that line of argument, then it would make sense for Xi Jinping to say, yeah, it was correct. It was a blip that, maybe there was some bloodshed. It was necessary. And so, if it were up to him, maybe he would just open it up and say, let's celebrate it, let's talk about it. But interestingly, it's not really up to him in that there's nothing for him to gain from doing that. And so he doesn't talk about it. He doesn't say anything about it. And therefore the stability maintenance regime underneath him, the censors and the police officers, the people who are sitting with Ding Zilin and taking her on vacation, they know it's not safe to change the line that they're following and editorial in Global Times is not an editorial in People's Daily. It's not the same thing. I mean, Global Times is not the voice of Party Center, right? It's the voice of sort of trolling the West and wasting our time. Really, it is. I mean, the Global Times, it just wants to make us argue about stuff and waste our time instead of focusing on what is the Central Committee actually doing and saying. And so it's not quite there yet. And maybe someday it will. And if that scholar in Europe, Louisa, who said, you know, Tiananmen has no political significance. Maybe if Xi Jinping agrees, let's just, let us see the, let us talk about it, let us see the archives, if it's not significant, or if it's something that you celebrate, it doesn't need to be a forbidden thing to talk about, does it? Then we can just talk about it, and try to learn it. And then my book will be obsolete, right? Because then we'll have all these new things. So that would be, I'd love that if we could just open things up.

- Right. We have, I'm going to try group a couple of questions here together that basically speak to the circumstances of possibilities of other kinds of protests happening. So there's a question from anonymous attendee at 8:34. Did the PRC win in Tiananmen Square Protest, and what effect will that have in the Hong Kong protest? It's something that both of you touched in your remarks already. There's a linked question that says, 8:52 now. Sorry. I just realized the time means nothing because it's my time and not yours. So I don't know why I'm using it. Sorry about that. Is that, so this is, I'll read it out. Is there any sign that social movements like the '89 movement may happen in the near term in China? Could you please speculate under what circumstances this may happen? So maybe we'll just go with just sort of the, how have they changed, I guess, what is within the realm

of the possible in some ways?

- Okay. First, I mean, one of the things that the Communist Party learned from '89 was that this should not happen again. And that's why that social stability machine, maintenance machine has kind of been put in place. And I think it's grown in power over the years. It would be very hard to have student protests across China, again, because of, you know, the success of that stability maintenance machine, which is designed to stop, you know, stop protests, stop them from spreading, stop them from linking up. But I guess, you know, the other side of the coin is that there were other kinds of protests that we see in China today. And, you know, most recently in the last week. We're seeing investor protests about Evergrande. People were gathering, you know, at the headquarters asking for their money back, this kind of thing. But, you know, the well-worn kind of chain of events is always that these will eventually get put down or solved. And I, you know, I think it would be, we do see protests in China and more than, you know, you would imagine, but the spread of them and the linking up is the thing that we don't see. And I think that's one of the reasons why Hong Kong and the events of 2019 in Hong Kong, these massive protests just kind of alarmed the Communist Party, so intensely, being so close, being so large, you know. The possibility that people across the border could look at those and say, oh, well, you know, Hong Kong people are protesting, you know, let's watch what's happening. And so I don't see the possibility of large-scale protests in China, but then, you know, people are continually wrong about China. So, you know, never say never.

- Yeah, the Internet is such a key factor now that really does change everything. And that Internet users in China is subject to surveillance and censorship, but you really can use the Internet to bring attention to issues and stoke outrage about issues in a way that gets the attention of authorities and they might arrest you, or they might actually do something about the issue that you raised, depending on who, on what level you're protesting at. But I mean, just imagine this from the point of view of somebody who wants to protest in China. Say you want no more Internet censorship and you want freedom of the press. Freedom of the press was actually one of the main demands of the student protesters in 1989. So let's imagine that's what you want. The problem in Beijing in 1989, and then in Hong Kong in the last couple of years, is that so often the protest become about the protest and they actually get away from the original issue that the protesters were protesting. So in 1989, as soon as that editorial comes out saying this is turmoil that's anti-socialist, then the protest became about that to say, how dare you call us turmoil, rescind that, rescind it, or some police beat some people, therefore the protest becomes about the police. And that really happened in Hong Kong. So many of the demands were no longer about the extradition law. They were about the police and about the labels that the government was using about the protesters. And that actually it's a Catch-22, because you can

actually gain more followers as a protest movement when you're just talking about police violence, because more people are appalled by police violence than are on board with sort of a more narrow political or more abstract, I guess, and more abstract political demand. So I don't know what that means for protests in the future, but that's the common thread that I see from '89 to Hong Kong. It's just, it's so easy to fall into that mode of the protests being about the protests. And so maybe future movements can learn from that.

- There's a couple of great questions that sort of ask you to place Tiananmen in sort of larger global processes. But before we get to that, we've got a great, interesting comment from Martin Witt, sort of that, that ties into just the conversation we were just having. And he says, what does it mean about the memory? So he's sort of shifting the focus to the West in some ways, in terms of what it means, what does Tiananmen and June 4th, what do they mean? So he asked, what does it mean about the memory of June 4th in the West, and even its significance as a spot for rights activism in China that some rioters in the US Capitol saw themselves as peers of the protestors. What is the risk that events of such as June 4th are receding so much in time and with the human rights situation eroding that they are being forgotten by those who have cared about them and misunderstood by others who have been, no matter how misguided, against the government?

- I mean, I think I'm less concerned about what the worshipers at the Capitol were doing. I think, you know, to my mind now, the biggest problem is, you know, for so many years, this sort of repository of that memory has been that vigil in Hong Kong. And, you know, The June 4th Museum in Hong Kong, the writing about June the 4th and remembering in Hong Kong that has happened, that is not just sort of kept that memory alive, but really transmitted it to younger generations and people. And so I think now, that memory appears, acts of memory in Hong Kong appear to being criminalized under the national security legislation. That then kind of shifts the focus who, you know, where does the responsibility for remembering now lie? You know, for so many years, Hong Kong has had done that job. And, you know, I wonder how that will continue in future. There is a danger that it is misused by other people like the June 4th, sorry, like the January, the Capital rioters, but I think that's less of an issue than the issue of remembering and global memory.

- I just want to point out that the main defining characteristics of the protests in China in spring of 1989 were, they were hopeful, they were extremely optimistic. They brought people together in comradeship in a way that they had in recent memory, They were happy. They were a chance for sort of play and dance and music. And they were extremely optimistic and they were committed to non-violence consistently through peaceful marches. They occupied an outdoor public square. They did not invade the leadership compound in Beijing. The protesters did not invade The Great Hall of the People. And they did a non-violent

hunger strike. That was really just, self-consciously an act of self sacrifice to not be violent and to say, we're not going to be violent. If you're going to be violent, that's on you. And that's going to make you look bad. So that's often forgotten because all that we remember is the bloodshed and the massacre. And you kind of forget about the hope and the happiness and the optimism and the non-violence before that. But, so if you're going to compare, you've got to at least have your basic facts straight about what happened in China in 1989. And don't forget that everything that happened before June 3rd, which was a moment of incredible optimism and happiness and cooperation and argument. And just sort of democracy at the basic level of let's talk and debate about what we should do about the future of our country, all of which I would say is admirable and laudable and really sad that it got shut down and, and killed by violence too soon, right? Only 53 days. Just think about how much was accomplished in 53 days in Beijing in 1989. And think about what would have happened if that could have continued. It barely got started. It really barely got started before it got shut down by the massacre.

- We have questions coming in thick and fast. So I'm trying to kind of curate as best as I can, but I do want to go back to this question that there are a couple of questions that try and sort of approach the situation what's going on in the PRC in 1989 in sort of a slightly larger context. And so the first one is from an anonymous attendee who says Rush Doshi recently counted the Tiananmen Square massacre together with the Soviet collapse and then the US-UN decisive war in Iraq as the critical shift in Chinese grand strategy against the US. Can you touch more on how it affected various levels of Chinese leadership, including some of those who came to power? So that's one kind of situating in a larger global context. I'm going to throw in a second one also that looks, it's approaching it from the perspective of neoliberalism. So this is Robin Vissler from UNC Chapel Hill, who says, hello, Louisa, by the way, and then says, what do both of you think of one recent analysis of the 1989 nationwide protest as linked to global protest due to neoliberalism, so different ways in which sort of the larger geopolitical geo-economic context is relevant. Any thoughts?

- Jeremy, you first.

- I mean, I think if you talk about neoliberalism yeah, you've got to look at workers in factories, some of whom were very upset by attempts to, sort of, to make factories and enterprises more profitable to allow managers of factories to get rich using the property of that factory. Those are all parts of a neoliberal trend at the time that the Chinese workers may or may not have been aware of. I mean, Zhao Ziyang himself was part of a neoliberal trend to reform prices and to liberalize the Chinese economy. And he didn't quite finish, but he started. And, so a lot of the grievances that workers had were against Zhao Ziyang. Workers did not see Zhao Ziyang as a democrat or as an

ally in any way, they saw him as a corrupt part of the problem. And only after he had been purged and in house arrest and reflected on things, did he come across as much more of a democratizer. I think that's all I'll say on that one.

- I don't have so much to say, but I would say regarding the effect on various levels of Chinese leadership, including those who came to power afterwards, I think, you know, June 4th was the foundational event that led to many of them coming to power, particularly Jiang Zemin. And then that whole chain reaction of everybody who followed came to power because of that. So I think that's one of the, one of the factors that has made it so untouchable as this taboo, because to start unpacking what happened, you would then have to unpack all the factors that led to these people being placed in their positions of power. And, you know, it could have a de-legitimizing effect. So I think that has, you know, it has had an impact on the leadership to this day and it will continue to have that impact. You know, that's why I don't see any sign at all that there's going to be any kind of reappraisal at any point in the foreseeable future, you know, the opposite in fact.

- Okay. Shifting back a little bit to, again, some of these things that you have talked about already in terms of questions of method, questions of evidence, and also questions of encountering rebuttal, I guess. So we have three questions that are linked that I'll put forward together. The first is what is your view towards the objections towards your work, that there was actually no massacre at Tiananmen Square and that your discussion is based on misleading, fictional assumptions? So how would you respond to a claim like that? That's the first question. The other one is, an anonymous attendee asking as a Chinese citizen studying abroad, how can I learn Tiananmen systematically while being safe? Well, how would you suggest one starts? I guess that speaks to Jeremy and your investment in teaching about Tiananmen also. And then there's a final question from Deng Haoxian, who says do the democratic discourses of those "liusi" activists like Chai Ling, Wu'er Kaixi, and so on, are they trustful and useful for "liusi" studies? And then they add parenthetically, I think their words may have some prejudice and bias. So things that are different perspectives on the same question here. So I was wondering how would you respond?

- That's such a great, these are all really great questions because yeah, of course, all of our sources have a certain degree of prejudice and bias. And then our duty as historians and scholars is to assess the sources and look at what's credible about it, what can I learn from it? So the argument that there was no massacre at Tiananmen. If you read my book, you'll see that we have the names of five people who were killed inside the square. And there may have been more. So I don't know if you consider a killing of five young men, a massacre, but I think we can consider the killing of at least several hundred

other people on the roads to the square in Beijing, a massacre. And we have their names. We have evidence of it. If you read my book, it's not fictional. It's based on actual historical evidence that based on eyewitnesses at the time and the work of people to gather that evidence afterwards. So yeah, assess it and then come up with, if you disagree, what's your competing evidence? You can show it. We can argue about it. That's what we do as scholars. If you're a Chinese student who wants to study this, you can study it and I encourage you to do so. There's so much out there. And, you can look at the footnotes in my book, you can look at the further reading. There's so much out there in Chinese. The question is, how do you do it safely? It seems less safe on Zoom, doesn't it? It seems more safe just in a seminar room and writing an essay that you just show to your professor. But what I've done is I've had students write Wikipedia entries about different elements of June 4th. And so if you Google SFU Tiananmen Project, you can see what the students have done. And you can sort of tell the ones who are from China, who read Chinese, because they use Chinese sources in their Wikipedia entries. And they're anonymous. I don't, I'm not going to tell you who they are. In fact, I can't go back through my records and connect the anonymous Wikipedia name to that Chinese student's name. But what's more beautiful than that is actually the personal conversations that when Chinese students do start studying Tiananmen in Canada or in the US they go home and talk to mom and dad about it, not online, but once they go home, not on WeChat, but once they go home and get in the room, they talk about it. And their parents say things that their children had never heard before. Their parents were there. Their parents protested in a city outside of Beijing. Their parent has a very specific memory that they now want to share with their child now that their child is old enough to talk about it. And so I would say the memories are still there. You can write undergraduate essays about it. You can read books about it. If you want to do graduate work on it, that's where it's going to be harder. And maybe you should under the current environment, do some other topics for grad school and then get tenure. And then do it. Sadly. I hope that'll change in the next couple of years.

- I would agree with Jeremy. I think the discussion about who got killed at exactly what spot is a distraction. People died, and Communist Party itself admitted that people were killed. You know, there was killing whether it happened at this spot or that spot, whether it was on the square or off the square, it's not really important and in the larger understanding of the event, but I mean, even the claim that people didn't die on the square is, you know, it is known to be untrue from the evidence that we have. But I think, you know, arguing about that is really a much, you know, pulls a distraction from the bigger questions. As to that question of how can you learn safely, it is the biggest question that there is. And again, I would agree that maybe, you know, the first step is just to inform yourself, to make your own, make your own inquiry, do your own

reading. You don't need to talk to other people about it, if you don't feel safe doing that. You know, the important thing is, you know, going to the library, read Jeremy's book, you know, go and look for your own sources in your own university libraries and see what they say and make up your own mind. And then you can just, you know, you can decide what you feel is safe for you. But I think, you know, it is really important that if you, that we make use of the freedoms that we have to study this, to discuss it openly, to teach it because, you know, academic freedoms must be used. And I think that's why it's so great that we're having this discussion today and that we're able to discuss it in this way. And I would encourage anyone who's interested in it just to go out and start reading, start watching films, start arming yourself with information.

- There's a great sort of, in some ways, unanswered follow-on question from another anonymous attendee that speaks to in some ways method, or how do we, how do you talk about the past in particular with both ideas of contingency and ideas of the counterfactual? So initially I think addressing Jeremy in particular, given that you do engage in sort of counterfactual history at different moments in the book. But Louisa, I'd be interested also to hear your views from say a media studies perspective, or a journalism perspective about how you think about these kinds of questions. The question itself is can you speak about how you approached the counterfactual scenario chapters in your book? Have you run into opposition by other historians for taking this approach? How can historians responsibly and rigorously use counterfactuals as a historical methodology?

- That's such a great question. So yeah, each part of the book, I end with a chapter called "alternative paths" in which I discuss basically counterfactuals. And they come from other people speculating about things. So they don't come out of my imagination. So what I'm doing as a historian is I'm actually looking at evidence of what people said, trying to explain why things went the way they did and how they might've gone differently. And my point in doing that is to show there were a lot of alternative paths. It didn't, it wasn't preordained. It wasn't inevitable that there was going to be bloodshed. It wasn't necessary because look at all these other things that people imagine, including Li Peng, including the students, including all kinds of people. And so for me, doing counterfactual history is not making stuff up. It's actually studying the counterfactuals that participants themselves are obsessed with, that they raised at the time, and that they're now obsessed with now. So I guess it's a bit early for book reviews. I haven't read any, so I don't. It's too early for me to respond to hypothetical book review critiques of the book, but that's sort of where I was coming from. I mean, Louisa, what do you think on this issue?

- I was really interested by this approach, partly because when you talk to people who were there, or who were a part of the movement in

any way that they themselves often so obsessed by the counterfactuals. You know, you have people who three decades on, you know, and I'm still getting people, you know, student leaders and others who come with questions, you know, who read something in my book and they say, can this really be true? What would have happened had that been known? How could have that one fact changed, things? And it's, you know, I think partly it's a function of the fact that the taboos are such that it's hard to discuss these things publicly, but I do think, I was really interested in the counterfactual approach because it was just something that I heard so much when I was doing my interview. So it was really interesting to see it kind of place in this historical narrative and to see those questions addressed in that way, because I do think that particularly the way that the events are portrayed to the extent that they are in Chinese history books, there's very much the sense that, well, this was always going to be the case. This was, it was always going to end that way. And as Jeremy has definitely pointed out that really isn't true. So, I really found that I was fascinated by the counterfactual chapters.

- You have a contingency that you bring out, I think was really, really fascinating. And that's not just one single contingency. It's sort of a, sort of a cascade of both events and contingencies. And that was, I think really, really powerful. So we are actually at time and we have a lot more questions. So maybe if you both are amenable, maybe we can take two more and then sort of close proceedings. So let me ask the first one, but let's take them one at a time because they're quite different in scope. So this is a question actually about Taiwan, but more broadly about the diaspora, the Chinese diaspora. So this anonymous attendee asks on the topic of memory repository, what's the place of Taiwan in this? Do they still have the interest or the will to carry the memory forward? If so, how? And then the same kind of question for other Chinese diaspora in other parts of the world.

- Yeah, that's an interesting question. So my book was published in Chinese in Taiwan in 2019. So I went there on a book tour and I just didn't know what to expect. For the longest time I kind of had, you know, I sort of thought that Taiwanese people were not that concerned with June 4th and it seemed to them something that was quite far from their own experience. But I was really, I was actually really surprised at their response. I mean, I gave a lot of books in Chinese and they were really full. Lots of people came, lots of people came. Lots of people came having already read the book, so asking very detailed questions about the book, which almost never happens, you know. And the year that was 2019, there was also, there was some quite big events. There was a sort of conference in the main square. Tsai Ing-wen, I think, met a lot of the student leaders. And it just seemed like people were a lot more interested than anyone thought that they would be, and, you know, even my publisher kept being quite surprised at the level of interest. So I don't know if Taiwan's role as a memory repository is shifting, but I guess given what's happened in Hong Kong

and given the fact that a lot of Hong Kongers have now moved to Taiwan, I think that we can expect to see more visuals and more sort of memory events in Taiwan for June 4th in future.

- Yeah, not only that, not only is Taiwan going to be a memory repository increasingly, Taiwan offers a model for how a violent authoritarian regime can transition into a multi-party democracy that is dealing with truth and reconciliation in the aftermath of a massacre, which is the February 28th massacre. That reconciliation only really comes, half a century later or even longer, 50 years, 60 years, 70 years. So we're only 30 years out from Tiananmen. Taiwan provides a model that's on a longer timeline for truth and reconciliation to deal with these terrible traumas and these turning points where people's lives through no fault of their own were just really turned upside down by, by political change that was happening around them. So I see Taiwan not just as memory repository, but as a positive model for, not perfect by any means, but for a way to deal with, with trauma and violence and sort of post-authoritarian future.

- Great. Okay. So let's take the last question. And it's a long one. It's sort of a sort of a bigger sort of state society kind of question. So maybe it's a nice way to end, but before we do that, I just want to apologize to the people that I could not get to. There are several questions that I could not get to. I'm sorry. I tried to do my best curating as we went along. But here goes, here's the question. It's from Jean Landy. It says, isn't the attitude regarding consent in China, similar to the way that most people have lived under most governments in history? An example is the suspicious libel laws of England in the 18th century. Then the Crown aim to stamp out any and all seditious or rebellious publications that would aim to undermine or discredit the Empire or the government. Truth was considered no defense whatsoever to seditious libel. Isn't that British attitude then the same as the attitude of the Chinese government now, wherein Qing dynasty laws similar? Is press freedom historically the norm or unusual? So I guess the press freedom bit stuck at the end, but I saw this question really more about thinking about what is the relationship in state and society in some ways. I don't know, it's sort of a big question. Any sort of reflections on this?

- Well, democracy is fragile, isn't it? Democracy and the kind of press freedom that people in China were demanding in 1989 and that the journalists themselves were thrilled to be able to exercise for a couple of weeks in Beijing in May, amazing press freedom. That was so fleeting and so fragile. And I think that question shows us, yeah, it is kind a rare blip in history for there to be freedom of the press and the ability to openly criticize the government. And if you have it, protect it because it's fragile. And if we do look at the long scope of history, I think that's, that's accurate. I don't think that means, oh, history should always be this way though that it's a fight

to get it, and it was a fight to protect it. And that's what people were fighting for in '89.

- And to me, discussion about June 4th, this is we shouldn't really be thinking or having to think about issues of sedition, when we talk about June 4th. This is a historical event that happened that everyone accepts and agrees happens. So I don't know why we need to think about, you know. We shouldn't have to be thinking about issues of press freedom and sedition in order to have these discussions. I think the fact that we, you know, even talking about it, it is, you know, it shows the extent to which we ourselves have begun to internalize the limitations the Communist Party has placed on freedom of thought and freedoms of discussion. I think it's something that we in academia should push against, you know, if you're able, as Jeremy said, freedom is fragile. If you're able to have those freedoms, you should use them.

- Great. Thank you. That's actually a brilliant note to end on. I don't think I can, one can one can say anything, I think much better well beyond that. So maybe I'll shut up and say thank you to both of you for a really, really fascinating conversation. Apologies to the people whose questions were not answered, but thank you to everyone who joined us in the audience. Thank you for those who stayed with us to the very end and we look forward to seeing you at future talks. So thank you again.

- Thank you.