

Offshore Asset Protection BLOG - Bob Bauman

That's The Way It Looks From Here

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Tiananmen Square: 20 Years Later

It has been 20 years since the tragic deaths of pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square in June 1989, and 30 years since Deng Xiaoping (left) (whom I met in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing in 1979) embarked on economic reform in China.



Cato Institute scholar James A. Dorn comments, "After 20 years China has made substantial economic progress, but the ghosts of Tiananmen are restless and will continue to be so until the Goddess of Liberty is restored."

Yesterday the BBC reported under the headline "Thousands attend candlelight vigil in Hong Kong" that a vigil marking 20 years since the Tiananmen massacre had been held in Hong Kong, the only part of China allowed to commemorate the event. An estimated 150,000 people (below) gathered in Victoria Park for the annual event, which was addressed by one of the 1989 student leaders, Xiong Yan. Other Tiananmen veterans were banned from entering the Hong Kong territory.



Money Over Morality

Some wore t-shirts saying "Donald Tsang You don't represent me" (see below) in a rejection of recent remarks by Hong Kong's chief executive. He had tried to argue that history could be forgotten as economic development was more important.

Open debate about the events of 4 June 1989, in which troops killed hundreds or even thousands of people during a pro-democracy demonstration, is forbidden in mainland China, and the government

has never held an official inquiry.



Many at the vigil expressed the view that for Hong Kong, and China, democracy was necessary. They still hoped for change within China, they said, and for reform of the Communist Party, and they said the killings of 1989 must never be forgotten. "It's just something from the bottom of your heart," said one.

Remembrance of a Return to China

All this reminded me of my own journeys to China, the first in 1979, the last 26 years later in 2005, when I led a group of Sovereign Society members. So I went back and found my A-Letter comments published on November 22, 2005 and here they are:

One of the most striking contrasts I witnessed in my 10 days in the so-called People's Republic of China was when we flew into Hong Kong from Beijing.



The far greater personal freedom I felt was emphasized by the welcome we got on the way in from the gleaming new Hong Kong international airport. Our local guide, William, spoke of the

democracy movement in Hong Kong in a way no mainland Chinese would ever be allowed to express an opinion. That he had the freedom to do so owes to the "one nation, two systems" arrangement under which the British ended their colonial control.

Even though Hong Kong has been a "Special Administrative Region" of China since the British handed it over in 1997, I could feel the freer atmosphere -- none of the TV or Internet censorship I personally experienced everywhere I went in China.



Instead there was the hustle and bustle of free commerce and the flow of free people coursing through the streets at all hours. When the Honorable Martin Lee, (left) a freely elected member of the Legislative Council, met with us, his call for full democracy for Hong Kong emphasized how nervous the Red controllers in Beijing are about letting people have a say in their own government.

On Nov. 18 the Beijing government again formally asserted its control, stating officially that no changes can be made in Hong Kong electoral laws without permission of the mainland government. [Hong Kong elections scheduled for 2012 have been postponed by the Communists until 2017 or 2020].

Return After a Quarter Century

You know, if you've been reading my comments, that in 1979 I spent a week in China as part of an official delegation when I was a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives.



The impression I came away with back then was of a backward, third world nation, tightly controlled by the Communist Party that has governed since the 1949 revolution. The people were downcast, dressed all the same in drab, Mao Zedong (left) padded jackets and cotton shoes; the hotels were old and musty and evidence of Western commerce consisted of Coca Cola bottles in a glass case at the backwater Beijing airport.

Cars were few but bicycles clogged the streets, coal smoke filled the air, and cabbages hung from every window sill and balcony - the government distributed it in piles in the streets since it was the one of the few foods available for millions in the winter months.

The changes I saw in China are astounding after 25 years.

Astounding

Today China is a modern nation in every respect, at least in its major cities, and we did visit Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou, with air and road travel in between. The streets are filled with fashionably dressed workers and business people, teenagers and young students wearing the latest fashions from the US and Europe.



Everywhere in China there is construction going on, literally thousands of construction sites, high rises for apartments, sometimes 50 stories high, new offices and factories, new super highways and overpasses (flyovers), and every airport was spacious and modern.

In fact the Chinese infrastructure is in stark contrasts to the pot holed roads and streets in the US and the congested airports - but then in China, almost everything is new - and Western business and products are everywhere - from high fashion designer shops, to names you know.

Forbidden Starbucks

Within a block of the St. Regis Hotel in Beijing, where we (and a week later, President Bush) stayed, there were shops and eateries bearing the familiar signs of 7-Eleven, Hagen Days, Sizzler Steakhouse, McDonalds, KFC and the ubiquitous Starbucks, plus a TexMex taco place.



There's even a Starbucks inside the Forbidden City at Tiananmen Square [since removed]. No doubt the last emperor, Pu Yi, (left) would be rolling in his imperial grave had he not been brainwashed by the Communist, who deposed him and reduced him to a life as a humble gardener.

Walk down Nanjing Road in Shanghai (below) and you see not only huge Chinese department stores, but major shops selling Versace, Dolce & Gabbana, Ermenegildo Zegna - or how about a Bentley automobile, or Mercedes Benz or BMW from the shining art deco showrooms of local Chinese auto dealers? Buicks and VWs (made in China) are everywhere.



In a recent book that gives an excellent description of where China is today, (One Billion Customers by James McGregor), the author says the Chinese have "nothing to believe in but making money." And it is very apparent that a minority of those 1.3 billion people are upwardly mobile from the dreary life of 1979 I witnessed. But China is a social powder keg of haves and have nots, with state socialism being replaced by a Chinese brand of capitalism.

How Long?

The question is - how long can the relatively few Communists (maybe a million or so that staff the police, military and government) keep the lid on. All this growing, glowing wealth for the many, still leaves the many more out in the cold.

And once the more or less free market has been allowed to operate for a while in China - and it's going full steam now - when will the peoples, whose republic it is said to be, demand a voice in their own governance?



Even as dissidents were subject to house arrest during Bush's visit, and even as President Hu Jintao (left) refused to answer question about democracy from the foreign press, even as the press and media is totally controlled - the seeds of freedom have been planted and, in my opinion, it's only a matter of time.

Would I invest in this state controlled, corrupt economy?

No. Not now. Not unless you have cash to gamble and lose and not unless you are very careful. But I will bet that the people of China will be free one day, perhaps sooner than many think, when this last of the imperial dynasties -- the Communist dynasty -- finally disappears.

That's the way that it looks from here -- back in the good old USA.



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