

CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY: FROM THE TIANANMEN SQUARE TO TIMISOARA

Lucian Vasile Szabo

West University of Timisoara

Abstract. The year 1989 is the year of vigorous social and civic movements in some Central and East European countries. Those movements led to the fall of the communist regimes, as well as to the initiation of democratic measures in those countries. With the exception of Romania, all those countries experienced a peaceful evolution. The Romanian Revolution, which began on December 16, 1989, in Timisoara, was bloody, with over 3,000 dead and 11,000 wounded, most of them after Nicolae Ceaușescu and his main supporters were dismissed from their power positions. In Timisoara, many victims appeared before the dictator ceased to run the state, as 72 deaths and almost 300 wounded were reported in town, most victims of gun shots. From the perspective of fierce repression, the Romanian Revolution, especially due to the major events in Timisoara, resembles the brutal mode in which the students protest movement in June 1989, in the Tiananmen Square from Beijing, was also repressed. The two major events have not benefited enough from a comparative research. The purpose of this study is to outline similarities and differences, but also to sketch the primary elements of evolution of the two countries after the year 1989.

Keywords: Tiananmen Square, Timisoara, 1989, democracy, repression, communism.

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1. Checkpoints in Romania and China

The year 1989 has been considered remarkable regarding the evolution towards democracy of some states of the world. The evolution or the return to democracy, the respect for human values and fundamental rights became specific in many states of the Central and Eastern Europe. The evolution was peaceful, yet sometimes accompanied by vigorous protests in some states. To Romania, though, it also meant a great deal of bloodshed. In China, other protests have been savagely repressed as

well, without causing the regime to change. In Romania, the dictatorial communist regime was abolished, yet, despite the bloody revolution, the evolution towards a profound, multipartite, and coherent democratic system has been slow, as the old regime survived, mostly through people and institutions, while the people and institutions of an open society remained unstable and somehow meretricious. They were being controlled in an authoritarian manner and sometimes by force (as have been the frequent raids of the mineworkers into Bucharest to punish the representatives of the political forces that were hostile to Ion Iliescu, the leader of the country after the fall of Ceaușescu, as well as the Front of National Salvation (FNS) as a party). In China, the leading role of the Communist Party stayed a fact, but the year 1989 marked an important change of political and governmental management. Slowly, the political totalitarianism was doubled by an amplification of the opening on the economical level.

Making an emotional screening of the world's revolutionary movements in 1989, Ralf Dahrendorf notes:

Yes, there were tears, bitter tears at the massacre of Tiananmen Square which brutally ended the 'democracy movement' of students and workers and even soldiers in China, tears for the victims of Securitate's brutality in Timișoara and elsewhere in Romania six months later (Dahrendorf 2005:6-7).

The evolution was different, although one of the greatest fears of the Timisoara people in December 1989, particularly beginning Sunday, December 17, when the repression forces opened fire against the protesters, was to avoid the same fate as the demonstrators from the Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Back then, in June 1989, after a month of peaceful protests of the students and other residents of China's capital, the state forces intervened, which did not happen during the period when the protests were rather isolated. The offensive of the forces of repression led to the evacuation of the place, while numerous victims were registered: dead, wounded, and arrested. There were no exact figures of the repression and probably we will never know them. But information about the bloody offensive of the state forces alarmed the whole world, although the Chinese officials made intense, desperate efforts that, both inside the country and outside it, only the official statements got through (Economy 2019). While comparing the repressive actions in Timisoara and Beijing with the Hungarian revolution in 1956, Tom Gallagher (1995:73) notes that the actions of the state forces in Romania were much more intense, which led to a larger number of victims. Yet, despite the large number of the dead and wounded on December 17, 1989, the Timisoara demonstrators continued their protests, and on December 20 they made the Army, the main aggressor on the streets, retreat into the barracks.

The Romanians found out about the brutal suppression of the protests on the Tiananmen Square, although they also lived in a closed society, with a controlled mass media. Information came from the radios with special programs for Romania (BBC, Free Europe, The Voice of America, Radio France International, Deutsche Welle). But there was also news in the programs of radio and televisions from the

neighbouring countries, including the URSS. Considering the resemblance between the dictatorial regimes in Romania and China, the rebelling people of Timisoara, militants in favour of the introduction of democratic measures, had every reason to be afraid. The squares, Tiananmen in Beijing (June 4, 1989), and Liberty in Timisoara (December 17, 1989) are places where guns have been fired and innocent people, including children, fell victim. Yet, in Timisoara, people had gathered a day before in Saint Mary Square, close to the Reformed Church, where the reverend of Hungarian origin, Tokes Laszlo, was seized. That was where the first confrontations with the repression forces took place; at that point, they did not open fire, but used water cannons instead, while making numerous illegal arrests. Despite the fire and despite the ending that was not favourable to democracy in China, the protests of the Timisoara people continued, moving later to the Opera (Victory) Square, which, starting from December 20, was never deserted.

The squares thus became symbolic places, as Frank Viviano remarked a year after the tragedy in the Tiananmen Square. He talks about the protests in the Slovak National Liberation Square in Bratislava, appreciating that the revolt in Beijing encouraged the Central and Eastern Europeans: "It is clear from dozens of interviews, not only in Czechoslovakia but in Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia, that June 4 is regarded by Eastern Europeans as a crucial spark that helped ignite their own revolution. The euphoria that has reigned here since the end of 1989, when governments fell from Bucharest to Prague, is mixed with a continuing sense of astonishment at the course of events" (Viviano 1990).

2. Similar living conditions

One of the causes of the fall of the former communist regimes in the states from Central and Eastern Europe was the general economic bankruptcy. Those states were simply unable to find the necessary resources to develop and support the outdated industrial capacities. The services and commerce offered the citizens in these countries insufficient products for daily living, which led to the initiation of the protest movements. There are other causes, of course, among which aspiration to civic liberties and democracy are fundamental. The miserable living conditions played a major role, though. The authoritarian (dictatorial and discretionary) regime and the centralized economy seemed so intertwined that differentiation was minimal. Yet, there were some differences. In the communist camp, Czechoslovakia and Hungary used to have much freer economies than the ones in Romania and Bulgaria. Even today, we note important differences between North Korea and Cuba, as well as between these countries and Vietnam or China. Besides, so far China proved, in a convincing manner, that an authoritarian regime, based on a unique party, as well as an opening to a complex economy can in fact coexist. That is neither centralized (socialist), nor fully free (capitalist). It is a dangerous and, at the same time, odd mixture, whose evolution seems difficult to decipher.

Until the brutal violence in June 1989 against the protesters in the Tiananmen

Square, the Chinese leaders were struggling to build a climate of trust of the foreign investors in China's economy, by offering access to huge resources and by taking advantage of any collaboration in order to be able to develop their own economy (Simon 1990). This economical opening was translated by students and some Chinese dissidents as an opportunity for a reform on the political and civic level and as a possible transition to democracy. To some extent, the Chinese communist regime tolerated that as long as it did not take any concrete vindictive form and did not cast any doubt upon the official system. In universities, centres of debates appeared, emphasizing an attempt to know the values of liberal democracies, yet in connection to the promotion of the Chinese national specificity (Yang 2014). There is also a public agenda, dominated by two important topics, generated by the reform of the academic milieu and of the system of public officials (civil service). As long as those debates took place in closed spaces and could be surveyed and controlled, they were tolerated by the system, as they represented an outlet for the release of some tension accumulated in a retarded and corrupt society, full of contradictions. Romania did not benefit from such type of openness, the forms of release of the accumulated tensions being fewer, as the regime proved more incumbent. This fact also represents one of the explanations for the special kind of violence specific to the pre-democratic actions and, more importantly, to the repression itself.

In China, the state forces intervened when the debates took the form of street demonstrations. The protesters did not yet have the necessary force to fight against the system, as was the case six months later, in December 1989, in Timisoara. The pro-democracy movement in China did not acquire the adhesion of a large number of people, as the population was rather indifferent, while another category preferred the politics of taking small steps. The brutal repression on 4 June 1989 provoked a crisis in the relations with the Occident, as the great companies were put in the situation to limit their actions and wait to see how things evolved. They could not become stable in that state of forbearance for too long, despite the persistence on the part of political leaders with democratic views, because they saw their own businesses subverted. The gap created in business risked getting definitely fulfilled by other investors, who might have been less sensitive to repression and the breach of the rights of the people in China.

The response of the Occident was classical, as many times the politics of reduction of economic exchange and limiting contacts was adopted (Gecelovsky 2001, Youwei 2003, Wilke and Achatzi 2011). Each state made its decision independently (often by consulting its partners). Some international, economic or political sanctions were adopted, such as the recall of the ambassadors. Romania experienced this phenomenon both in the last years of the retrograde communist system of the leader Nicolae Ceaușescu, and in 1990, after the previous year's revolution. This thing was possible because of the return of the new leader Ion Iliescu to an authoritarian system, of subversion of the historical parties in the opposition and of the organizations of civil society, a fact that became concrete through the repression of the students' movement, but to which persons from various social classes participated in the University Square in Bucharest. The demonstration began on 22 April 1990, through

the institution of some 'communism free area' and was drowned in blood on 14–15 June 1990, by intervention troupes comprised largely of mineworkers brought especially for that purpose to Bucharest by the new president of Romania, Ion Iliescu (Cox 2012:136-138). Six dead and over 700 wounded were registered. Romania lost at that point a lot of the respect it gained in December 1989, when, by struggling heroically, it dismissed one of the most brutal political regimes in the world. Another phenomenon was the deserting of Romania by a large number of people, especially intellectuals and civic activists, similar to the exodus of the Chinese intellectuals after the massacre in Tiananmen Square in 1989 (Beja 2003).

3. Information about the repression

While the protest in the Tiananmen Square benefited from a relatively good presentation in the international media, for the repression on 4 June 1989, desperate attempts were made to conceal it, as foreign journalists were evacuated from the scene. A few months later, in Timisoara, a city in the Western part of Romania, 560 km from the capital Bucharest, but only 60 km from the frontier with the former Yugoslavia, the interdiction of the access to concrete information from the place of the incidents to a large extent repeated the communicational distortion previously registered in China. The situation was only seemingly similar: the same preoccupation of the system with cutting the connections with the exterior (outside the borders), the interdiction of the access inside the country and in the city given to the foreign press correspondents, lack of news about the events on the national radio and television stations, and then the diffusion of materials of condemnation of the persons involved in the revolts, desperate and systematic attempts to conceal the truth about the repression. Yet, there is a major difference: in the capital of China, there were some correspondents of some press or television agencies with international reputation. They worked in difficult conditions, as Mike Chinoy (1999) illustrates. Their role was to cover the historical meeting between the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, with the purpose of de-icing the relations between the two big states. The moves of the Soviet leader systematically avoided the Tiananmen Square where, for over two weeks, the protesters resided. Journalists obtained the approval to cast images during Gorbachev's visit, yet the occasion was taken advantage of to spread materials recorded with the revendications of the demonstrators outside the country (Chinoy 1999:186).

The students condemned the suspect death of Hu Yaobang, a Chinese leader, who declared he was against the way in which the students' revolts from 1986–1987 were suppressed. The authorities waited for Gorbachev's visit to be over to take any measures, perhaps hoping that the protests would die out on their own. Yet, the appearance of the Soviet leader in Beijing stimulated the students in their actions. There was no such opportunity in Timisoara, as the regime in Bucharest decided to intervene by force as soon as the number of persons in the streets increased to a few hundred, after the first movements in favour of democracy emerged. The reverend

Tokes Laszlo had the possibility to address the group of people residing around the Reformed Church, yet under strict surveillance, not once, but twice. But he was forcefully evacuated in the morning of 17 December 1989, so the revolution in Timisoara took place in his absence, although it is apparent that it started beneath his windows. On 15 December the reverend was contacted by a representative of the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest, who was accompanied by a journalist from Great Britain. Discussions were carried even from a distance for a while, as the officers of *Securitate* (the intelligence service in Romania during the communist regime) prevented the rapprochement (Ionica 2014: 35). Later, *Securitate* made a special effort to hinder any foreign official or journalist from getting to Timisoara, while disturbing even the activity of the Yugoslavian General Consulate in Timisoara, in its desperate attempt to stop the leak of information about the protests beyond the borders of the country. The two communist regimes, Chinese and Romanian, were to the same extent keen to erase any traces of the massacres and to spread reassuring information, while claiming that the events were not significant. Blame was later laid on some persons who broke the law, meaning that they should be punished, submitted to the public hostility of all honest citizens. That was the story concocted by the two communist regimes, but they did not entirely reach their purpose.

4. The common element: the brutality of the intervention

Between the two actions of repression of the moves for democracy, the one in the Tiananmen Square (from 4 June 1989) and the one on the streets in Timisoara (16–20 December 1989) there are similarities concerning the brutality of the actions. The differences are major too. Paradoxically, the movement in the Tiananmen Square in Beijing was encouraged by the relative economical opening begun in China by the reformist leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979. In those conditions, the students and the other participants to the protests (intellectuals, artists, and workers) thought ampler measures were necessary (Lai 2010). The authorities in Beijing tolerated the student movements, thinking they would die out on their own, merely due to the intimidation measures, without any intervention by force. Ceaușescu did not tolerate a gathering of consistent groups, he ordered their dispersal. In the days of the repressions, the citizens of Timisoara were not allowed to form groups larger than three persons. We notice a major difference regarding the location of the protests. In Beijing, they took place under the eyes of the central authorities, while Timisoara was hundreds of kilometres from Bucharest, so control was not that tough. Besides, the information that reached the political leaders' offices in Bucharest was incomplete, did not present the extent of the manifestations and were repeatedly misinformed (Szabo 2014:16).

Another difference was the superior capacity of Romanians to inform people. In Timisoara, people listened to and watched radio and television programmes of the neighbouring countries, and the Occidental radio posts were used as well, as five of them had programmes in Romanian. That way, they could find out about the massacre in the Tiananmen Square, which as a fact represents a real challenge

to communication, as information moved from a communicational almost blocked country to another country that was in a similar position. Apparently, the foreign press, subordinate to the totalitarian regimes, either kept silent about the events (as it was the case of the newspapers in Timisoara), or they took an attitude against the demonstrators, seen as ‘enemies of the people’ (Marin 2008). It is obvious that the communist leaders pursued the maintenance of the repressive system in the two countries, as the leading role of the communist party could not be doubted. Still, there are differences in this respect as well. In Romania, we are not talking of a purely communist system, but of a dictatorship of a single clan, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, and those close to them. In China, power and influence were shared, as more leaders got to the forefront. In those contexts, there were disputes between them, sometimes difficult to mask (Jones 2014). There were differences in China both as regards the measures taken (repression or dialogue), and the rhythm of the economic reforms, while in Romania all measures precluded any openness.

There have always been differences between what ideologists and propagandists of the communist (totalitarian) party officially promoted and what the citizens that were submitted to such assaults actually believed. Even if they did not convey their true beliefs and let the officials believe that they accepted the official propaganda and the imposed conduct, many Romanians or the Chinese knew that the truth was infinitely more diverse. They knew and know to this day that the official lie happened on a large scale. The possibility of free speech was extremely limited, e.g. through the blockage of all means of communication outside the borders of the two countries (Hall 2010). When the first news about the revolt in Timisoara in the morning of 17 December 1989 reached the Occident, the journalists from the free world were afraid that the phenomenon of concealing the constitutive elements of facts would be repeated. From a media related point of view, the Romanian Revolution surprised the world, while offering at the same time a field for the probation of new technologies and innovative methods of doing journalism as well. The bang came, surprisingly to some extent, from the integrated technological capacities, meant to ensure a better and prompter dissipation of information. The later studies identified with great precision the consequences of over-communication, whereby global television became the main actor of drama and comedy at the same time:

The problem with the Tiananmen Square and Romanian revolution television stories is very significant in an age of instantaneous communication: first images are not properly evaluated before being transmitted; and second, after the distortion is created, there is never sensational correction of the reality (Aubin 1998:163).

The difficulties in communication are apparent, being increased by the communist leaderships of the two countries. Likewise, there was a time when television adopted new technologies, turning also to satellite transmissions (Schnell 2003), possible from Beijing, but not from Timisoara. The drastic intervention of the state forces in June 1989 against the Chinese students who protested in the Tiananmen Square resulted

in numerous victims, while the number of the killed, wounded, or arrested could only be estimated, because it could not be known in detail. After the large-scale tragedy during the Romanian revolution and the bloody character of the changes (including, in this instant, the number of dead and wounded), there was another type of analysis, able to impose a model of change in other countries as well. The bloody Revolution in Romania was re-staged, over two decades later, in 2012 in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. In that confrontational milieu, the references to China were necessary because, as Peter Siani-Davies emphasizes, there was in Timisoara the danger of fraternization between the protesters and the components of the troupes designated to perform the oppression. In Beijing, military troupes from outside the capital were also called “to suppress the Tiananmen Square demonstration” (2005:93). The same was true in Timisoara’s case, where on 17 December 1989, military convoys from around (Arad, Lugoj, Buzias), but also from further away (the paratroopers from Caracal and helicopters from Carasebes), from the elite units of the Army (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006) arrived. The hypothesis according to which some of the local leaders of the party, *Militia*, *Securitate*, and the Army were more tolerant is being confirmed in practice, although the repressive system functions unitarily to the end, including the decision to stop acting directly against the masses of protesters. Starting on 20 December 1989, the Army withdrew into the barracks, while the forces of *Militia* and *Securitate* disappeared from public places. The public administration (dominated by members of the communist party) remained in institutions as well, waiting for a conclusion.

5. A great problem: the complete truth

The finding of the truth about what exactly happened in China in June 1989 and in Romania in December 1989, with the two reference points, the Tiananmen Square and Timisoara, represents a challenge to the officials in the judicial systems of the two countries. According to some elementary rules, the death of some persons in such special circumstances should be investigated, while the murderers should be punished. In China, the ideological prevails over the judicial, as the protesters in June 1989 were considered enemies of the people and of the state, so it was out of the question that someone was held responsible for their deaths. We are talking of the same attitude that the Romanian Communist regime, dominated by Nicolae Ceausescu, had, until 22 December 1989, when the protesters were considered hooligans and agents of some foreign secret services. Ceausescu’s fall slightly changed the situation in Romania. The transition was slow, hesitant, without remarkable accomplishments as regards the daily lives of the citizens. Some persons were judged for the December 1989 crimes and there were some convictions. The search for the murderers and the conviction of the members of the repression teams was being blocked by the impossibility to begin prosecution against the Army employees. After many years of procrastination, the generals Victor Atanasie Stanculescu and Mihai Chitac were convicted for their roles in the coordination of the repressions in Timisoara. Several other officers have been indicted, but the issue never got to trial.

Neither historians nor other researchers achieved any success in clearing the facts in the two cases. In China, access to the information from files is being blocked. Very rarely, some details emerge that reach too few interested recipients. They cannot be communicated to the public, any attempt to mass distribution is rapidly stopped by censorship or by the state forces, if needed. The development of the new technologies, the access, even limited, to the Internet in China offers more chances to find out details about the events in the Tiananmen Square, which benefit from a special interest, even among the Chinese, as Jens Damm (2007) illustrates. Still, access remains limited, despite the increased capacities to hijack some digital contents. Leaks are possible, as shown by Damm, who specifies that there are serious doubts as regards the authenticity of the Tiananmen Papers that reached the Occident. In the absence of some authentic information, speculations develop in the digital public sphere, while the little certain data gets lost. Romania went through such media over-exposure before the explosion of the digital communication, as the process began in the very period of the revolutionary movements. The lack of information, inside the country and outside it, led to the well-known media explosion at the end of the year 1989 (Szabo 2013). Concerning information in the Timisoara case, it was only in 2014 that almost all sources have been identified, while the files (many in electronic format) were acquired by some organizations interested in making them public. Yet, an assiduous work of organizations, as well as a research of those documents is necessary for the accomplishment of some relevant studies and conclusions.

The suppression of the student revolt on 4 June 1989 in the Tiananmen Square in Beijing alarmed and worried the Occident (Taylor 1998), but they also caused problems to the Chinese leaders. Then came international sanctions that led to a decrease in the export of Chinese commodity. Many African leaders declared that they consented to the force measures taken (Mawdsley 2007), which facilitated an orientation of commercial exchange towards that continent, to the states of the Pacific, and later to South America (Szabo 2014). On 18 December 1989, right after finding out about the protest movements in Timisoara and of the moderate repression on 16 December, as well as the extremely bloody repression on 17 December, the Occidental leaders took position against the regime in Bucharest, through extremely harsh interventions. Those interventions were facilitated by the fact that Romania was not, at that date, an important commercial partner of the Occident, being situated in a position of isolation as well. On 20 December 1989, the reports about the bloody interventions of the communist forces against the demonstrators in Timisoara were known by the whole world, generating a wave of emotion, sympathy for the protesters, and indignation against the dictatorial system. In December 1989 in Timisoara there were more victims than in June 1989 in Beijing, but international mass media was more prepared to report on the savageness of the repression, which facilitated the shattering exaggerations about what happened (Szabo 2013). In 1989, Romanians were much better informed on the democratic movements from Central and Eastern Europe, on the (slow) progress of the reforms in the Soviet Union, while they kept in mind the repressive movements from both the main cities of the European communist states and from China. Despite this awareness, there were no debates (even informal)

and no planning of the street movements in favour of democratic reforms. In China, the situation was different, because the leaders of the students could not discuss, in either formal or informal situations, any problems and ways to pursue them. Of course, those gatherings were limited and supervised, but they were able to meet Gene Sharp, a well-known American activist and promoter of nonviolence (Lui 2000). Therefore, the students' actions had a non-violent character, though they were firm and apparent. This desideratum of the putting away of the violent interventions was formulated in Timisoara as well, in the days of the protests. On 16 December 1989, the demonstrators were attacked with brutality by the troupes formed of soldiers equipped with helmets, shields and water cannons. On 17 December shots were fired, hitting many adults and children who were there by accident. Back then, one of the slogans that was shouted in contact with the representatives of the Army, who formed most of the repression troupes, was "No violence!". Still, the repression did not stop until 20 December in Timisoara and until 22 December in Bucharest.

6. 'Soft power' and the unique party

After the repression in the Tiananmen Square, China chose to develop 'soft power' solutions in its international relations. The economic offensive (with rhythms of increase of over ten percent annually) may be observed in the increase of the living conditions and in the modernization of the country. Of course, the improvement of the material life was accompanied by the elevation of the cultural and educational levels. We must also add the effects of globalization, a domain where the state imposes certain limits, at least regarding access to communication. Still, there is enough data so that many Chinese citizens have inquired about some radical reforms concerning the political system as well. Often, such manifestations for liberty and democracy are being brutally suppressed. For now, the Chinese autocratic system barely tolerates the work and ideas that can enrich the economy, while the purpose remains as large a profit as possible. Yet, it is not only the profit that counts, but influence as well. China does not want to play the military card, even though it represents a force in the world, in this respect. The Chinese communist leaders realise that a war, a direct confrontation, an appeal to 'hard power' may be very costly for the country and its interests. They have a lot more to gain from economic expansion. China translated in a convenient manner the concept of 'soft power'. It further diluted its meaning of ideological confrontation, while keeping the form of influence on economic markets.

The two concepts, 'hard' and 'soft power' are relatively easy to understand, despite some contexts dominated by ambiguity. An excellent description, where the semantic context, as well as the spheres of use are developed can be found in Joseph S. Nye (2004). The examples of soft power that the American professor gives are important, as they also come from the direction of the Occidental media offensive in the states with authoritarian systems. Radio Free Europe got through the Iron Curtain, where it brought Occidental news and music to Central and Eastern Europe; the protesting students in the Tiananmen Square built a replica of the Statue of Liberty,

while Iran was full of satellite antennas (Nye 2004:x). That was precisely what the former Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu condemned in November 1989, at the last congress of the Romanian Communist Party. Gilley (2011), referring directly to the increase of China's influence upon the world, establishes two areas for the two types of power. 'Hard power' includes demographic, geographic, economical, and military indicators. 'Soft power' is built out of technological elements, organizations, culture, diplomacy, and social development.

There is a predisposition, on the part of the Chinese investors, to settle within countries with recent democracy, or even in those where democracy is still in an incipient stage. Of course, they maintain their previous connections to the former communist states. Today, those relations are being developed in an accelerated rhythm, as Chinese capital is rapidly placed in those frail economies, whose vitality has been weakened in the last years by the crisis for many decades now. In Africa, the economic assault that China performed finds a fertile terrain: a minimal stability is needed, in relatively unpretentious societies, so that the Asian investors' business can prosper. Too poor to refuse or oppose the monetary flows and the subtle 'soft power' endeavours initiated by the Asian investors, the African countries take the Chinese presence for granted. Kurlantzick (2007:8) showed that China is particularly active within a large perimeter, from Asia to Australia and Argentine.

The 'soft power' type strategies that China used in its commercial and cultural external offensive are also being used inside the country, with some differences: the internal capitalism is less conspicuous, while the large industry remains under the coordination of the state. Likewise, on the cultural level, a certain openness may be observed, but only in two large directions: 1) a popular culture on the consumerist level, which promotes, at the simple and emotional levels, merely some values such as heroism, loyalty, love; 2) a culture of the depths (of the elites, with approximation), on uncontroversial themes. The true debate of ideas, culture, and art of the profound meanings and values (such as freedom and faith) is still missing, while the ideological constraints are being apparent, even though a slow evolution to a more permissive system can be observed nowadays.

7. Collective memory and the economical offensive

The world evolves, and changes are part of the everyday, whether they take place suddenly or gradually. The question, however, is whether the evolution will also be in the direction of the restoration of some regimes with increased extents of democracy and civil liberties. China does not wish to give up its political system, as it finds it the only efficient one at this point. The Chinese authoritative system may be attractive through the lens of economic efficiency. Still, there is a systematic turn to the repression of the protest movements in favour of the civil, religious, and self-determination rights, which ranges from the elimination of the students' demonstration in 1989 to the force measures in Tibet in 2008 (Hunter 2009). At the same time, the expansion towards the outside continues. Africa represents an opportunity for

China. Few of its states are stable and fewer have a consolidated democracy. For its expansion, China needs stable situations and governments that may control the internal situation, but which keep the market economy, to some extent, free. The Chinese investors do not feel comfortable in unstable areas, marked by conflicts. Yet, they are not necessarily looking for the stable, consolidated economies either. Of course, there may be important agreements, such as the one with Australia (Minyue 2007). The need for cooperation made Australia pass over its restraints related to the lack of respect for the human rights and the bloody repression in the Tiananmen Square and sign a treatise. The commercial exchanges are important and both parties have something to gain (Szabo 2014). This closure to China may mean the relations with the United States are getting colder, a fact that is determined by the decrease of the goods exchange between the two countries, but also by the tensions generated by the change in a traditional relation (Camilleri et al. 2013).

Defined and appreciated as a superpower, China has the possibility of choosing its own mode of action both in internal and in external politics. Although it is apparent that the economic offensive is crucial, it is not being followed, only to a small extent by reforms in the political system, by an evolution in favour of the introduction of civil rights and democratic principles. Romania is constantly coerced to make such reforms and consolidate the state of the right, as there is an internal pressure, come from its own citizens and from some of the institutions, and an external one, through the obligations taken as a member of the European Union (EU) and of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The rhythm is rather slow, as there is a lot of restraint and lack of trust in such evolution. In these conditions, how do we regard the two major events: the students' revolt in the Tiananmen Square on 4 June 1989 and the revolt in Timisoara on 16–20 December 1989? Time is one of the factors that make the image of such events obscure. New and newer facts appear in the public sphere and personal lives, demanding the attention of those involved, so that the older events tend to lose their consistency. But the two events of the year 1989 are 'public contestation model' (Lee and Chan 2013), with lasting effects in collective memory. Despite the temptations and pressure dictated by the events of the present, a need exists to give those events some value for their extraordinary role in history, in the lives of the communities that generated them, and in the lives of the states. Yet, the situation is different again. In China, any public attempt to recall the protests in the Tiananmen Square is rapidly being repressed by vigilant police officers, especially around the date of 4 June each year (Tiffert 2019). In Timisoara, the commemoration is weak, attracting an increasingly fewer participants, which proves that collective memory functions with great deficiency.

Address:

Lucian-Vasile Szabo

Department of Philosophy and Communication Sciences

West University of Timisoara

Vasile Parvan Street 4

300223 Timisoara

Romania

E-mail: vasile.szabo@e-uvvt.ro

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