

ASIEN 35 (April 1990)

Abstract

China's decade of enlightenment

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Never before did millions of Chinese pour into the streets of Beijing for days at a time calling for democracy and for the premier to step down. Even on the sixth day of the martial law in May 1989, thousands of demonstrators flooded Tiananmen square. Initiated by university students in Beijing after Hu Yaobang's death in April 1989, this protest movement against autocracy was highlighted by a student hunger strike lasting seven days and the movement itself went on for more than six weeks. The author inquires how it came about, why millions of Chinese in all walks of life spontaneously and warmly supported the students. He looks at the intellectual trends over the previous decade in China in order to reveal the roots and strength of this movement.