The Little Monument of Fallen Greats

Chapter One:

Try to recollect every time you go visit a monument, were there any stand-outs that you could never forget? And what was your reasoning that you rank the experience above others? Through the past month of monument-hunting in Boston, I have explored a wide array of distinctive monuments with each and every one of them carrying their own charm and significance in history. However, the explorations have led me to contemplate the very essence of what constitutes a good and memorable monument. Does it have to occupy a sizable or towering physical presence to evoke awe from its audience? Is it a requisite to depict a grand and solemn historical figure for commemorating his or her life accomplishments? Or is it because of other factors such as location, material, ornamentation, or symbolism that ultimately sublimates the monument and gives it the meaning to exist?

Now, put down all your wild expectations, and join me on the journey to visit a rather bizarre monument that truly resonated with me mentally and spiritually. It is neither very eye-catching nor impressive at all, at first glance, you might not even notice its existence. Some may argue if it really is a monument at all, I would concur, unlike a traditional monument commonly seen in Boston, this one looks particularly unassuming and dull. Its miniature size of about 30 inches in height\(^1\) and its odd placement make it often overlooked by any passerby. As a matter of fact, finding this monument for the first time took me quite a while even with the guidance of GPS. Despite defying most expectations people have toward a traditionally successful monument, its uniqueness and the history it bemoans deeply touched my heart as someone who used to live in mainland China. The name of this monument is the Tiananmen Memorial, built on September 10, 1989 by the city of Boston.\(^2\)

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As you make your way into the Downtown Boston’s Chinatown, you can spot the Mary Soo Hoo, or Chinatown Gateway Park located just outside the gate to Chinatown. The park itself is approximately 3/4 of an acre, which makes it the largest open space in Chinatown.³ You can often spot groups of elderly Chinese people gathering around at the Park to enjoy their favorite pastime activities such as Pokers and Mahjong while their grandchildren play on the slides nearby.

It was in this leisurely and politic-free environment that the Tiananmen Memorial was established, just right next to the park and on the side of the hectic Beach Street. Taking a closer look at the monument, the granite column form stone is inscribed in both English and Chinese:

TIANANMEN MEMORIAL
THIS PARK IS DEDICATED IN HONOR OF THE DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT IN CHINA AND IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO DIED IN THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IN TIANANMEN SQUARE IN JUNE 1989.
RAYMOND L. FLYNN, MAYOR SEPTEMBER 10, 1989
CITY OF BOSTON⁴

The plain text that mourns the death of those Chinese protesters is all there is to this monument. It is almost as though it resembles more like a gravestone than a typical monument, a gravestone for Democracy in contemporary China. Its very existence serves as a perpetual reminder to the Chinese immigrants of the extremely gnarly and tragic incident that occured 32 years ago in Beijing, China. For any viewer who has no prior knowledge of the truth, here’s a rundown on the incident of June Fourth Tiananmen Square Massacre.

Chapter Two:

The early April of 1989 marked the beginning of the Chinese Democracy Movement led by ordinary students, workers, and intellectuals on Tiananmen Square, the heart of Chinese capital Beijing.⁵ The demonstration gained wide popular support revealing a deep discontent

with the prevailing Communist regime as thousands of protesters started gathering in groups to push forward the desire for the freedom of speech and other democratic reforms that had been long suppressed by the ruling Communist government. By mid-May of 1989, the protesters occupied the square, staged hunger strikes, and asked for dialogue with government officials. In response, however, Chinese authorities declared the employment of martial law by sending soldiers and tanks from the People's Liberation Army to disperse the crowds. Late on June 4th, 1989, the tanks and armored personnel carriers rolled into the square in the middle of the night and began firing live rounds into the crowd of protestors, killing and wounding numerous civilians. Casualty estimates vary greatly from several hundred to a total of ten thousands. Here I will show a brief footage of the terrifying scene on that night, video credit goes to Arthur Kent on Youtube.

After the incident, the international community, human rights organizations, and political analysts condemned the Chinese government for the massacre. Yet the Chinese government continued to make widespread arrests of protesters, strictly controlled coverage of the events in the domestic press, and purged officials who were deemed sympathetic to the protests. Such suppression also signified the end of political reforms and liberation movements that began in the 80s. The Tiananmen Square massacre was not the first act of political violence by China, or any other country for that matter. Government suppression has always been relevant since the dawn of civilization, but this incident of Chinese citizens seeking freedom at the cost of death should never be forgotten by the world whatsoever.

Chapter Three:

Back to our Tiananmen Memorial in Boston Chinatown, it is obvious that the monument was built here in Boston to give the overseas Chinese a rare opportunity to publicly mourn and

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8 “Remembering Tiananmen, 20 Years Later.” The Boston Globe. link.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
honor the fallen heroes from their homeland since the incident remains as one of the most sensitive and most widely censored topics in China.\textsuperscript{14} Any memorial assembly was considered unlawful and anyone who promoted the mourning of the Tiananmen protesters could be facing prison times. Even outside of mainland China, the Chinese government is determined for any opportunity to erase history as this Tiananmen memorial faces the fate of potential removal.

It was reported a few years ago that some Boston Chinese community leaders have been influenced by the Chinese communist regime on a regular basis.\textsuperscript{15} The overseas spy network sent by the Chinese government attempted to seize the opportunity of new constructions on the Chinatown Gateway Park to remove the Tiananmen Square Memorial. It was only because the many astute local Chinese citizens in Boston Chinatown caught wind of the scheme and came out to voice their opinions at some of the community meetings, the removal plan was not successfully carried out.\textsuperscript{16} Nevertheless, it is possible that the Chinese government will persist in removing not only this monument but also many others that are detrimental to its reputation across the globe. There must be countermeasures implemented worldwide to deter their corrupted attempts to erase crucial Chinese history.

Simply put, the CCP’s attempt to erase such important history is affecting every Chinese regardless of where you are. Connecting back to the monument itself, it is truly outrageous and horrifying how such a pivotal monument did not get any more attention\textsuperscript{17} and can be so easily manipulated by a government so far away. The whole situation truly saddens me and I genuinely wish for the day where mainland China can allow open discussions of incidents like the Tiananmen Massacre and the day where democracy and human liberty is acquired by every Chinese citizen so that the death of those protesters on the Tiananmen Square would not be considered futile after all.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} KeepinemHonest. Meeting regarding Tiananmen Massacre Memorial being removed. YouTube, 2010. \texttt{link}.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Cheng, Eddie. Boston Debates the Fate of its Tiananmen Memorial, January 1, 1970. \texttt{link}.