

A TIANANMEN MOTHER VOWS TO FIGHT ON

BY YANG HONGFENG

Epoch Times reporter Yang Hongfeng interviewed Zhang Xianling by telephone on April 3, shortly after Zhang and two other Tiananmen Mothers, Ding Zilin and Huang Jinping, were released from several days' detention by Chinese authorities. April 3 was also the birthday of Zhang's son, Wang Nan, who died in Beijing on June 4, 1989.¹

Yang Hongfeng (ET): We're extremely happy that you finally returned. But in fact this should never have happened. Did the authorities arrest you through the appropriate legal procedures?

Zhang Xianling (Zhang): Yes, they followed proper legal procedures. That is, they produced a valid warrant, initially a summons and then a detention notice.

ET: What reason was given?

Zhang: They wrote that I was suspected of breaking such-and-such an article of the criminal law. I can't remember all the details, but the summons stated that I was a suspect in a crime, and that it was according to Article 50 of the Criminal Procedure Law. The second one, the detention notice, stated the arrest was in accordance with Article 61 of the Criminal Procedure Law, but didn't refer to me as a criminal suspect.²

ET: They said you received a package.

Zhang: That's right.

ET: Did you ask someone to send it to you, or did someone just send it to you?

Zhang: You could say that I was aware of this matter in advance. I knew in advance that someone wanted to send me some T-shirts, and I agreed—if I hadn't agreed, they wouldn't have known my address—and after I told them my address they sent the package to me. Perhaps I'm too naïve! But I felt it was only

some T-shirts, just a souvenir, and I thought that if Customs didn't agree to the T-shirts being sent, they would just confiscate them. But my thinking was too naïve, I see that now.

I feel this law is rather vague, because it doesn't provide any specifics about exactly how the law has been broken. One is Customs Law, I think. In relation to the Customs Law, they said what was sent were T-shirts, but what was written on the Customs form was scarves, so there was a discrepancy in the documentation and that involved Customs Law. But I didn't fill out the Customs declaration, so this shouldn't have been blamed on me! I didn't tell anyone to write "scarves." Another accused me of "inciting subversion of state power," and I think this is wrong. We received a few T-shirts—in what way does that "endanger state security"? It simply doesn't make sense.

So I believe this legal interpretation is quite vague.

I feel the Chinese government was not very sensible in doing this, because I think this kind of matter should be settled. If you see some problem with our T-shirts, you can confiscate them and then come over and talk to us about it. My husband recently had heart surgery and immediately experienced heart trouble and had to go to the hospital. If you had any sense of humanity, you shouldn't arrest us in this way, don't you think? A few mothers like us, even if we received not 50 T-shirts but as many as 500 T-shirts, could we overthrow the government? Could we endanger state security? It's impossible!

ET: When they released you, what explanation did they give?

Zhang: They didn't really give any explanation, and I don't think they had one. They gave me the impression that originally they could have applied for putting me under surveillance, but having taken into consideration my explaining the situation clearly, and that it tallied with their version, they wouldn't place me under surveillance and would restore my liberty. Putting it simply, they had their reason for arrest and their reason for release.

This is what is known as, "The charges have a basis, but evidence is lacking." I think if you've spent any time in China you're familiar with this phrase.

ET: Does that mean you've experienced this kind of harassment in the past?

Zhang: I can't say it's been often. This is the first time I've been detained. Before it was more like, if I went somewhere, they would follow me, or if I went to make offerings at the grave they would tell me not to do it, but if I insisted they'd agree to it; and sometimes there would be a surveillance vehicle, that sort of thing. But this was the first time for this kind of situation. It's at least the second time for Ding Zilin! She was previously detained for 45 days.

ET: Today is Wang Nan's birthday. What do you have planned?

Zhang: It's our custom every year on this day to go to the Wan'an Public Cemetery, which is where Wang Nan's ashes are kept. Today was the same as always, we went this morning and made offerings and placed some fresh flowers. After we came back my mood was not very cheerful; this is inevitable, whenever we come to this time my emotions are very unstable. Because I can still see the day he was born as if it were happening before my eyes, and so when I think of it I find it very hard to take psychologically. At the same time I remind myself that I'm not the only person to meet with this tragedy; there are so many other mothers, fathers, wives, husbands in different times and places who, even with the passage of time, still feel this way, still feel the pain.

Ai, what can I say, every time I think of it I feel very sad; I'll just tell you briefly about it. He was 19 years old, a student at Yuetan Middle School. When the student movement first started he really didn't understand much about what was going on, because he wasn't very involved. But he rode his bicycle to school every day, and he would be on the road for more than half an hour, and as he rode he would encounter some university students, and he naturally talked with these university students about what was happening at Tiananmen Square, and eventually he became involved.

Later I heard from others that he went there every day at lunchtime and took pictures. He loved photography. That's why on that evening, June 3, he took his camera, and wearing khaki fatigues and a helmet that someone had left at our house, he rode his bicycle to Tiananmen. I've thought about what route he must have taken after he left; it should have been the route from the back entrance of Beihai, from Beichang Street, and then southward toward Nanchang Street, because he died at the entrance to Nanchang Street, and if he had come from Tiananmen he definitely wouldn't have been able to reach that point. He may have gone over from Houhai, from the front entrance of Beihai, to Beichang Street, and then from Beichang Street across Nanchang Street to Tiananmen to take pictures. Before he left he had telephoned a fellow student and said he was going to record the true events for history, and at 10:30 he asked me whether I thought there would be gunfire. I said, "I don't think so." I said, "Even at the time of the Gang of Four they didn't open fire, why should they do it now?" But I said, "Don't go out, it's dangerous out there." He said, "Don't worry, I won't go out." I never guessed he would actually go out, taking his camera and wearing a helmet and riding his bicycle toward the north end of Nanchang Street.

Later I found some eyewitnesses who told me that when

the martial law troops opened fire, he ran out to take a photo and was struck by a bullet. After he fell people in the crowd wanted to carry him away for treatment, but the martial law troops wouldn't allow it; they said he was a hooligan, and whoever tried to help him would be shot, so the people had no choice, they could only back away. Just then an ambulance came from the north end of Nanchang Street on its way to Chang'an Street to save people, but it wasn't allowed through. The doctors in the ambulance got out and tried to reason with the martial law troops, saying, "We're doctors, we have to go to save the injured," but the martial law troops said they were not allowed to go to Chang'an Street. Ambulances came twice, but their negotiations failed, and they had to go back from the north end of Nanchang Street, and for that reason the injured people on Nanchang street could not receive treatment.

Eventually some medical students managed to carry my son behind the martial law troops to a place where they could bandage his wound, and they felt that his breast was still warm, and they saw that he had a student ID, his old student ID from when he was at Huayuan Village Middle School, and they saw that he was only a secondary student (the ID said he was only 17 years old because it was two years old, although at the time he was already 19). The medical students saw he was still very young, and they hoped they could save him, but the martial law troops wouldn't allow them to take him away for treatment. They said, "If you want to help him, you'll have to do it here," so of course they couldn't save him. Eventually around 3:00 a.m., after he had passed away, the medical students said, "He's dead, we're not taking him away for treatment, but to let his family come and identify the body." But the martial law troops said they couldn't take him away. So all they could do was stay there with him until sunrise, around 6 a.m., and then the martial law troops forced them to leave, and they had to just leave him there. Apart from Wang Nan there were also two other corpses, and the medical students had to leave them there, those three corpses.

One of the students telephoned the school, and that's how our family eventually received news of Wang Nan's death. In fact, by the time I found his body it was already more than ten days later, on the 14th. At that time his body was at the Huguosi Hospital for Chinese Medicine; they contacted us to come and identify the body. The hospital told us that his body had been found buried outside the No. 28 Middle School next to Tiananmen Square, and that his had been one of three bodies found in that pit. Because he was wearing fatigues they initially believed he was one of the martial law troops, so they took him to the hospital. I think the others were probably cremated, because there was no identification on them and no one knew who they were. Eventually, after Wang Nan was brought to that hospital, they carried out inquiries and learned that he was not a serving soldier, and they notified the school, and then the school notified us. It was June 14 before we learned what had become of him. Ai, if someone hadn't told me that my son's body had been dug up next to the No. 28 Middle School near Tiananmen, I would never have believed it could happen. But on that day no one could escape their fate, they had to bury so many people, but because he was wearing fatigues, we found his body.

Eventually someone gave me a photograph of him after he'd

been dug up, and that was unspeakable; after I saw that photo the first time I couldn't sleep for more than a week. Such a good boy—whatever you might do, why did you have to kill him? Having wounded him, why not let him be treated, and after he died, why not let him be taken away, but instead just bury him, and in a common grave? Among us petitioners there are 13 people who up to now have still not found the dead bodies [of their family members], and it's possible that the bodies were buried nearby and then cremated or something like that.

Even when two military forces fight each other, they won't prevent treatment of the wounded or the arrival of ambulances—that's basic human decency, isn't it? Someone has died, and you still don't let him be carried to the hospital, but just bury him. I have very detailed information on this. I wrote out the material in great detail and mailed it to a relative, and I think I've seen that document posted on the Internet. Ai, I can't talk about it any more. I used to get very upset when I talked about these things; I've really wept my eyes dry. When I found my son's body, there was a bandage around his head, so I could see someone tried to save him. As for his student ID from Huayuan Village Middle School, a teacher from the school told me the school had received a telephone call from someone notifying them that a student named Wang Nan, with the student ID number so-and-so, had been wounded at such a time, and had died at such a time. And I thought at the time, his student ID number was very long, if that person was able to recite it, he must have seen the student ID card, or was even carrying it with him.

Eventually I looked for that person and found him, and he came to our home and gave us the student ID card and the bicycle lock key Xiao Nan had been carrying, along with some other things. He also told me the details of what had happened, and that's how I know that the martial law troops wouldn't let my son be treated and wouldn't let his body be taken away; he told me these things himself. The way things are in China now, I don't dare to reveal those people's names for fear of bringing harm on them. But I believe some day they will come forward and bear witness.

There was a period of time when I nearly went mad, but eventually I realized that I couldn't go mad and I couldn't weep myself blind, I needed to gain a clear understanding of what had happened. And later I found eyewitnesses, and found the doctor who had tried to save my son, and found the traces of his burial. I spent the last half of that year clarifying what had happened, and during that time I came to know Ding Zilin, and we began devoting our energies to finding the people who had died.

ET: I'm sure I speak for our readers overseas when I say our greatest hope is that such a thing will never happen again.

Zhang: Yes, my feeling now is that such a thing is unlikely to happen. But if the matter is never made clear, and if there is never a proper legal resolution, it will be hard to guarantee that it will never happen again. Although I think it's unlikely to happen again, I believe it's necessary to make the situation clear and to reach a legal conclusion in order to be sure it won't happen again.

Even though something like June 4th is unlikely to happen

again, I'm afraid there is a very great possibility of more people being detained.

ET: Someone overseas has nominated you and the Tiananmen Mothers for the Nobel Peace Prize. The person nominating you is Perry Link, a professor of Chinese literature at Princeton University and a well-known expert on Chinese affairs. You aren't able to go online to see his letter of nomination, but I could read it to you. It's about one page long. Would you like to hear it?

Zhang: Yes.

[Reporter reads the letter]

Zhang: A relative of mine overseas telephoned me today and mentioned that this person wrote this letter, but he didn't read it to me. It's rare for a foreigner to write Chinese so well.

ET: The Nobel Peace Prize works this way: the relevant scholars and political experts can nominate someone of their own volition. After the nomination, the Nobel Peace Prize committee will evaluate the nomination. During the UN Human Rights Commission session, right after the Chinese government issued its white paper on human rights, it turned around and detained the three of you . . .

Zhang: It's very stupid, I have to say.

Someone said something to me that I think is true, which is that the Chinese leaders may have been blinded by certain well-known people acting in their own interests. I have to say, I don't know, I'm just an ordinary mother, and it's only because I lost my son that I've stood up to fight for justice on behalf of my son, and it really opened my eyes. I don't know why they would want to arrest me, it seems a very simple and routine matter to me. If it's not allowed, then you can simply not give it to me, and Customs can confiscate it, and then you can come over and ask me about it. Why do you have to detain me? I find it really perplexing.

In fact we've expressed our views repeatedly in hopes of gradually solving the problem. We're not advocating any kind of violence or social instability, we don't see this as a good way to solve the problem. Ding Zilin and I and the other Tiananmen Mothers have all along conducted our group activities in a lawful, open and independent manner. We want to solve the problem, not make a big show or raise a fuss—this has been our principle all along. But sometimes the question of lawfulness really is very troublesome.

ET: When you and Ding Zilin contacted other family members, listening to their stories must have been quite distressing.

Zhang: That's for sure. Every time we listened to someone it was very upsetting. At the same time I experienced an intuitive reaction, which was that when I found other people in a situation similar to mine, I also felt their pain. I read something somewhere that said sharing the pain of others is a way of reducing one's own pain. When I've sought people out I've

found that's the case with me. That is, after finding more people, I still felt pain, but it wasn't the same as before. I felt that there were many people who had also met my unhappy fate. So I should work even harder to find others, and I should work hard to get to know these people.

Before we sought them out, they were very repressed, because there weren't many people they could talk to about these things. Now it's much better. Before it was as if you couldn't say anything, because if you did it was possible that others would discriminate against you, but now it's much better. When I first found them, some people wept bitterly and said, "All the mental anguish I've been suppressing all these years, now I can talk over with you!" We had a common language for exchange. There was an old granny of around 85 who was originally feeling extremely repressed, extremely anguished, cursing her fate and wondering why it was so bad, but after I found her she said, "It's not that my fate is bad, there's just too much wrong that is done." Since then we've been in touch regularly, and she was the original inspiration for the Tiananmen Mothers.

ET: Do the Tiananmen Mothers intend to continue their work seeking out family members?

Zhang: Of course, we'll definitely continue. After we were detained this time, while I was in the detention center I really felt a lot of anxiety, because my husband's health was not good, and his spirits were low, and it caused me a huge amount of worry. I was also extremely worried about the other Tiananmen Mothers. I didn't know how upset they might be over Ding Zilin, Huang Jinping and myself all being arrested at once. But after I got out and learned what was going on, I was extremely happy to learn that we Tiananmen Mothers could not be struck down. Detaining us for six days, six months, even six years would not keep the movement from continuing.

ET: After Jiang Yanyong's letter³ came out, it was confirmed by others that the kind of bullets used at first on June 4th were banned for use in war under international convention. But they were used against our own people, against innocent students making demands against corruption. Then you produced your June 4th video CD, and brought up the mass burials, which clearly indicate an intention to destroy evidence, a typical feature of a tyranny or dictatorship. The governments tried in international courts, such as those of Argentina and Cuba, were acting against their political opponents, while that can't be said about June 4th. The people's political demands were by no means unreasonable, and to use such methods against these people—I find myself asking, is this my country? Is this really the motherland I've known all my life?

Zhang: Is this a country with 5,000 years of culture?

We're only acting as individual mothers. You can understand the attitude of a mother never to forget.

ET: What do you think an ordinary, powerless Chinese can do to help you Mothers?

Zhang: I believe ordinary Chinese are already helping us. Some people provide us with information; they know someone died in a particular place or was injured in a particular place, and they tell us, and we go and find out the full details from them. Our goal is to verify what happened, because there are always rumors. My mother always says, "By the time news has been passed a third time, an immortal becomes a yellow dog." You say a certain person was killed, but is that actually true? And if so, was it the martial law troops who killed him? And did he die on June 4th? Was he an ordinary citizen or a hooligan? We have to verify what happened, and we hope ordinary people will be willing to help us.

Another thing people do is donate money. There are some families who may not be starving to death, but who are still experiencing great hardship. There's a woman in a village near Beijing whose husband was killed, and raising two children on her own is extremely difficult—they really just have four walls around them and nothing more. When Ding Zilin went to see this woman the first time, she wept to see someone living under such hardship. People with financial resources can donate as little as ten yuan, even 8 yuan, or as much as 10,000 yuan or 20,000 yuan. The only requirement is that there can't be any political conditions attached; it has to be purely humanitarian aid. There are also people in China who have donated money, and we hope more people will join in on donating money or providing us with information.

ET: How can people get in touch with you or donate money?

Zhang: They can get in touch with Ding Zilin, and a lot of people in China know my telephone number. But I don't want to make our contact information known for overseas telephone calls.

ET: We were just talking about the situation in China. What can Chinese overseas do?

Zhang: We hope you'll be concerned about us and support us, that will be very good.

ET: On behalf of our readers, I express deep gratitude to you for accepting this interview under your current circumstances.

Translated by Stacy Mosher

1. This article was originally posted on the EpochTimes Web site on April 5, 2004: (<http://www.dajiyuan.com/gb/4/4/5/n501038.htm>). This translation is slightly edited.
2. Article 50 of China's Criminal Procedure Law outlines the different forms of detention available to police. Article 61 authorizes the police to first detain a person who is a prime suspect or who is apprehended in the process of or immediately after committing a crime under specific circumstances.
3. See "SARS Hero's Call for Reassessment of June 4th" elsewhere in this issue.