

TIANANMEN REFLECTIONS

In 2006, HRIC conducted interviews with individuals involved in the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement. Released in an audio podcast series, these oral histories explore the role of democracy and independent movements as China moves into the future. This podcast series is also a new media contribution to amplifying and disseminating voices from inside China today. A reflection from Ding Zilin introduces the podcast excerpts.



DING ZILIN: RECOVERING TRUTH

Ding Zilin's son was killed during the June Fourth crackdown. She subsequently established the Tiananmen Mothers with other victims of the crackdown and family members of victims. For the past 19 years she has been working to aid victims and families, establish the facts regarding who was killed and injured, and call for accountability from the Chinese government. This is an excerpt from a statement she wrote in 2007.

I often think that there is a lot for us to do regarding the 1989 Tiananmen Square Movement and the “June Fourth” incident, and that the first thing we must do is recover the truth of what happened. I say “recover” because over the years [since 1989], the Communist authorities have carried out a policy of forced amnesia, which means that every soul-searing, gut-wrenching scene of that tragedy has been scoured and corroded by the pitiless passage of years, gradually weakened and obscured, such that by now all this has nearly disappeared. In recent years, I have become even more strongly aware that recovery of the truth about June Fourth has become a source of anxiety for our current government. Thinking back to the 1980s and 1990s, when the talk among both Chinese and foreigners turned to the important issues of China's direction and the arrangement of its future system, June Fourth still hovered in the background, unresolved. In those days people often said, “If we want to solve China's problems, we can't get around June Fourth.” There are few who still say that, and even fewer who still believe it. For a lot of people now, the Tiananmen Square Movement of 1989 and June

Fourth have greatly receded, becoming more and more insignificant. And for some young people, the mention of 1989, or June Fourth, is like a folk legend. There are a lot of reasons for this situation, but there is no denying the fact that in China, one can seldom find an accurate and credible historical record related to June Fourth and 1989.

On the 15th anniversary of June Fourth in 2004, in a book meant for our compatriots at home and overseas, the Tiananmen Mothers used the slogan, “Speak the truth, refuse to forget, seek justice, call upon conscience.”

During the National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) meetings in 2007, the Tiananmen Mothers called upon the NPC delegates and the members of the CPPCC in the hope that they would urge the government authorities to lift their censorship of June Fourth and make the truth about it public.

Our aim in using this slogan and presenting this

demand is the preservation of historical truth. For as we see it, “A system that depends on lies and deceit is absurd. . . . The most effective way to deal with such a system is to have more and more people step forward and ‘speak the truth.’ ‘Truth’ is a kind of force and ‘speaking the truth’ is the power of the powerless. Without truth, there is no historical memory, no justice, and no conscience.”¹

We earnestly hope that all Chinese people, wherever they may be—at home or abroad—can courageously break through and cast off the lies fabricated by the Communist Party, and live proudly in truth and reality. This will mean that all will receive just treatment and that everyone’s freedom and integrity will be respected equally—whether they are living or dead.

ORAL HISTORIES

CHANG JING

A fourth-year student in the Geophysics Department of Peking University during the 1989 Democracy Movement, Chang Jing served as a standing member of the Preparatory Committee of the Peking University Autonomous Students’ Union and then as its vice chairperson. After June Fourth, he organized an inquiry at all Beijing-area hospitals into the number of fatalities resulting from the crackdown. He is currently living in the United States.

ON THE SURVEY OF BEIJING HOSPITALS SHORTLY AFTER JUNE FOURTH

At that time, the students were all extremely indignant. When our Peking University Preparatory Committee met, one student proposed that we should record [the facts of] this historic event, specifically the exact number of those who had died. People were estimating and guessing at the number and all sorts of statistics [were being given], but none of the data was firsthand.

On June 5 or 6, we sent students out. Most of the students were those who were affiliated with the Red Cross. At that time on campus, there were many Red Cross liaisons and they had contact with all the large hospitals.

I remember very, very clearly that there was a classmate of mine, a student who had graduated from our geophysics department. When he came back, he completely broke down. When he saw me, he started crying uncontrollably, saying that he had never seen anything so terrible. They had gone to Fuxingmen

Hospital, and just at that one hospital, there were over 240 who had died. They said that the morgue was already overflowing and couldn’t accommodate so many dead. Many of the bodies were tossed into the corridors of the hospital. I clearly remember this incident.

I took a look at overall numbers from the survey.... Fuxingmen had the most, over 200 corpses. Some others had over 50. Added together, there were maybe over 1,000. My memories of these numbers are not terribly accurate. At the time, I myself was in an extreme state of shock. But my classmate, and his reaction when he came back to report—that is something that I’ll probably never forget as long as I live.

At the time, we had fairly good connections with the Peking University Campus Clinic and the university administration. The drivers and doctors who worked at the Peking University Campus Clinic risked their lives on the evening of June 4 by venturing into areas where the situation was tense and trying to help the students there. I was directly involved in the situation on the ground, so I am more familiar with those

details. I'm not sure if students used the university's buses when conducting the investigation, but what I do know is that at the time, there were many Beijing residents, ones with Jeeps and other types of motorized vehicles, who offered to let us use their vehicles. I remember Beijing citizens offering us their vehicles on the morning of June 4.

ON THE NUMBER OF CASUALTIES

On June 5, prior to sending out the survey teams, we received word that the Red Cross was calling. I took these few calls myself, and at the time, they reported over 1,000 [had died]. Then later—it must have been on June 6—another phone call came, again report-

edly from the Red Cross. The statistic they gave that time was a little different, and they felt it was a more comprehensive number. What they said then was this: over 3,000 fatalities and what seemed like several tens of thousands wounded—though I'm not sure if there were actually that many wounded since my memory is no longer clear on this.

I think it must have been the Beijing [City] Red Cross [that contacted us], because the Red Cross liaisons who were on campus must have belonged to the Beijing [City] Red Cross. At the time, every single university seemed to have someone who was in touch with the Red Cross. Students would serve as a liaison with them, and would collaborate on educational and welfare work.



MA SHAOFANG

In 1989, Ma Shaofang was 25 and a student at the Beijing Film Academy. He was one of the founders of the Beijing Independent Students' Union, and a member of its standing committee. Ma was one of the organizers of the hunger strike, and he remained in Tiananmen Square until the early morning hours of June Fourth. On June 12, a nationwide warrant was issued for his arrest; he gave himself up on the following day. In October 1990, Ma was sentenced to three years in prison on charges of "counterrevolutionary incitement." Following

his release from prison in June 1992, he has continued to advocate for civic consciousness in China.

ON LEAVING TIANANMEN SQUARE ON JUNE FOURTH

At nine or ten o'clock on the night of June 3, I was at the Democracy University in Tiananmen Square, of all places. Wu'er Kaixi² was supposed to be speaking. When they couldn't find him, they got me to speak. After I finished speaking, we left for the Beijing Hotel.³ There were 60,000 people at the National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall [in Taiwan] singing "Children of the Dragon"⁴ in support of the Democracy Movement. When I came out from the hotel, I saw the first tank set on fire.

When I went to report this incident, there were two loudspeakers on [Tiananmen] Square: one was at the monument [to the People's Heroes],⁵ and the other

was the one Feng Congde⁶ had left behind—the hunger strikers' loudspeaker. I had just finished speaking on the telephone with someone from Taiwan. That night, those who were on location with us were Lin Yaoqiang and Li Lanju, in addition to a Hong Kong reporter who wanted to take photos. Three of us, Liang Er, Zhao Hui, and I, lined up on the first step of the monument, facing north. . . .

The first bullet [I heard] . . . landed on the square, right in our midst, did you know that? And they were saying they were rubber bullets, at that time . . . they were already saying we had to get to the monument, but the Film Academy contingent wouldn't leave immediately. The Film Academy's banner was set up right under the national flag [halfway across the square]. We heard a bullet land with a thud. Somebody said it was a rubber

bullet, and picked it up to examine it, exclaiming: “Wow. It’s real!” At that moment, a whole bunch of people took off running. I just sat there; I was really feeling like I was ready to die like a hero. I said: “What are you running for? It’s just a bullet. Life and death are up to fate.” And then I said, “All the Film Academy marshals have a duty to protect their female classmates. I’m telling you to get right over to the monument. Once the command post over there announces a withdrawal, you leave with them.” It was already the middle of the night then, around one o’clock in the morning on June Fourth.

When the Film Academy contingent was getting ready to leave and the bullet had landed, a wounded person was carried through the square. That was the first time I saw blood that night. And then I, along with others, made announcements. I was one of the last to speak. When my speech was done, I went up to the front with Liang Er. At the end [of the speeches], I heard Feng Congde say: “Retreat or stay?” Then he said, “‘Retreat’ was louder, let’s retreat!” That megaphone was the megaphone on the square; they had already started to open fire. Then Feng Congde shouted, “Retreat or stay?”

“Retreat!”

Feng said, “It sounds like the two responses are almost equally as loud. But still, the sound of ‘retreat’ is just a bit louder. We now announce what time we’ll retreat.” After that, no one spoke again [through the megaphone].

We milled around for a bit, and then the lights [in the square] started flashing on and off. It must have been five o’clock when the withdrawal started. When it began, I was in the first rank, on the periphery. I stood up, and as we retreated, the inner ranks fell into total chaos. People in the middle started singing the national anthem in loud voices, and shouting, “Sit down! Sit down! Time for us to show what we’re made of!”⁷⁷ Then we joined them in shouting, “Sit down! Sit down! Time for us to show what we’re made of!”

The soldiers retreated and we sat back down. Then those on the inside of the crowd gathered around their banners and began to withdraw. When everyone had just about left, when there were only about ten

rows left, my glasses somehow fell off. We were at the north front at that time; we had all joined hands, and the whole group began moving toward the southeast. A breach opened at the monument, with the monument dividing the one long file of people into two sections. When we had withdrawn to the east side, our classmates behind pushed us over. There was a little pine tree on the square. We fell into that pine tree, one row—ten of us—fell over. I was holding my head in my hands. My glasses were on a small chain. When I got up, both the lenses were gone from my glasses and my shoes were gone too.

LOOKING BACK ON JUNE FOURTH AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE FUTURE

First, it shows all future Chinese what the Communist Party and the government are [made of]. Second, all Chinese intellectuals—those who experienced China’s policy of reform and openness, and the purging of the so-called anti-bourgeois liberalization—now understand that an intellectual is something other people call you, not something independent. As a result of this [realization], there are some Chinese intellectuals who are pursuing their independence. No other democracy movement before 1989 achieved this. Third, what sort of method of struggle is necessary to move Chinese totalitarian politics toward . . . at least toward the mainstream of world civilization? [As a result of June Fourth], [p]eople say it’s possible to enter the mainstream of world civilization, and this is something people never thought before.

I don’t really agree with people who say that 1989 is one heap of questions after another. I’ve met with a lot of people in China and spoken with them about this event. 1989 wasn’t really a political movement. . . . I prefer to see it as a movement for civil rights. Since 1949, China has not had civil rights. In 1989, really and truly, Chinese people suddenly became very aware. The only difference [between this and a civil rights movement] was that those two words—civil rights—were never explicitly mentioned.

Another question is that of the movement’s general plan and methods. I feel that we are all products of a Communist Party education. If [someone] says we were wrong, then that is truly because we’ve been

fooled for too long—that could no longer happen today. Of course I'm being a bit too optimistic here. Could it really not happen?

The 1989 Democracy Movement actually hastened the Communist Party's recognition of itself as a totalitarian government. In the end, 1989 was a litmus test. Even though the blood of so many lives was spilled, because this litmus paper was blood-soaked, weighed down with those lives, it brought home a truth, both to rulers and to those who were ruled. The truth was that there needed to be an

accurate picture, or an accurate picture of government control. As for whether they see it this way, that's a different matter. But new exhortations to struggle to the end for communism, new exhortations to wild applause for communist-ruled countries—I'll bet that all the slogans and applause are insincere and forced. This, too, is probably one of the contributions of 1989.

I feel that, in 5,000 years of Chinese history, the 1989 Democracy Movement was the first time the people woke up.



HAN DONGFANG⁸

In 1989, Han Dongfang convened the Beijing Autonomous Workers Federation, an independent labor organization. After June Fourth, Han was imprisoned for 22 months. He is founder and director of *China Labour Bulletin* and is currently living in Hong Kong.

THOUGHTS ON THE ROLE OF LABOR UNIONS

At that time, the thing I felt most was that I didn't know how to go about organizing the workers. I was a worker too, a railway worker, but I didn't know what a labor union was, what the relationship should be between a labor union and the workers, or between a labor union and politics or the regime, and what people a labor union should communicate with. Now, after years of working in the international labor movement, including visiting and communicating with other groups, considering the rights and benefits of workers and providing legal assistance to workers in individual cases, I know what's involved. The labor union is actually a special interest group for workers that has no direct relationship with the regime. Its main target is the boss, the employer, and its daily concerns are pay, welfare, working hours, and working conditions.

But even though the labor union's direct counterpart is not the government, this doesn't mean

unions don't deal with the government. A labor union needs the government to serve as a referee or intermediary between the boss and the union.

Another issue is official legislation. A government is never completely neutral, and always takes its own interests into account, but a labor union can use its lobbying capacity to influence legislation and enforcement by the government to make it more neutral and even favor the workers. This is a feature of special interest groups, and labor unions are no exception.

[L]abor unions should be able to play an important role in resolving current social crises and avoiding the eruption of future social crises, because in principle labor unions resolve conflicts through peaceful organization and rational negotiation rather than by striking down or annihilating the opposition.

Nowadays you have taxi drivers going on strike, and in Heze, Shandong Province, in February, thousands of textile factory workers went on strike for more

than a week without anyone being arrested. They were fighting for something very simple, a raise in pay, and they got it. These situations show us that society is advancing, and that social and economic relations are changing, and behind the scenes government policy is changing as well. That's why we shouldn't use the terrible events of years ago to anticipate what's going to happen today or in the future or allow them to intimidate us into forfeiting our rights. By defending their rights through association, negotiation, and litigation if necessary, workers actually provide a very good model for solving China's future crises. That is to say, citizens defend their own rights through awareness, concrete intervention, peaceful negotiation, and legal channels rather than waiting until the last minute, when they have borne too much too long and society explodes.

HOW TO MOVE BEYOND JUNE FOURTH

That's why my preference is not for radical action, but rather for a gradual process in which citizens build up their own society, and establishment of the

legal system is propelled by civil society. But this is just my hope. Today when I look at the declining trends and rapid escalation of social problems in China, especially at the corruption of officials and of the elite, and the increasing disregard for the common people, I believe that another June Fourth scenario in China is likely; in reality, it could very well happen again. However, if it does happen, the workers and rural residents will not be as complacent as they were in 1989, when they acted solely in support of the students. What will it look like if another June Fourth scenario arises? Which social class will be the catalyst? Will it be the rural residents who have lost their land, or the hundreds of millions of migrants who leave their homes to work in the cities and are unable to obtain any security? Who will it be? Regardless of which social class might be the catalyst, the possibility of another June Fourth still exists. This realization should give us even more of an impetus, given our available resources and capabilities, to promote civil and social consciousness, and to find a way to resolve these feelings of anger and resentment through rule of law.



MENG LANG

In 1989, Meng Lang was working at Shenzhen University as the editor for the university press. Today, he is a poet and an author in the United States and serves on the board of the Independent Chinese PEN Center.

ON MENG LANG'S EXPERIENCES IN 1989 FROM THE CITY OF SHENZHEN

In 1989, I was at Shenzhen University in Shenzhen, which is separated from Hong Kong by a mere strip of water. I started work there in 1986 at the university press. During the 1989 student strike, I was in the editorial department of the university directing the production of the *Shenzhen University Press Correspondence*, the official publication of the school.

So in April [1989], the student movement erupted during this process, and as the editor of this publication, I was present during the whole event.

Shenzhen is a city very different from most other places in mainland China; our close proximity to Hong Kong granted us certain freedoms. For one thing, we were able to watch Hong Kong television, and thus were able to keep up-to-date with the situation in Beijing. We were able to see the most current

Photo credits: AP Photo/ Josh Reynolds.

information because members of the Hong Kong media were on-site in Beijing. This means that we knew everything that happened, from the first student strike to the tragedy of June Fourth. As a teacher, I was naturally very concerned.

Since the situation in Shenzhen is unique from that of other areas of mainland China, I'm reflecting on this history from a rather unusual perspective; I think it would be difficult for other people to really understand what it was like.

The university established a Student Emergency Situation Committee, and the student strike originated from the administrators of the school—from the university president and the Party Committee Secretary Luo Chenqi. The fact that the university president and Party officials openly supported the school's joining in the movement of the Beijing universities may have been an exception to the rule among university strikes throughout China. All the way up until June Fourth, from the hunger strike to the announcement of martial law on May 19,⁹ the school continued to encourage our participation.

I participated in several demonstrations, including the silent protest in front of the Shenzhen capitol building. After June Fourth and during the so-called inspections, the Shenzhen police department interrogated us about our roles during these events. That was because we were publishing a "Quick News" paper, which reported on events at Shenzhen University, as well as in the cities of Shenzhen and Beijing. I was an editor of the publication, so the participants of the student strike asked me to look over their drafts. I also joined and offered guidance at several of their editorial meetings.

June Fourth is a tragedy of our people—that the government would use the military to crush their own students and citizens. In retrospect, the Communist Party caused a very unfortunate tragedy. We should reflect on this tragedy because, even though we speak of the ordinary and normal, the political system that allowed something like this to happen is still in power. The environment in China today is very discouraging regarding the development of democracy. The government has without a doubt failed to uphold its promise to rule by law. In some cases, the government has become increasingly fierce

in suppressing the people's ability to freely express their opinions on politics and society.

ON MENG LANG'S LIFE AFTER JUNE FOURTH AND LEAVING CHINA

I continued living in China for six more years [after June Fourth]. I am primarily a writer, so in my main area of work, I was not involved in anything political. Though I suppose in a way I *am* similar to those involved in political activities, because I was expressing my freedom through my work—literature, just like politics, is a way of expressing freedom.

Even without June Fourth, we—independent writers—would still have been on the police watch-list. Beginning in 1984 or 1985, we were under the observation of the Shanghai police department. After June Fourth, the political atmosphere was uncertain. Then in the spring of 1991, underground poets and independent critics of mainland China, about 30 or so people from across the country, published a magazine called *Modern Chinese Poetry*. The publication of this underground magazine drew the attention of officials. In the spring of the following year, the Shanghai police department's Political Security Subdivision put us under what can be called a "secret arrest." In April of 1992, a colleague—a notable poet from Shanghai named Muo Muo—and I were secretly arrested and held in the police department's hospital for 36 days for our participation in the editing of underground publications.

Soon after June Fourth, donations came from overseas and from among students and citizens to help people like Zhou Duo¹⁰ and Liu Xiaopei. Although they had already been released, they had both lost their jobs. In another case, Wang Dan was in prison and his family was going through a difficult time. Overseas Chinese people, students studying abroad, and donations from among people in China helped these three, including Wang Dan's family. There was one donation that I personally helped Zhou Duo obtain. I remember, at that time Zhou Duo was in Baiyang Marsh (which is now a vacation resort), pondering how to restart his life. This one incident gave the Shanghai police the excuse to monitor us. Of course, I believed that what we did was simply an act