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# EVILS UNDER THE RED CROSS

**By Guan Zhonghe & Yan Jiawei**

*The red cross is a universal symbol of compassion, mercy and humanity. Yet the circumstances of Jiang Xin's death under the banner of this hallmark emblem demonstrate the true cruelty and indifference that characterized Mao's "revolutionary humanitarianism."*

"You must bow your head to the people to admit your guilt before we can practice revolutionary humanitarianism on you."

The world knows that the symbol of the Red Cross<sup>1</sup> stands for the sanctity of charity and the spirit of human fraternity—caring for and helping the sick and wounded, regardless of race, class, wealth, or faith, like the life-giving spring breeze and rain. Yet in China, Mao Zedong's political ideology distorted these sacred, universal values beyond recognition, especially during the class struggle of the 1960s and 1970s, when false reasoning and fallacies spread through the country like a pestilence. Thus it happened that a political murder case eventually played out under the banner of the Red Cross.

The main player in this tragedy, Jiang Xin, was a technician at the Sichuan Nanchong District Geophysics Research Institute in the 1950s. The 1957 Anti-Rightist Movement devastated his work unit because the institute secretary and chief, both of whom came from army backgrounds, were what could be termed "scientifically illiterate." Having no understanding of geophysics, they created havoc in the institute with their ill-informed decisions. For instance, the secretary refused Jiang Xin's application to purchase several imported instruments his laboratory needed for research purposes: "Buying foreigners' things brings disgrace on our state system. We defeated the American imperialists and the Kuomintang with millet and rifles. What do we need foreign machines for?" These nonsensical words brought research and development to a halt. Jiang Xin, who had become a scientific expert, referred to this incident in

1957 to help the Party rectify work styles, with the hope that leadership would eliminate bureaucracy. Party leadership feigned praise at the time for this "well-raised point." However, as soon as Mao Zedong issued the "Anti-Rightist" order, Jiang Xin was labeled an ultra-Rightist, discharged from public employment and assigned to Reeducation-Through-Labor (RTL).

Jiang Xin was assigned to an RTL team codenamed "P.O. Box 4.15," where he was essentially nothing more than a convict. However, Jiang Xin considered himself innocent of any crime and nothing could change his mind, not even the inhuman punishment of forced labor or the brainwashing of "political education." On the many occasions when he faced the RTL cadres, he declared that he was not an anti-Party Rightist, that he had not committed any crime, and that the Rightist label had been forced upon him. For this reason, whether he was at a mass rally or small struggle session, he consistently refused to admit his "guilt."

Jiang Xin was a very modest, friendly, and warmhearted person. He was of slight build, with thick-lensed glasses. He wore a shabby woolen work jacket, which was so tattered and covered in patches of every size and color that his fellow inmates called it the "coat of many flags." During the Cultural Revolution of 1967, Jiang Xin and his fellow inmates were assigned to work construction on the Neikun railway, which ran from Yibing in southern Sichuan through Neijiang to Kunming. When they were constructing the Bao'ershan tunnel (near Jinshawan on the Yibing-Neijiang section), an RTL cadre member named Yue, who was particularly malicious, made it a rule that every person must complete five cubic meters of crushed stone per day. If they failed, they first had to stand in front of the Mao statue after dinner and apologize, then work overtime on the night shift until they finished. Only then were they allowed to go to sleep. Heavy construction work like this was extremely strenuous, especially for a slight, frail scholar



A handout photo shows a woman from Sichuan province, carrying a bag of rice and a blanket which she received from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), August 2, 2007. Photo credits: REUTERS/Gu Qinghui/IFRC.

like Jiang Xin. On the day before his death, Jiang Xin could not finish his task and was working the night shift along with fellow inmate Guan Zhonghe (one of the authors) and others. They had worked for more than two hours and were completely exhausted when Jiang Xin suddenly felt a terrible pain in his right abdomen and fell to the ground, crying, “Aiya! The pain is killing me!” Guan Zhonghe and two other members of the RTL team carried him to the medical room immedi-

ately. The medical worker, Lin Jingui, gave him an injection to stop the pain, but it had absolutely no effect. Quickly becoming flustered, the medical worker, who was also an RTL inmate, went straight to his team leader to report. The team leader was absorbed in a game of chess with his friend and had to tear himself away to listen. “I’m not a doctor,” he said impatiently. “I can’t do anything. Give him a couple more painkillers and see how he is then.” The medical worker knew that painkillers could relieve skeletomuscular pain (in the back or legs, for example), but would be ineffective on the smooth gastrointestinal muscles. Yet he did not dare disobey the team leader’s words, which were tantamount to law. After another half hour of restlessly tossing and turning in pain, Jiang Xin was drenched in sweat. The medical worker had no choice but to go back to the team leader. Fortunately by now the team leader had finished his chess game. After a moment’s thought, he said reluctantly, “If he really isn’t okay, you’d better take him to the detachment hospital!” As the health worker turned away, he heard the team leader comment, “These stinking intellectuals make such a huge fuss over a little bit of illness.”

Their workplace at Jinshawan was tens of kilometers away from the detachment hospital in Shahe Town. There was not even a public bus at the time, let alone an ambulance. Guan Zhonghe set out with two other prisoners, Wu Xun and Zhong Zehua, pulling Jiang Xin on a handcart. The team leader gave each of them a piece

of steamed corn bread as “compensation.” Heedless of their own fatigue after a hard day, they hastened towards Shahe, thinking of nothing but saving their friend. They pulled the cart for the entire night, finally arriving at the Shahe detachment hospital just before daylight. The detachment hospital had ground to a standstill during the Cultural Revolution, and all the experienced doctors had been subjected one by one to criticism, denouncement, and investigation. The Red Guard “doctors” had no idea what was wrong. One of them even suggested, “The skin on the abdomen is not red or swollen. Is it because he’s eaten too much?” Guan Zhonghe and the others pleaded as hard as they could, and eventually the Red Guards showed some “mercy” and said, “Go and get that old guy to come and have a look.” The “old guy” arrived shortly—an elderly doctor with a northern accent who the revolutionaries called “Old Man Che.” The old doctor asked about the symptoms, palpated the lower right abdomen and then pressed down with his hand, causing the patient to scream in pain. When the old doctor quickly lifted his hand away, the patient cried out in pain again. The old doctor gave his diagnosis immediately: “Tetany of the abdominal muscles, tenderness indicated in the lower right abdomen, obvious rebounding pain. Classic symptoms of acute appendicitis.”

The revolutionaries, who did not understand what he was saying, reprimanded him impatiently: “Instead of coming out with those counterrevolutionary capitalist class theories, just tell us what to do.” The old doctor said, “Admit him to hospital immediately and prepare him for surgery—we must act fast.”

Guan Zhonghe urged the old doctor to write out a hospital admission card. Assuming that Jiang Xin would now be saved, they all breathed a sigh of relief; but the hospital was under the control of a group of Red Guards, and patients had to obtain approval for admission from a revolutionary nicknamed, “One-Knife Wang.” This individual, Wang Weidong, was a poor-performing student of Yibing Medical School who had seized power during the Cultural Revolution. Lacking medical skill, moral character, and any sense of responsibility, he had committed serious mistakes during a number of operations, leaving patients dead or injured. Because there was so much confusion at the time, no

one had investigated. One-Knife Wang looked at Jiang Xin’s admission card and said affectedly, “The highest authorities instruct: practice revolutionary humanitarianism by healing the wounded and rescuing the dying. You are an anti-Party, anti-people Rightist. You must bow your head to the people to admit your guilt before we can practice revolutionary humanitarianism on you.” With these words, he flung the admission card at Guan Zhonghe and said, “Ask him to submit a written request for hospital treatment as an anti-Party, anti-people Rightist element, etc., and personally sign his name.” With incredible willpower, Jiang Xin, who was in so much pain he could hardly draw breath, managed to raise himself up on the stretcher and assert with glaring eyes, “I am not a Rightist. They’ve forced this title on me!”

Perhaps because this was so unexpected, One-Knife Wang was dumbstruck for a moment. He quickly recovered, however, and said with a callous grin, “The Great Leader Chairman Mao teaches us that imperialism and reactionaries are all paper tigers. If you will not bow your head today to admit your guilt as a Rightist element, we will not give you any treatment. I think you will hang on for quite a long time.” With these words, he began to leave and reminded the two young men present, “To be admitted to the hospital he must sign his own name, admitting he is a Rightist. Accompanying persons’ signatures are invalid.” At this, Jiang Xin retorted, “I’d rather die than accept the Rightist label this guy is forcing on me.” Wang, who had been at the point of leaving, turned around and said enigmatically, “Let me have a look today. Is it possible that there are any Sister Jiangs and Xu Yunfengs<sup>2</sup> among the anti-revolutionary class enemies?” Saying this, he swaggered off with a cigarette dangling from his mouth.

In this state of impasse, time passed slowly. Feeling as if they were being stabbed in the heart and powerless to resolve the situation, his fellow inmates kept watch over Jiang Xin, whose brow was beaded with sweat from the pain. Several times, Guan Zhonghe whispered in Jiang Xin’s ear, “Why don’t you sign? We’ll go and plead on your behalf, okay?” Jiang Xin answered feebly, “Thank you, but I’d rather die than accept this Rightist label . . . !” Not only was he in great pain with acute appendicitis, but he also had not eaten in a long time nor received any

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treatment, like fluid infusions or painkillers. This terrible suffering, exacerbated by the poor health he suffered because of habitual, long-term hardship and undernourishment, caused him to lose consciousness briefly just after 9 a.m. Guan Zhonghe and the others appealed three times to the hospital villains on his behalf, pleading that they would resolve the matter of the signature after he was admitted to the hospital. But these villains of the revolution, who regarded people as worthless and cared nothing for the life of a Rightist, responded shamelessly: “The irresolvable aspirations of the capitalist-class Rightists extinguish the power and prestige of proletarian revolutionaries like us. Don’t mention the death of one Rightist. If ten Rightists die, that’s five pairs of them gone. And one less Rightist means one ration of grain saved.” Although they were seething with rage at these inhuman words, Guan Zhonghe and the others had no way out of the situation and could only stare at the cruel and malicious people blocking the way. At around 10 a.m., Jiang Xin briefly emerged from his state of shock. Tugging on Guan Zhonghe’s hand, he painstakingly kept saying, “If I die . . . I’ll be free . . . Brother, you can get out alive. I just ask one thing: be sure to give that English dictionary I have to my wife.”

At that moment, a scene from the past came to Guan Zhonghe: Jiang Xin always had a shabby little book with him, a specialized English dictionary he used for his work, the cover of which was filled with tiny writing in English. In the midst of the Cultural Revolution, an uneducated team leader, also named Wang, had called it a “feudalist, capitalist and revisionist book.” He was about to confiscate it when Jiang Xin lost his temper and said angrily, “This is an English edition of Chairman Mao’s quotes.” At this, team leader Wang, who could barely recognize more than a handful of Chinese characters, became frightened, respectfully put the book down at once and left without saying a word. Why did Jiang treasure this book so much? He had told his friend Guan Zhonghe privately that he had been making English notes on the cover about important things that had happened while he was on the RTL team. In his mind, Guan Zhonghe replayed the scene of Jiang Xin writing; once Jiang was cured and had his health back, they would talk

about this again. But at that moment, gritting his teeth, Jiang Xin muttered, “Don’t . . . don’t say anything. Brother, I . . . it’s better to die in glory . . . than to live in dishonor.” With these words, he suddenly rolled himself off the stretcher and onto the floor. Beating the floor with both hands, he struck his head against a stone pillar. His head began to pour with blood, and, taking his last breath, he died. At that moment, the symbolism of the big red cross on the hospital wall changed; for Jiang Xin’s friends, it became the red “X” that appears on the announcement of a death sentence.

Jiang Xin’s death brings shame on China’s use of this international symbol of compassion, and renders utterly meaningless the “revolutionary humanitarianism” of which those revolutionaries spoke.

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Translated by Annie Knibb

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## Notes

1. The use of the distinctive emblem of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement—a red cross on a white background—does not necessarily mean that the entity using the emblem is officially associated with any organization under the Movement. Rather, the symbol of the Red Cross may be used as a protective device by medical services associated either with the armed forces or (with permission, in times of armed conflict) civilian groups. See “Emblems of Humanity,” International Committee of the Red Cross, 2007, [http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/p0876/\\$File/ICRC\\_002\\_0876.PDF!Open](http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/p0876/$File/ICRC_002_0876.PDF!Open).
2. Two fictional heroes of the novel *Hongyan* [Red Crag] (Lou Guangbin and Yang Yiyan, 1961), who were persecuted by the Kuomintang and died as martyrs in prison.