

IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE “HOOLIGANS” OF JUNE 4TH

BY PU ZHIQIANG

While unarmed students and members of the public imprisoned or killed during the crack-down in June 1989 are hailed as victims and martyrs of the democratic cause, greater ambivalence attaches to those convicted of violent or criminal acts. Pu Zhiqiang questions this dichotomy.

In the twinkling of an eye China has entered its 14th “sensitive period” since 1989. In accordance with the traditional recognition given in Chinese culture to fifth and tenth anniversaries, everyone from the top ranks of government to the most ordinary citizens is preparing for the approaching season of national remembrance. But as we experience the pain of these reawakened memories, have we given due consideration to the “hooligan” category that has been “legally” executed, imprisoned, exiled and tortured? Has it ever occurred to us to ask, “What kind of people are you? What is your family situation? What have you done since being released from prison?”

Most of you “hooligans” were probably ordinary people laboring diligently and conscientiously at your work units, responsible fathers and dutiful sons and loving brothers. It is likely that 15 years ago you simply felt a restless anger, sympathy and a sense of right and wrong. You were not wicked by nature, and had never been considered bad people. If this “political storm” had never happened, it is quite possible that today you would be like the rest of us, spending your days with no other thought than making a living.

Thinking back to the time when we were on our protest marches, I recall that it was you on your bicycles who blocked the soldiers and gave us a chance to escape; when we were exhausted, it was you who used carts to carry off students who couldn’t walk another step; when we were hungry, it was you who brought us soda, congee and bread with cries of, “Long live the students!”; when we were staging our hunger strikes, it was you who set up tents to shield us from the sun and rain, and who gave us encouraging words; when the troops moved in on the city, it was you who stood in front of the military vehicles and earnestly remonstrated with the ignorant soldiers; after the conflict started, it was you who in the streets and

lanes wielded crude weapons such as clubs and stones to face the tanks and hail of bullets. It never occurred to you that the People’s Army would really open fire on the people; you probably thought of nothing but that we were still at the Square. You treated us as your own brothers and sisters back then, but over the past 15 years we have forgotten you, we have shamefully forgotten you.

You did not become victims by dying in the streets, but rather died on the execution field or under your harsh imprisonment. The grand sum of your crimes was probably nothing more than in the heat of the moment hurling a few rocks, torching a military vehicle, stealing or obstructing weapons, or maybe like Xiao Bin,¹ being sentenced to ten years in prison for a few casual remarks. We know very well that in that chaotic scene, your actions were probably nothing more than a normal response to the circumstances and should not be considered a crime. In comparison with a Palestinian youth wreaking violence in the streets of Gaza, you did nothing, but your fate was similar.

People like you do not have a philosopher’s capacity for recollection, or a writer’s skill of expression. Your families have been able to do nothing in the past 15 years but bury the disgrace and pain in their hearts, or even force themselves to forget you. But who can claim that you were not born and raised as other humans, and that you don’t have the same right to proclaim your innocence to the world!

You should never have been forgotten.

I see how over the past 15 years you have been unjustly forgotten, and how those who have forgotten you continue to embrace those of us who accepted your help.

We have never considered that every soul who met a wrongful death through “lawful” execution left a weeping mother or wife; that every imprisoned “hooligan” has a young wife and child counting the days until his release. In comparison with those who died in the streets, you have met with an even more unfortunate fate, bearing the ignominious title of “hooligan.”



Bystanders rush to save wounded protesters. Photo: AP Wide World Photos

In the past 15 years the “hooligans” and their families have not received a dollar of humanitarian aide, have not been honored in any memorial service, have not even been remembered for a fleeting moment by the rest of us! Both sides of the controversy treat you as if you never existed. Perhaps in other people’s eyes you are nothing more than ordinary criminals, forever labeled as the dregs of society, and even if you manage to survive until release from prison, you are regarded as “unreformed ex-cons from the *laogai*.” Heavens above, why has fate been so unfair to you?

At the festival of Qing Ming, people are preoccupied with sadness as they make their way to the cemeteries to burn papers in cherished memory of their ancestors. Shouldn’t we at this time think of the widows of the “hooligans” who died 15 years ago? Where can they scatter the cup of earth for their dead, where can they cast the hell money they clutch? Once again before my eyes I see you on the road 15 years ago, waving banners emblazoned with your heartfelt wishes for us, “Return home safely!”; I see you pulling wagons and asking if we’d like a lift to rest for a while before continuing on; I see you bringing the fruits of a day’s toil to distribute at the Square; I see you riding your motorcycles over to tell us what’s happening on the street; I see you in court, the despair in your eyes as you meet your fate unaided; I see your life ended like a puff of smoke dispersed by the wind until it disappears. And I see how over the past 15 years you have been unjustly forgotten, and how those multitudes who have for-

gotten you continue to embrace those of us who accepted your help.

After 15 years I have finally begun to understand that a healthy society should not harbor vengeance, and that what is needed is social reconciliation and political tolerance. If we do not soothe your wounds, social reconciliation is impossible; if the trouble in your hearts is not poured out, we can never put our consciences at rest. Let all wronged souls obtain redress; let all who should not be forgotten be bathed in the light of remembrance; let us all, by remembering you, invite you to continue to remind us—we must never forget.

Written at Qing Ming, April 3, 2004

Translated by Stacy Mosher

1. Xiao Bin, a 42-year-old laid-off worker, was imprisoned for counter-revolutionary incitement after being interviewed by ABC News. Xiao Bin was turned in by members of the public after the Chinese government intercepted ABC’s satellite relay and broadcast Xiao Bin’s words on national television.