
CHINA: A COUNTRY WITHOUT FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS

By Tie Liu

A veteran activist's reflections on why there are no human rights in China, based on his own experiences.

As I'm writing this, there are three or four unidentified men sitting at the gatehouse of my building complex, no more than three hundred meters from my home. They are in plainclothes, claiming to be authorities from the Beijing Tongzhou Yongshun District. It's been five days since they put me under 24-hour surveillance. This is why I say that there are no fundamental human rights in China.

At the age of 74, I already have one foot in the grave. It's puzzling why the Communist regime finds it necessary to spend so much energy monitoring an old man like me. Do they expect me to wave a flag and join protests? Or that I will create trouble and start a revolt? Or do they think that I will bomb Tiananmen Square?

Now that I'm retired, I go to bed at 10 p.m. everyday and wake up at 6 a.m., to water the plants and feed my dog and birds. Then I go with my wife to do some morning exercises at the local club, and I read and write for the rest of the day. My life has always been like this. Of course, I write essays that speak the truth about the historical disasters that this country and our people have experienced. I also wrote what I witnessed as an "extreme Rightist" (according to Mao Zedong thirty years ago), and then spent 23 years in prison. It is without doubt that these articles are not flowers that beautify the country or songs praising socialism. Instead, my essays are filled with tears, scars, and endless suffering. Naturally, they upset the Communist authorities. What can I do? I refuse to fabricate history or make things up! I say what I see, and take life the way it is. As you can tell, I will never learn how to lie; I will never "evolve." No wonder I'm stuck being a Rightist.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the Anti-Rightist Movement, a natural point for me to stand up and make my voice heard. I signed a petition aimed at the Central Committee of the Communist Party, with 61 other "Rightists." I also published numerous articles online that strongly criticize Mao's wrongs, and attended an international conference on the Anti-Rightist Movement in the United States. I don't know why, but I became a major target of government surveillance. Beginning April 9, 2007, three cars followed me everywhere I went for three days; my home phone and cell phone are both bugged. To use their words of warning: "We are watching your every move." My whole family was threatened and harassed. They were worried that I had violated some important national law.

Fortunately, I'm still mentally stable, and I can still smile. One month ago, for the future of this country and for the people, I published three now notorious articles online: "Advice for the 17th Party Congress: The Communist Party and the Liberation Army Should Be Renamed"; "Criticizing Mao Must Be on the 17th Party Congress Agenda"; and "If Mao Zedong is Not Condemned, There Can Be No Freedom and Democracy in China." I don't know what taboo these articles violated, or whose ancestors' graves they dug up, but they did cause so much trouble.

On October 3, I came back from vacation with my wife, relaxed and in a good mood. At ten o'clock on October 6, three men, claiming to be from Tongzhou Political and Legislative Affairs Committee, broke into my house without showing identification or a warrant. They warned me that "on behalf of the committee" I need to get their approval whenever I leave the house, or I will have to suffer the consequences. They also threatened me and asked what organizations I am a member of,

what meetings I organize, and what “overseas hostile forces” I am involved with. I tried to argue that they have to provide evidence for such accusations. When they asked if I had any demands, I told them: 1) I hope the Communist Party will carefully examine historical lessons and learn from them, and widen freedom of speech; 2) declare the 1957 Anti-Rightist Movement a mistaken political movement and apologize to its victims; 3) pay victims their salaries retroactively from 1958 to 1980, and compensate for emotional loss; and 4) openly expose and condemn Mao Zedong’s guilt in persecuting the people.

Although the intruders were utterly unreasonable, in consideration of the bigger picture ahead of the 17th Party Congress and the harmonious society President Hu is trying to build, I proposed that I would only go as far as the local club for exercises with my wife, and that I would not attempt to go to Tiananmen Square or other controversial places. I also agreed not visit my friends. The intruders, however, did not understand my compromise and sacrifice. They sent people to watch me from the gatehouse all day long, beginning on October 7. Whenever I leave the house, they stop the car and ask me where I am going and when I’ll return, refusing to let me go until they get approval. Yesterday afternoon at two o’clock, when I was out getting a newspaper, two plainclothes men stopped me and asked, “Are you Tie Liu? Where are you heading?” I asked, “Who are you with?” They answered, “The Yongshun County govern-

ment.” Then I asked, “Do you have an ID?” “No” they said. I told them: “If you don’t have proof of identification, what right do you have to stop me? I am a citizen, what law did I violate?” They said nothing but continued to tail me. At the moment I have no idea what will happen to me and can only wait and see. But this is horrible; China is really a terrifying country, where people have no sense of security at all!

As my daughter wrote in her letter to President Hu Jintao, “I think that my father’s actions (giving speeches and writing articles)—whether they were right or wrong—did not violate any laws, and certainly did not violate the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China. All his demands are the legitimate, rational demands of a citizen.” In today’s China, both the government and the media are advocating “rule by law,” yet the country is not ruled according to the law. Many government bodies (such as those in my hometown in Tongzhou District) restrict and deprive a citizen’s personal freedom by stopping them, following them, and monitoring them, without any formal legal procedures. Freedom of speech and other personal freedoms are basic human rights in civilized societies. But these freedoms are not available to the Chinese people; in such an environment, how harmonious can this society possibly be? I call upon the international community to pay attention to the situation of human rights in China.

Translated by Isle Arthur