

Sensational speech at “Writers and Human Rights” Seminar, jointly sponsored by UNESCO and Italian Pen Association, Milan, Italy, June 28, 2006.

Race against Fear

By Zhou Qing

Honorable Mr. President,
Honorable Delegates from International Writers’ Association
Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good Afternoon. I am very grateful to the Italian International Writers’ Association for inviting me to attend this congress in such a beautiful city - Milan. It is the first time for me to attend such a congress as a “writer”. In 1989, I was arrested after the “fourth June Massacre” since then I have been stamped as a “dangerous actor” by the Chinese Communist Party in China for seventeen years. It is therefore a great honor for me to be here as a writer as my personal identity. I spent two years and eight months in jail, lost six teeth, and permanent cripple my arm. However, perhaps the true sacrifice is since 1989, I have lost my personal identity in China, and have become a “fearful virus” in society. Despite this fact I have never stop writing and publishing books since the early 1980s, and after my release from the jail, hence this has gained me some notoriety in the international literary community.

Since I was released from the jail, my name was not allowed to appear in the Chinese media for a considerable length of time. When it appeared for the first time, the character of my first name was divided into two parts as to conceal my identity. There was another famous Chinese writer, who has to use a pseudonym when she published a translated works about the Second World War. As you know, one of the Chinese traditions for Chinese intellectuals is that one should never change one’s name in what ever situation. In China, however, the names of many Chinese writers are screened and filtered. Moreover, some writers as the members of the Independent Chinese Pen are sentenced heavy punishment and remain in the jail, just because that they have different opinions from the Communist Party. In my opinion, a writer obtains his identity and reputation through publications. As soon as a writer is forced to quit publishing he/she has no possibility to reach the readers. It is certainly a kind of spiritual ravage as well as punishment, leading to deep humiliation and desperation.

On the contrary, when a writer behaves dutiful and domesticated, he/she has an unbelievable supply of material and enjoyment from the system. So was the case in the former Soviet Union. As far as I know, it is exactly the same case in China. A certain lady writer, for instance, supported by the Communist party and a party member herself, enjoys very high payment for publishing short novel. She enjoys a good salary, complete social security as well as a free apartment. The cultural organizations of the Communist party also do their utmost to support these kind of hack writers to propagandize in China and abroad. There are famous writers such as Yu Hua and Mo Yan, who write the complementary works, and simultaneously become the nominee for the Nobel Prize. Their identity such as “member of the party” or “member of XXX committee” is however completely ignored by the Western

society. Mr. Yu Hua has been an extreme case. When he was in Italy, he announced to the Italian media that it is very free to publish in China, and there is no censorship at all. This is of course a ridiculous announcement. Hence, I would like to express my gratefulness to Italy Pen Center again, for giving this opportunity to a member of the Chinese Independent Pen Center, instead of a Chinese writer in the main stream.

While writing this speech, I was still unsure if I could actually participate in the congress or not. As many know, many Chinese writers, particularly members of our Chinese Independent Writer's Association, such as president Mr. Liu Xiaobo, is not permitted by the Chinese government to go abroad to attend any activities or personal travel. At the end of 1999, I was detained at the border in Xinjiang for more than ten days when I returned from Russia. Their aim was to force me not to be able to return back to China.

I believe that terrors and lies are the most important methods that all dictators exercise to maintain control. They can apply the resources of the whole country, for occupying, overriding and terrifying citizens at any cost. Meanwhile, they constantly produce lies to distort history and reality. The terror and lies are spreading over the whole country of China, to pollute and to drug the people in various social groups. I would define this as "National Terrorism".

Since the June Fourth Massacre in 1989, national terrorism has reached its peak of madness during the past seventeen years. It degenerates and corrupts the Chinese people as a whole. The national terror is like a deadly virus. As it extends and expands without limitation, it will finally devour all the life spaces of the people, liberty of expression, and future as well as spiritual development. Now, I will tell you the story of my life during the past seventeen years, both within and outside the jail, to explain my experience living in national terrorism. I believe that my case should be a vivid example for realizing and understanding the situation, particularly for a writer.

Before the massacre in 1989, I was a university writer before the massacre. When the student petition movement was touched off by the death of the former Party General Secretary, I lost my peaceful life, I posted a petition published on the 26th April 1989, This poster became the root for later persecution against me. When I was sentenced to jail, the first crime stated was that "(I) published an illegal publication entitled Democracy and Freedom, for which I was the chief editor. The publication printed one thousand copies. Moreover, I had drafted several posters for the students, mobilizing the student's strike, etc. Obviously, this is a typical case that I was punished because of expressing my opinion.

Right after the June Fourth Massacre, I went into exile. I was completely penniless. One of the students gave me some money from the earlier donation for the student's strike. An peasant couple also helped me. They said: "We know that you are a student, so please hide in our home. When the policemen come, we will let our dogs face them. " However, I had no aim in my way of exile. I was also very much worried for my girlfriend at Xi'an Jiaotong University. Therefore I decided to return to Xi'an, to see how she was.

I was, however, beaten down in front of the gate of the University by the policemen. What I faced was many soldiers and guns. I was arrested and directly punished with special handcuffs. Nobody paid attention to my arrest, when my girlfriend screamed for help, "Student being arrested! Student being arrested!",

The first place I was jailed was at the fifth section of the Xi'an Public Security Bureau.

This is a famous jail in China, since most of the prisoners here had been sentenced to death. More than thirty fellow prisoners were executed.

The head of the policemen in the jail was nicknamed "Tiger Wang". He often broadcasted through the speakers: "I will make you change! Your wife will change husband, your son will change his surname, and you will change your mind!" Certainly, he was a very brutal policeman.

There were many different kinds of punishments for the prisoners. Since so many prisoners were locked up in the same cell, sexual attacks and torture and fighting happened all the time. I was forced to fight with a death-sentenced prisoner, who always humiliated the new prisoners. I broke his head with a piece of wood. However, I was punished by the police with back-handcuffs. That was to handcuff both hands behind my back. I could neither eat nor sleep. The only way I survived was I was fed by a kind roommate. After six days of such punishment, I could hardly withdraw my hands from my back.

There were many different kinds of torture amongst the prisoners. One who live in a normal and rational society would never be possible to imagine how brutal these tortures could be. One of the tortures was called "vaccination". That is during the summer time to make a cut on the arm of one, and then put many fleas, bugs into the wound. After several days, the tortured one became "vaccinated". A ball appeared in his arm like a tomato. But there were hundreds of visible bugs inside moving around, That was really terrible!

Another brutal torture was to beat the swollen arm with a plastic hose. The result of the beating was that the ball became severely swollen, This was accompanied with unbelievable pain. One of prisoners was beaten with this plastic hose because he smoked without permission. He died from the infection.

In such an environment, I became the leader of my cell for a period of time. As the most fierce man in the cell, I must confess that my beastliness was also revealed. That also led to brutal fighting and beating. I realized a particular truth. That is, a beast will lose its beastliness in a cell for a long enough time. On the contrary, a human will lose its human nature in a cell for enough long time.

On September 26th 1990, I was transferred to the Criminal Labor Camp of Shaanxi Province prior to my arrival. There were more than one hundred prisoners in its June Forth Special Team. The prisoners were teachers, engineers, students, workers as well as hoboes and beggars. In November the same year, I learnt from the only newspaper available in the jail that the communist regime made its most efforts for the prolongation of so-called most-favored-nation clause from USA. They pulished statements day by day to tell the people that no more people were locked up in jail because of the June Forth Movement. I was totally shocked by such a lie! There were several students and teachers around me in jail! I therefore had an extreme idea to break the lie. I decided to escape from the Labor Camp and then to escape from the country. Then it would be possible to tell the world the truth.

Accordingly, I started looking for partners for this jailbreak. Mr. He was a group leader among the prisoners. He told me that he wanted to escape as well because he was missing his girlfriend. I thought he might be a good partner since he was a group leader, and he had much more access to get the necessary tools than I had. There was another man who was just arrested from a former jailbreak. So there was a total of three persons for this jailbreak.

The plan for the jailbreak was carried out as such. The group leader, Mr. He, was able to

get a piece of steel-saw hidden in a sausage transported into the jail. My responsibility was to saw off the sticks of the security fans on the window by stealth. I also utilized my bed sheet to make an eight meters long rope. When everything was prepared, it was planned that we would escape from the window, and then use the rope for climbing over the high wall.

All of a sudden, four hours before the planned escape, a group of fierce policemen rushed into our cell. They easily discovered the off-sawed window fence, as well as the eight-meter-long rope. I was immediately put into a isolated cell with heavy guards. The rest of the prisoners held a meeting, and decided to accuse me, I realized later on that the team of three for the jailbreak was a trap from the beginning.

The consequences for this attempt of jailbreak were obvious. I was isolated in guarded cell for a long time, and a prolongation of imprisonment for five months. The decree published for stating my prolongation of imprisonment charged me for:

- Refusing to make known of this jailbreak;
- Bad Behavior for singing and shouting out loud;
- Spreading continuously in the Labor Camp different opinions for speaking out against the June Forth Event;
- Collecting a name list of imprisoned students and teachers total and liberate them from the camp.

Hence, I spent a total of two years and two years and eight months in jail.

As soon as I was released from the jail, I was carefully watched for instance, I was told that I must stay at home for several days because President Bill Clinton was visiting China. I became furious at them and said, Bill Clinton must not disturb my ordinary life. If you continue to tail me, I will disturb Mr. Clinton as well!". Later on, a kind neighbor told me the truth that there were several new peddlers and strange cars around our house during those days. They were all from the secret police.

It has been rather often that I was forced to have a tourist trip escorted by policemen outside Xi'an during these so-called sensitive time periods. They just guarded my door to prevent that I disappear from their sight. I tried once to travel to Zhangjiajie city, located in another province, without telling anybody. However, I surprisingly encountered two policemen who were in charge of my case in Xi'an, three days after my arrival. This was not an easy job for them to find me in such a city with a population of three million people. However, they got plenty of policemen to trace me with my photo in hand.

Last year, when I tried to help a friend from USA to publish a series of books on Christianity, all the related persons were questioned by the police, including one of my drivers.

The policemen watched me ever so carefully. They told me that their attitude was never to believe any of my publications. At the middle of 1990's, I was in charge of publishing a newspaper entitled "*Historical Tale*". They threatened me to shut down the newspaper immediately. Or they would do it, because I could not to be trusted, even if there were full printed text such as "Long Live the Chinese Communist Party" on the newspaper.

In short, I have suffered terrors and turbulence day by day during the past seventeen years. Yet, all of my family members and friends suffered from inquisition, disturbing and even threats. Naturally, I will continue to face terror in the future.

When I am telling my stories of tribulation, I reveal therefore a surprising and unbelievable truth: that is each time I eat the bread of affliction, because of my writing, I realize that when the writers became the objectives of terror in a country, the regime must be based on national terrorism. This has been thoroughly proved in history, from Hitler's Germany to Stalin's Soviet Union, from Mao Zedong to Saddam Hussein, including Cuba, North Korea as well as my homeland in the twenty-first century.

My opinion is, it is much more important to recover and to repair the humanity which has been distorted by the dictatorship, than to face with the national terrorism. Please allow me to explain with the example of the June Fourth Movement. During the Movement, there was a very special time period from 15th April to the end of June. The people appeared extremely self-disciplined, when nobody carried out social orders. Crime happened in the whole country during that time. Even the thieves published poster of suspending stealing, in order to support the students.

Nonetheless, the extremely high self-disciplined society turned immediately into a prosecution movement, as soon as the gun fire broke out against the students. In the prosecutions, people disclosed and betrayed each other, so that it became a new kind of terror among the people. *Homo lupus homini One is a wolf to other* This has been the strategy of the Chinese nation. This is also the great success of the long-term rule over China by the Communist Party. All the people became slaves of the dictator-driven system. I therefore believe that the dictatorship is the natural enemy of a civilized society. It is also the most threatening against democracy, freedom and global harmony.

To live in China at the moment, means that one must race with terror, particularly for a writer. We utilize our ration to face and to struggle with the terror, so as to achieve the slightest improvement. Chinese Independent Pen Center was organized to care and rescue these writers from such terror.

Finally, I believe that there must be a public forum in human society which is shared by everybody. In this world, the strengths of good and evil are always competing. As a writer, I believe that any kind of freedom is first and foremost derived from the expression of freedom. To write in freedom is also a challenge living under a dictatorship. Though we encounter many failures, we will continue to fight for the freedom of writing and open expression!

Thank you!

Zhou Qing

Translated by Minhai Gui