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“June 4th Pro-Democracy Movement Seminar”, Beijing 2009 Meeting of Chinese Intellectuals to Commemorate June 4th

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To commemorate the crackdown of the protest movement of the June 4th 1989 is dangerous. This event is officially still condemned as a “counter-revolutionary disturbance”. Nevertheless, during these 20 years from that time on there developed a growing community of courageous sympathizers who usually met outside of China to commemorate this event. This year – high security year for 20th anniversary of 1989 – they met in Beijing. The 19 intellectuals who met are famous for their various texts published on proposed political reforms and represent different generations of public intellectuals.



2009 ‘Beijing Symposium of June 4th Pro-democratic Movement’ was held on May 10th in Beijing. Among 19 participants, there are influential scholars, public intellectuals, lawyers, editors and activists jailed for the June Forth Event. In their presentations, the participants inquired into a series of problems, such as what happened on June 4th, 1989, the consequences and significances of the event, situation and development after the

event, prospect of democratization in China and possibility of national conciliation.

Participants included Xu Youyu, Mo Zhixu, Cui Weiping, Hao Jian, Xu Xiao, Zhou Duo, Liang Xiaoyan, Qin Hui, Guo Yuhua, Li Hai, Liu Zili, Qian Liqun, Teng Biao, Tian Xiaoqing, Wang Junxiu, Xu Yinong, Yin Yusheng, Zhang Boshu and Zhang Yaojie.

The seminar occurred also on Mother’s Day of this year. It was started with a standing ovation to honour the Tiananmen Mothers, who lost their children at the June 4th 1989 and observed a three-minute silence for the victims.

A wide range of topics was discussed at the seminar, from the truth of the June 4th Incident, its impacts and significance, the social conditions after the Incident, China’s path to democracy and future, etc.

Professor Qian Liqun, as the first speaker, passionately named the two reasons of his participation in the seminar. The first is the conscience of a teacher. Two decades ago, he saw many students sacrificed their lives for China’s democratization, and as their teacher who failed to protect them, he has felt self-reproachful over the years. Protecting students is not only a teacher’s responsibility, but also a legacy of the Peking University, as he described that during the May 4th Movement ninety years ago, whenever students were arrested, the University chancellor Cai Yuanpei was the first to rescue them. Failing to protect his students makes him feel guilty and if he would fail to speak out for his unjustly-accused students, Professor Qian would take it as a shame of being their teacher. The second driving force for him to participate is the conscience of a scholar. Politicians may refuse to re-examine June 4th Incident, but scholars must record it as history, to conduct academic discussions and researches, he concluded.

¹ This article will appear in the June issue of Kaifang zazhi (Open Magazin)

Zhou Duo shared his experience between mid-April and 4th June 1989, with some important details were previously not known to the public. His sharing stimulated other participants' interests and (reminded them with) their own experiences, which led to a lively discussion on "(should we) refuse to forget (the June 4th Incident) or remain in collective silence".

Silenced memory – did we fail?

Xu Xiao reviewed her involvement with the democracy movements since the 1970s and raised the following question, "as individuals, we could refuse to forget, we could try every measure to keep our memories vivid. Yet facing an ever-growing political power which can even change the world order, and a society filled with pragmatism and cynicism, how do we make sense of our ongoing resistance?"

"We all have kept quiet about June 4th for a long time, which makes us de facto accessories after the fact. By now, each of us is responsible, to a certain degree, of the Incident." Cui Weiping analysed. She further asked, "at the 20th anniversary of the June 4th Incident, I would like to ask everyone around us, 'How have our society been affected, our national spirit and morality suffered and what are our loss in our work and living, after these twenty years' silence and cover-up? Do we still want to prolong the silence?'"

Mo Zhixu viewed the twenty years' refusal to forget the June 4th Incident did bring some outstanding achievement. It results in the new generation's (resounding) attitude when their rights are being violated, thanks to as well the marketization, globalization and internet. The brutal power reminds the people of the tragedy two decades ago and June 4th has become the spirit, the totem and common understanding for people who resist against power monopoly and undemocratic political system. By relating to the June 4th Incident, more people are fighting for freedom and democracy.

Li Hai recalled how June 4th had become a part of his life. His life and careers suffered enormously after the June 4th Incident and now he tries to find a way to minimize the suffering and live as an ordinary person.

Liu Zili gave his talk a topic, namely "Enlightenment, Order and Counter-revolution", by discussing the major historical changes and incidents be-

tween May 4th (1919) and June 4th (1989) from the ideological and cultural perspectives. "(The stages are) The conflict between nationalism and individualism started by the May 4th Movement resulted in a people's revolution; nihilism first removed traditional culture and later led to the birth of (CCPs) red revolution which destroyed all values; 1949 shifted the nation from democratic transformation to dictatorship, the Cultural Revolution in 1966 witnessed the marriage between people's movement and ruling power under totalitarianism; the 1978 reform can be interpreted as the totalitarian regime trying to eliminate the revolution; the post-June 4th regime aimed at building its Chinese values to deny the universal values."

Zhang Yaojie's thesis topic is "Immediate Resolution and Gradual Improvement". He compared the gradual improvement approach raised by Hu Shi and the radical revolution called by Chen Duxiu, Qian Xuantong, Liu Bannong, Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, Li Dazhao and etc., during the May 4th Movement, and concluded that during the June 4th Incident, "if the students in hunger-strike would have retreated (from the Tiananmen Square) earlier, it could leave the authority other options, instead of brutal crackdown, and the authority would have no reason or excuse to shoot at them.". His suggestion for the rights-defenders is "they should also look into the concepts of 'hard' and 'soft' resistance".

Qin Hui analyzed the models and consequences of democracy movements of the June 4th Incident and other communist countries in Eastern Europe. He described that though the June 4th Incident took place in a society, where possibilities to organize were very limited and mutual trust and interaction between government and people was seriously lacked, the Chinese students, people and intellectuals organized themselves well, gave reasonable demands and acted peacefully, which he saluted. As a historian, Professor Qin argued against the idea of the crackdown of June 4th contributing to China economic miracle, as the historic order could not be simplified by a single explanation. He believes the crackdown and economic development only share the precedence relationship in time but not in causality.

Many studies exchanged at the seminar show that the June 4th Incident was the watershed of the modern Chinese history. It led people to question the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party's rule, Tian Xiaoqing pointed out. Before June 4th, though the legitimacy did not come from people's free choice, it had a revolutionary authority: the

party as a self-acclaimed defender for freedom and democracy, to fight against the repressions and injustice of the reactionaries; the propaganda portrayed the People's Government as for the People and the People were the ruling class; the popular (economic) reform, all were the factors contributing to its legitimacy. The violence used on June 4th, however was immediately seen as illegal and it swept away the legitimacy the Party had built. Since then, the ruling power's legitimacy was replaced by its pragmatic function (de-ideologization): using violence and bringing economic gain. The political morality of reform was eliminated and the Party has changed from an ideological institute to a profit generator.

Bloodshed as eye-opener

In his study, Xu Youyu reconfirmed the significance of the gunshots at the June 4th Incident, without the bloodshed, the people would not break away from the old and firm ideology (of the Communist Party). The spiritual resources which supported the students in 1989 were indeed a part of the Party's ideology. One student leader, said before the crackdown, "Only when the Square is awash with blood will the people of China open their eyes".² Unfortunately, her vision became reality. The June 4th Incident did not change China's political system, yet, it showed the urgency of such a change, and prepared the people (for the change).

The social changes and development of the post-June 4th era and the understanding and analysis of the current situation is one of the core topics at the seminar. Yin Yusheng argued that after the June 4th Incident, official ideology became invalid and the ruling party relied on force to maintain its ever-growing economic growth and to eliminate nearly all conflicts. Despite the economic growth, the grassroots people benefit far less than those in power and when a financial crisis comes, social unrest would lead to political transformation, as people's awareness and demand would be raised and their cost of resistance would be lowered.

Wang Junxiu sees the post-June 4th era to be shaped by two aspects: first, as an ill-formed "Chinese model" of development, by disregarding human rights and labour standard for an export-oriented economy, which creates a new monopolist class of capital and power. The second

aspect was the civilians' rights-defending movement, which spread after 2003. The example of Chapter 08 is a further step of this movement.

Liang Xiaoyan commented that young people nowadays thought differently from those in 1989. She once invited some young people to watch Carma Hinton's documentary movie *Tiananmen: the Gate of Heavenly Peace*. The young people did not expect and were shocked to see the attitude of the students of 1989, in which each of them thought they were responsible for the rise or fall of the nation. Liang's observation on today's youth is that they live under tremendous pressure, their lives and thoughts are strictly repressed and their spiritual life emptied. The positive side she found is, despite such a detachment, a large number of volunteers have been organized in the recent year and showed their responsibility and dedication. To a certain degree, their attitude is similar to the spirit of the 1989-ers.

Teng Biao, a rights-defender lawyer believes the rights defending movement has its root from the pro-democracy movement in 1989. The pro-democracy movements in the 1980s were shaped by their political environment at the time while the current rights defending movement adopt case intervention, internet and media, civil cooperation and so on, to promote human rights and rule of law and in the long term, the transformation of political system. The reason that the number of rights-defenders keep growing is due to a soaring number of rights-violation cases, as the totalitarian and post-totalitarian regime, by its nature, contradicts the human nature. In the internet age, means of rights defending get more diverse, as shown in the Wengan Incident (also known as Guizhou Riot, 2008), Yang Jia's arrest, Milk Scandal. The ruling authority is gradually losing ground and when the civil society grows enough muscle, political transformation would become inevitable.

Guo Yuhua commented that only when the history is faithfully and completely recorded, the tragedies in history could end, and to achieve that, it needs a real democracy movement. The antidote of the "wolf milk" (wolf milk refers to the education, especially propaganda and lies the Chinese received from the Communist Party, the Chinese who have grown up after the 1950s were called "the generation fed with wolf milk"), is the truth of history and it would be a heavy and enduring task. He believes that the space for struggles is gained by the process of struggling and same goes with the strength; therefore it would be

² Original from Chai Ling, see <http://www.tsquare.tv/film/YeRen.html>.

unrealistic to expect the ruling class to release their power or open up the space.

Hao Jian's "Analysis of the Persecution Paranoia of the Chinese Rulers and People through the June 4th Pro-democracy Movement", used psychological phenomenon "persecution paranoia" to study the impact of psychological state on China's political landscape, and the urgency and possibilities to combat such paranoia. His study shows that from the speeches and behaviours of the Chinese rulers before and after the June 4th Incident, the core decision-makers tended to exaggerate threats and selectively chose evidence to support their wrong-doings. The paranoia also troubled the ordinary people, after the crackdown, they exaggerated the power and its irrationality.

Zhang Boshu pointed out in his study that "the bloodshed of the June 4th was caused by the 'antagonistic rationality' shared among the top leaders of Communist Party. The antagonistic rationality recognizes the patriots as traitors. There have been major changes of the Party's totalitarian rule in the past twenty years. The antagonistic rationality has then shaped the ruling power's denial to constitutional democracy and universal values and its continuous heavy-handed meas-

ures to maintain its power. Yet, another major change is the civil democratic force has released itself from the antagonistic rationality, on one hand, we regard the current political system as a dead end and should be replaced by constitutional democracy, on the other hand, we do not take the ruling Party as enemies, our good faith calls it to follow the flow of history, to reform instead of holding back. It is a higher moral ground where it shows a completely different political thoughts and culture."

During the free discussion time of the seminar, participants heavily debated the belief of "bloodshed for stability" and the relations between economic development and the crackdown of June 4th Incident. They all denounced the "bloodshed for stability" logic, which rationalizes killing for economic growth, and (ignores the) facts of social injustice, income gaps and other risks in China. Derived from the concept of "antagonistic rationality", the participants also discussed further on the relationship between civil society and the government.

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