

**Part 1: My experience as a journalist**

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**Last Part: About press freedom**

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**Part 1: My experience as a journalist**

From earliest youth, I dreamed of becoming a famous journalist. But in 1966, when I was only ten years old, I experienced the terror of the Cultural Revolution. The newspapers that I admired the most were Renmin Ribao (The People's Daily) and the Dalian Daily. Later, in 1982, after I graduated in history from the University of Liaoning, I had the good fortune to work as an editor and reporter on the cultural supplement of the Dalian Daily. Then, in 1987, I was moved to the Dalian bureau of the Xinhua news agency. At the beginning of the 1990s, I changed again, working for the north-eastern China bureaux of the Hong Kong newspaper, Wen Hui. So after years of hard work, I had managed to realise my childhood dream.

I am most probably the only journalist in China to have worked for these three different media. The first was a small popular newspaper in Dalian, the second was a national news agency and the third was a foreign newspaper. However despite their differences none of them was able to evade the tight control of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and being a journalist was not the be-all and end-all. The controlling and authoritarian shadow of the CPC had played no part in my childhood dreams. In this respect, one could say that before my arrival in Toronto on 2 February 2009, I had not yet fully realised my dream.

However, I have no regrets, even though I brought to an end an 18-year career in the Party's media, and that I endured five years and one month behind bars, I did after all fight for freedom of expression. It was in my own voice that I genuinely described the lives of the poor and condemned corruption by some of the well-placed officials in the north-east of my country. I bellowed and battled to realise my dream. And now I feel relieved.

It was somewhat cheeky of me when in 1991, I sent off an application on spec. to the editor of the Hong Kong newspaper Wenhui, Liu Zaiming, and thus began my innocent dream. At the time, while travelling in Shenzhen, I noticed a copy of Wen Hui stuck up on the wall of a restaurant, whose owner came from Dalian, and I noticed that its main offices were in Hong Kong, but that a score of correspondents were scattered around mainland China. I supposed that this newspaper enjoyed real freedom of expression and projected my childhood dreams onto it.

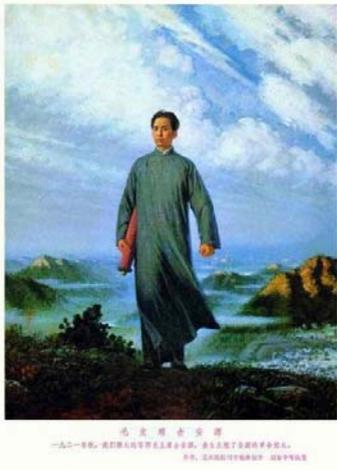
But it wasn't long after I was taken on by the Wen Hui bureau in the north-east in 1993, that I realised that it was nothing more than a Hong Kong-based outpost for CPC propaganda.

However, against the background of the 1990s, a time when people’s awareness was limited and news was tightly controlled, for a Hong Kong newspaper to open a bureau in a little town like Dalian, was an admirable step. I remember very well that when I registered the bureau with the Department of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, a woman there thought it was a reactionary newspaper and, in terror, immediately sought instructions from her superiors. From then on, no fewer than 10 state security agents interviewed me. It demonstrates the extent to which the CPC’s dictatorial system makes life difficult for journalists, even those who are not from mainland China. The state is very wary of journalists from Hong Kong and abroad!

The setting up of a bureau for Wen Hui in the north-east showed the contradictory nature of CPC officials. Because on one hand they want to attract foreign investment but on the other hand they fear that foreign journalists will uncover scandals. This paradox arises from the fact that the far-reaching liberalisation of the economy has not been matched by political openness. My point of view comes from having personal experience of this paradox.

The Dalian Public Security Bureau was the first body to give me “multiple entry passes” between Hong Kong/Macao and mainland China. With these passes, I travelled between capitalist Hong Kong and socialist mainland China. It allowed me to understand the meaning of the concept “one country, two systems” and to realise the contradictions that it involved. Nothing is more important to a journalist than freedom of expression. In the streets of Hong Kong, I read newspapers such as Shaqian Sha that were realistic and outspoken. It was unsettling to hear another side to things, no less truthful than the uniformity on the mainland. Why should 1.2 billion people, 56 ethnic groups not have different opinions? Why is life so complicated? Why can’t journalists speak out against injustices suffered by the poor? How could I replace lies with a description of reality? I puzzled over these dilemmas for a long time. I decided to meet for myself the manager of the newspaper, Liu Dawen, but I suffered from huge indecision when it came to writing, because I took a long time to publish.

Then, around 1998, I was deeply shocked by two events. On one occasion, I had to go to see Wen Shizhen, Secretary of the CPC Provincial Committee and Zhang Guoguang, Governor of Liaoning province. I wanted to report on reform of state enterprises in Liaoning. From Dalian, it was a 300-km drive. To reach the provincial capital, Shenyang, I had to cross over a railway line in an urban area. My car was stopped by sacked workers who were blocking the line, protesting against the corruption of the factory manager and the privatisation of the factory. They said that this confrontation was the only way to get the railway department to inform officials in Beijing, particularly the president, Jiang Zemin. “Once he knows about it, he will come to talk to us”, they said. This made me think about the “History of the Party” course I studied at university and the picture Mao Zedong goes to Anyuan.



What made Mao go there? In fact, the miners who extracted coal there at the time and those who today were blocking the railway were driven to this resort by the same circumstances. Is it not incredible that the CPC resembles a capitalist regime in abandoning the poor? I later met officials in the region who carefully avoided my questions on this issue and talked to me about the successes of the reform policy. I also received subtle warnings from officials at the Propaganda Department. Naturally, the articles I wrote in future for Wen Hui could only be full of praise.

The second episode was even more serious and still distresses me today. While I was interviewing an official in Daqing municipality in the north-east of China, more than 100 unemployed workers from Daqing's towel factory surrounded the offices we were in, waving placards bearing the very simple message: "We are hungry, we want to work" and the slogan they repeatedly shouted was: "Chuck out the factory's

corrupt director!" The reasons for their protest? The company's conversion to a joint venture, with a foreign boss, who wanted to cut back on staff while the workers had no idea where they could find other work. Since the police were blocking the entrance to the official's office, the only way out was a door at the back. But the workers saw me and that I had a camera in my hand and they shouted out in delight, "A journalist, a journalist!" as if I was the Messiah! But after listening to their protests and writing an article I was unable to publish it in Wen Hui. The articles in this paper could only praise the Daqing officials. I was deeply saddened by this forced silence. Only an independent newspaper in Hong Kong would carry such a critical article.

Even though there is an article of the Constitution that clearly promotes freedom of expression (Mao even said that you should never condemn the orator), in practice it is useless. The criminal code even contains articles that allow the government to repress on the basis of "overthrow of the regime", but the country was built on countless inquisitorial campaigns against intellectuals. This demonstrates the government's brutality and hypocrisy. Since this cast a huge and threatening shadow over Wen Hui, the newspaper had no choice but to operate self-censorship. The head of the agency, Liu Yongbi, frequently warned me against sending articles to other magazines, because he would suffer the consequences himself. However, at this time, I blindly believed in the CPC officials and their understanding of social class. I also believed that they represented the proletarian cause and I therefore idealised the motivation for my criticisms. I even thought that our Leader would understand how sincere my criticisms were and the objectivity of my articles. So to promote the cause, I began to write under a pseudonym.

I started writing a large number of reports for Sha Qiansha, Kaifang, and other Hong Kong newspapers from the 1990s onwards. These included, "Ma Xiang Dong loses 30,000,000 yuan (three million dollars) in the Macao casino" and "Dalian residents unhappy under Bo Xilai".

I wrote candidly about corruption cases involving this official in the north-east, setting out to make myself the spokesperson for people with problems and writing about growing inequality. I thought that at the worst, I would be sacked from my newspaper and that I could lose some privileges like my house, my company car or my bonuses. I even imagined that I could be sent to prison. But I did not back down, driven by the desire to improve society, even if I had to sacrifice myself to do it. Some people have to pay a high price in a country with 5,000 years of feudal history. Even though some of the articles lacked punch, I thought that I could to some extent help push China towards a democratic state. I took my inspiration from people like Chen Tianhua, Zou Rong, and Zhang Dayan. I believed that, since my investigations were legal, officials would have no choice but to act against corruption. I constantly wrote these articles and began to think of myself as an "uncrowned king", and that a recognised journalist was untouchable.

Unfortunately for me, we were not aware of the technological capacities of the extremely efficient state security apparatus. In fact, I had been under close surveillance since 1982 from the time I began working as a journalist on a Party newspaper. On 4 December 2000, on a snowy mid-winter morning, eight plain-clothes agents brutally snatched me from a parking lot. The man who ordered my abduction was none other than Che Kemin, secretary to the mayor of Dalian, Bao Xilai, whom I had criticised in my articles. My captors were ranking officers in the Dalian Security Bureau. Unknown to anyone, I was imprisoned on an island at the extreme southern tip of the Liaoning peninsula, in the Lushun naval base. Che Kemin had been a soldier there at the end of the 1970s. I have never been in the military.

I was prevented from communicating with the outside world and forced into silence. They had no worries about the fact that their actions were completely illegal. That was when my career as a Party journalist came to an end. I remembered the words of an old journalist on Wen Hui who had supported the cause of the students during the events in Tiananmen Square in 1989, and had ignored the orders of Li Peng. He produced a front page bearing only four words: "Heavy heart, sickened mind". It wasn't until 1997 that I met for the first time with Li Zi, who had been sacked as editor of Wen Hui. Despite the smile that lit up his face when he spoke, he was a broken man. I knew that his smile hid a deep sorrow. I am just the successor to these brave journalists on Wen Hui like him, Liu Ruishao and Cheng Xiang. Their tragedy continues to be played out in China...

I was held in an unheated, dark and cold cell, with close to me an Alsatian dog that barked night and day and three soldiers carrying guns, in a prison of which the courtyard was practically buried in snow. A bone-piercing wind chilled my very soul.

I was no longer the "uncrowned king", the recognised and untouchable journalist. I was the first Chinese journalist of the 21st Century to be imprisoned for having spoken.

Toronto, June 19th 2009

## **Part 2: My life in prison**

I was held in the Chinese Communist Party's "black prisons" from 4 December 2000 to 3 January 2006, a total of five years and one month. I did not know that there still existed a country where courts could pass sentences on both corrupt officials and the journalists who exposed the same corrupt officials. It was my privilege to experience this absurd farce first-hand.

My first place of detention was the Lushun naval base, where I spend 45 days. At that time, Bo Xilai had just been promoted governor of the Liaoning region. His "gang" organised a gathering of more than a thousand people on the streets of Dalian to celebrate his departure for Shenyang province. But, except my wife, none of Dalian's 5.9 million inhabitants suspected that a journalist had just been jailed for criticising Bo Xilai. Dalian National Security Bureau agents, including Wang Fuquan, Lu Donghui, Deng Yiqiang and Lin Gang, were very violent with me, cutting off my food and preventing me from sleeping and, finally, using torture to force me to invent confessions. They also obtained so-called proof that I had written for "a foreign organisation hostile to China" and the dissident magazines "Vanguard" and "Opening".

I lost consciousness several times under torture. My behaviour became so disturbed that they called an ambulance and took me to the Lushun army hospital. The first secretary of the Dalian National Security Bureau, Che Kemin, told me that, after the opening of the 9th session of the Liaoning parliament, provincial secretary Bo Xilai would become secretary of the party's regional

committee, which would make him the 17th most important politician in China. He added that articles criticising the new secretary would be treated as inciting subversion of political authority. But Bo failed to get control of the party's regional committee before the 9th session. Thinking they did not have enough evidence against me, they confiscated articles about the "Mu & Ma" corruption case and the scandal involving Daqing deputy mayor Tie Luhua. They also asked the Defence Department in Dalian to confirm that the cases involved state secrets. Then they accused me of supplying state secrets to foreign organisations. On 19 January 2001, I was transferred to another detention centre, located in Dalian.

In order to attack his political enemies and use me as a scapegoat, Bo Xilai arrested some of my colleagues and held my wife illegally for 28 days, inventing all sorts of misdeeds. Without any hard evidence, they also accused my lawyer, Chen Dehui, of about 10 offences including tax fraud. (Chen was arrested the day after agreeing to represent me. He was acquitted a year after his arrest.) I could have been murdered without being able to reveal anything about these cases. Fortunately, a benevolent prison guard agree to send my letters to my wife. She had them published in "Asia Weekly", attracting the attention of the Hong Kong and foreign media. Thereafter, my prison conditions began to improve.

Bo Xilai skilfully manoeuvred the Dalian intermediate people's court, which convened a closed-door hearing before sentencing me. There was no one in the courtroom aside from a judge, a clerk, a lawyer and five other people. Not even my wife was able to attend. The Lushan judicial police discouraged my relatives and friends from attending the hearing and even beat some of them. Not long before this, I had written an article about the Mu & Ma case in which mayor Mu Suixin was tried for corruption and got a suspended death sentence. I found myself in the same defendant's box as the one he had been in. It underscored the fact that the CPC gives identical treatment to corrupt officials and journalists who cover corruption.

I was sentenced on 26 December 2001 to eight years in prison and an additional four years without civic rights on charges of supplying state secrets to illegal foreign organisations and initiating subversive actions against state authorities. There were only two documents supporting the charges. One, provided by the Bureau for Secret Affairs, said the Ma Xiangdong case was a state secret. The other, provided by the National Bureau of Security, said "Vanguard" was a dissident magazine based in Hong Kong. There was also a document that I had asked the lawyer defending me, Cai Mingfu, to print. But Zhang Mingming, the presiding judge, who had studied in the United Kingdom, forbid Cai to present articles at the hearing that described Ma Xiangdong's visit to the Macao casino. The ban was the indication of the influence of Bo Xilai and his gang over the judiciary.

Under international pressure, my case was reviewed by the Liaoning provincial court the following year. My sentence was finally reduced to six years in prison and three years without civic rights and I was transferred to the Yao Jia detention centre in Dalian. Bo Xilai, the province's governor, offered to reduce my sentence even more and to cover my medical expenses if I defamed another municipal official. I refused to do this. I then understood that the CPC's anti-corruption campaigns were in fact just power struggles within the party.

Bo Xilai, Jiang Zemin and Li Tieyang had fought for power and personal gain, and had tried to prevent the Mu & Ma case from being exposed. Bo Xilai's father, Bo Yibo, and Jiang Zemin met secretly to reach questionable deals. They then tried to use the Mu & Ma case to bring provincial governor Zhang Guoguang before the courts, overthrow secretary Wen Shizhen and thereby succeed Hu Jintao as the person in charge of frontiers. As a result, Zhang Guoguang was arrested. Relations between the the National Bureau for Security and the Committee for Discipline and Inspection had degenerated into internecine squabbles between influential party members. So honest journalists had to be sacrificed.

I was transferred to Wafangdian prison in Dalian on 20 February 2003 to serve the rest of my sentence and to perform forced labour. Under pressure from the guards, I had to get up at 5 a.m. every day. I began working at 6 a.m. and continued until 11 p.m., without being able to drink or go to the toilet. I was given three meals a day consisting of fritters of spoiled maize and bananas. I could not wash for several days. I became ill but I did not get prompt treatment. My body was covered with red blotches and pustules, my legs had oedemas and my clothes were crawling with worms. At night, I slept on the floor with 167 other people. Most unbearable of all were the punishments inflicted on prisoners who did not finish their work in the evening. They had to line up with their heads bent, and they were beaten until they fainted or because seriously injured. The prison supervisors pretended to know nothing about this.

From the outset, Bo Xilai had given orders for me to be treated harshly and had asked Lu Donghui's father to keep me under surveillance. He secretly tried to hurt me in prison. Fortunately, one of the jailers knew my friend Song, and never hit me. All the same, every day human rights were violated and inhuman acts were committed. Those who suffered most were the detainees who were poor, because they had no money to bribe the guards. Unlike the wealthier prisoners, they had to work all day. It reflected the outside world. The CPC's prisons are like China as a whole, they are places where those who are powerful enjoy different rights from those who are weak.

Among those held in Wafangdian prison was the former head of the Shenyang intermediate people's court, Mr. Liang, who had been implicated in the Ma & Mu affair. His cell had a computer and he had been assigned a guard. I heard and saw a lot of stories between 9 April 2003 and my release on 3 January 2006. The prison consisted of five sections. The first section had the office in charge of ensuring respect for discipline. The second section consisted of members in charge of a small reeducation newspaper and a TV station. The third one was responsible for the canteen and the showers. These three sections were a long way from the areas where cement was produced. Only people with contacts would live there. The bribes ranged from 3,000 to 10,000 RMB. Even the prison's hospital beds had a price and all it took was money to be hospitalised. It was a way to get out of forced labour and to have the meals that were specially made for the sick. Among themselves, the prisoners said: "With money, you are free; without money, you are guilty."

Liaoning province deputy governor Liu Ketian, a confidant of Bo Xilai who had been given a 12-year sentence, was living in this section of the prison in May 2005 and enjoyed the most favourable kind of treatment. For his comfort a wooden bed had been bought for him. A chauffeur collected him on the day he had to begin serving his sentence. He shared his cell with just two other detainees while I initially had to sleep in a room with 93 other people and then in a 12-man cell. The two people sharing with Liu Ketian were a former member of the People's Police called Zhou and a former judge called Zhang. None of them did hardly any forced labour.

Liu Ketian did not wear a uniform when he went out into the courtyard, with his hands in his pockets. A cook had been put at their disposal, and their wives came and spent the night with them once a week, bringing them food and other acquisitions. Liu Ketian's job was to read to the other prisoners in the reading room. They had everything in their room – colour TV, refrigerator and washing-machine. As he had published a collection of poetry, he recited poems. Conditions for them were completely different from mine. I had to do more than two months of forced labour after my arrival, working more than 10 hours a day. As I was physically weak, I was targeted by other detainees. I was desperate, I was losing my hair and I was having very bad stomach aches. But even if you were sick, the prison did not allow your family to send you medicine.

Bo Xilai and his "gang" continued to give people the job of watching me. Zhang Lei and Guo Qiang, two prison police officers, tried to cause me harm. But a guard named Gao was proper in his behaviour towards me and suggested I should edit the prison newspaper, "The New Life Newspaper," instead of doing the usual work. I refused because I would have rather died than go back to writing for the CPC. Guo Qiang then told me that every article I wrote would take seven days off my sentence. Again, I declined politely.

The prison governor, Gao, personally ordered my transfer to a section where I no longer had to do forced labour on 26 Jun 2006. Instead I had to read to the other prisoners. The guards may have thought that, under the supervision of other detainees, I would become inoffensive. But I finally managed to get a shortwave radio and catch up with international developments. Thanks to the comings and goings of 5,000 detainees, I discovered some scams, filled more than 30 notebooks, four diaries and a collection of poems, which I sent abroad. At the end of 2003, I heard the journalist Xiao Man interview Bao Tong [a party official allied with Zhao Ziyang, the CPC general secretary who supported the student movement in 1989]. Xiao mentioned my name, which encouraged me to continue sending out news from prison.

After the 2004 New Year festival, I learned from a radio broadcast that my wife had secretly gone to Canada with our daughter. After the 2003 New Year holidays, I managed to call a journalist friend using a fellow detainee's mobile phone. I asked him to send me 2,000 RMB (200 euros) and medicine for my stomach aches. The jailer took 1,000 RMB commission from the 2,000 RMB. I was able to use the rest to buy meal tickets. Almost all I did in prison was read. Nonetheless, I was not able to finish the long volumes of historian Sima Qian's "Historical Memoires." I was also able to use an apparatus to study English until the jailer Gao was transferred. He had allowed me to study this foreign language. My prison conditions improved but Zhang Lei used the pretext of a medical inspection to beat me. I responded with a punch. A prison policeman, Yuan Yiqing, advised me not to make waves. Zhang Lei subsequently encouraged several inmates to do me harm.

There were many demonstrations in China in the first part of 2005. At the same time, Bai Shiming prison governor Chu Yu and deputy governor Sun Chenfeng prevented me from using my apparatus to learn English, locked me up for more than 40 days and told Li Hongjun, Qun Xigang and other inmates to make sure I did not leave my cell. They sang at the top of their heads in the middle of the night to prevent me from sleeping. As I was not allowed to go to the toilet, I urinated in a small bottle. The stench in the cell was appalling. I could no longer see my relatives. I caught vitiligo and had serious skin problems. I still suffer from the aftermath.

Under international pressure, my sentenced was reduced by 11 months just before Hu Jintao's visit to the United States. I was finally released on 3 January 2006. The week prior to my release, the agents Lu Donghui and Deng Yinqiang warned me that I would be under surveillance after I was let out. As I was leaving the prison by the main door, I turned back to look at the smoke curling out of the cement factory. My thoughts were still locked into that smoke. Five years and one month in prison was not such a long time, I thought. I had been in three detention centres: a military one, a local one and a municipal one. Perhaps God had sent me to prison for an interview, a long and thorough interview.

The PCC had confiscated my pen. But to be honest, I would later be able to take up another pen and write about this grim imprisonment I had experienced, and describe these jails that have been stripped of any form of justice. To the guard who accompanied me to the south gate, Yuan Yiqing, I said: "Thank you!"

Toronto, June 19th 2009

### Part 3: My life on the road

I had been separated from the world for more than five years. My brothers and sisters were delighted to be able to take me back home. A big meal was prepared at midday to celebrate my return. Then a relative who had come from Liaoning took me to Qiaoshangong cemetery in the Dalian suburbs, where my father had been buried six years earlier. I once again saw his impressive headstone. The inscriptions had hardly aged but the trees beside the cemetery were now an impressive forest.

My mutterings were drowned out by the icy January wind. I had survived. As I was leaving the cemetery I realised I had lived for more than half a century. But where was I supposed to go and live now?

I felt very depressed as I lay on my bed. My wife had left a family photo opposite the bed. The sight of it released a flood of memories. The National Security Bureau had forbidden me to leave China for three years. I was virtually destitute. I needed to earn a living, but how?

It was then that someone knocked on the door. I found pretty girl at the door. I had not seen a woman for five years and I must say I was shaken by the sight. The young girl said she worked for an electricity company. "Your wife went abroad three years ago," she said. "There is an electricity bill of more than 7,000 yuan to pay. With bank charges, it comes to more 10,000 yuan." I showed her the paper certifying that I had just been released from prison. On seeing it, she dropped the bill and fled, shouting: "A criminal, a criminal... Too bad, forget it."

I realised that any attempt to explain would be pointless. After being released from a reeducation camp, society had completely abandoned me. I had no work, no social security and no friends. In order to keep me under surveillance, National Security Bureau officials paid more than 100,000 yuan just to be able to live in the former premises of the Zhuangjuyuan Hotel, located opposite my home. Wang Fuquan, Lu Donghui and those who had followed my case also came to Community 93, where I lived, and threatened employees who worked there, ordering them to keep a watch on me and inventing a story about how I was an American secret agent who had just served his sentence and if I revealed anything to them, they would be caught. As a result, the community's employees and neighbours avoided me.

I was closely watched during the first few months. I was followed every time I went out, sometimes by as many as four people. They deliberately caused an accident once but fortunately I emerged unscathed. I could not talk freely by phone with my wife and daughter because my phone was tapped. I was constantly on guard. The situation was absurd: instead of helping me financially or finding a job for me, the government preferred to invest in keeping me under surveillance. I had just got out of one prison but now I was thrashing about in an even bigger prison like the Monkey King who could not escape from Buddha's hand. I lived in fear night and day. No one could come to my aid. I had to find work.

It so happened that I had studied calligraphy at the age of 10. So I decided to set up a calligraphy gallery. I wrote to Li Jialian, Wang Jianlin and Sun Yinhuan – CEOs I had written stories about when I was a journalist – requesting their help. In the end, it was only Sun Yinhuan, the head of the Dalian Yida group, who was understanding. He gave me 20,000 yuan. I also contacted the editor of Vanguard, Liu Dawen, who gave me 20,000 Hong Kong dollars.

Then I sold antiques from a stall in Dalian and Tianjin, doing it for a little more than six months, earning just enough to repay the rent and the running costs. As I get on with people easily and was beginning to reestablish contact with old friends, earning money was not my primary

concern and I gave away most of the works of calligraphy in my gallery. So it was no surprise that my financial situation began to deteriorate rapidly.

Fortunately, Zhang Qing, a very well-off TV series actor, came to my aid and got me two Xiali cars. Until then, I had not known how to thank Sun Xuwen, the prison guard who forwarded my letters to my wife in 2001. So I gave him one of these cars.

Among those who also helped me in a disinterested manner were Jing Hong, Yang Xiaodong, Lu Yushun and Wu Ning, Wang Jinli, Li Zhixin, Wang Xiang and above all Li Mu and my college professor, Wang Zhixin. I would also like to thank the famous Shanghai-based human rights lawyer Yan Yiming, Ma Anshan's boss Wang Yanan and all those who bought my calligraphies. Through Asia Weekly reporter Wang Jianmin, the Hong Kong artist Zhang Yun, who is more than 80 years old, sent me a gift of 3,000 yuan and a collection of poems that I will never forget because of the way they condemned the injustice of my imprisonment.

An old gentleman told me that journalist Zhang Taiyan of Suzhou Journal did prison time in 1904 and that price of his calligraphies were now very high. "But it is very regrettable and unfair that, because of the Communist Party of China, no one can know the value of your works," he added.

So I sent my works to Luan Yuemin of Dalian Daily, Mary of Xinshang Journal and Li Mingming of Dalian Evening News, who I had known for a long time. They had all become editors or had key positions in their newspapers and I was disappointed that none of them dared publish anything about my calligraphies.

I was reduced to applying for a job with company based in Dalian that sold sports goods and I was hired as the director's assistant. But, at Bo Xilai's behest, a certain Mr. Liu, the head of the local tax department, sent agents to check the tax returns. Under pressure, I had to resign. I then got a job with a Japanese company but before I had officially begun, a tax department agent came looking for me. The company then had to move to Liaoyang and I offered by resignation. By the start of 2006, I could no longer live in Dalian. That is when I began wandering all over China, earning my living by means of my calligraphies.

I accepted an invitation from Jiateng Longze, the Japanese head of the Shanghai bureau of the newspaper Dumai. I twice went to Shanghai and stayed with Jiateng, who had a place in Xintiandi, Shanghai. It was if we were destined to meet. His assistant, Wang Zhencong of Asia Weekly, knew that I had opened a calligraphy gallery in Dalian and had managed by telephone to get the registration number of my permit from the Office of the Department of Commerce. Finally, Jiateng had been able to make an appointment with me.

But Jianteng's plane was delayed by fog and he arrived two days late. I sent a student I knew to collect him by car. A very curious thing occurred on the way back. There was an accident as they were crossing a viaduct. I think I was the intended target of that accident. It was only by luck that my student was not injured. My meeting with Jiateng was watched by local representatives of the Bureau of National Public Security. Fortunately, the article that was published was very restrained and limited itself to referring to my life as a calligrapher.

But two agents sent me a very serious warning signal. One midday in Dalian, near Nanguanling, I was struck violently by the mirror of a jeep driven by two suspicious-looking individuals wearing leather jackets.

I reported these intimidation attempts to Wang Jianmin, who wrote about them for Asia Weekly in Hong Kong. Thereafter, there were virtually no more incidents of that nature. Jiateng, who

often went to Shanghai, was very familiar with Chinese culture and really like the fact that I was a calligrapher. He introduced me to lots of Japanese clients in Shanghai. He invited me to install my workshop in his home and, above all, he helped me financially.

Thanks to him, I sold lots of my calligraphies and I earned enough to cover my basic outgoings. I remembered the people who helped me in prison and I sent one a well-known brand of leather bag. As I left the post office, I was overwhelmed by a mixture of relief and happiness.

My calligraphies were soon being displayed in the Old Jinjiang Hotel's Japanese restaurant and in Chuanyi restaurant under the Tianyao bridge. Jiateng used the 2008 Chinese New Year to organise my first calligraphy exhibition, which had destiny as its theme. It was a success and received positive reviews in the newspaper Dumai and in many other media. Lots of Japanese ordered my calligraphies. At the same time, Liu Dawen, who had always supported me, continued to give me free advertising in the magazine Vanguard, which increased my clientele. I finally had a regular income.

I was living very well but I could not settle for calligraphy because I was itching to go back to journalism. So I established new contacts. In Zhuhai, I met a journalist called Sun who had a senior position with the newspaper Dagong. She asked me to be her consultant. Although it was badly paid and I had to use a pseudonym, it meant working in Dalian again. Like a fish returning to the ocean, I felt as if I was being reborn.

I attended two meetings of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and, with her, interviewed many officials and heads of companies. I made lots of new friends and started to get reestablished in society.

I realised that China was now even richer than before I went to prison but also, to my great disappointment, more corrupt. And freedom of expression had regressed even further. For example, Sun's articles had to constantly flatter the people she mentioned and to sing the government's praises. And her articles were sometimes censored. She told me she was under a lot of pressure because of the quantity of propaganda the newspaper had to put out.

I do not know if it was because my phone was still tapped but the intelligence services tracked me down again. The person who had offered me the job through my friends told me: "My superiors have done an investigation. You can no longer be a journalist. You must go back to being a calligrapher. I was not surprised. It was bound to have happened sooner or later, given that the news media are a priority surveillance target for the party's agents. A journalist who has been jailed for exposing a case of corruption within the party cannot be allowed to reenter official circles. I could have discovered other cases of corruption. So I left Zhuhai and continued to wander.

Fortunately, my daughter Jiang Xiaoyuan was on the other side of the Pacific Ocean and I was used to my solitude and my freedom. My nature is entirely suited to the life of a tramp. But without a passport, I was trapped in China.

It is not easy being a tramp. I lived in the dormitories of a Nike factory in Qingyuan, in Guangdong province. The director, a Taiwanese who collected calligraphy, was very tolerant and trusting towards me. He strongly advised me against writing about corruption, warning that it could cost me my life. I could not help laughing as I listened.

I then went to Hainan Island, Dongguan, Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Fanyu. In Sanya, on Hainan Island, I made a pilgrimage to see Guanyin (a Buddhist deity) and sold a calligraphy to pay for my three days in a taxi. In Dongguan, I sold a calligraphy to pay to stay in a hotel. In

Guangzhou, I sold two calligraphies for six meals in a Korean restaurant. I quickly realised that the Chinese of southern China love calligraphy. With a brush and ink, I was not going to die of hunger there. I dubbed this trip around the south as “The Pilgrimages of a Wandering Calligrapher.”

In Shenzhen, I again saw my friend of 30 years, the writer Liu Yuanju, and the journalist Xiao Qiu, who was still able to stand at 91. I also had the chance to see Wang Jianmin, who I had not seen for years. He told me that, on 4 December 2000, after my arrest, he wrote an article for Asia Weekly that saved my life. We had not seen each other for so many years. A former bachelor, my friend was now married to a very sweet woman and was the father of two pretty kids. God has rewarded him, I said to myself. I gave him calligraphies of poems I had written in prison. He was very moved, and gave me money to cover my everyday expenses, commenting that the past few years had not been easy for me.

Liu Dawen Kong was waiting for me to visit him in Hong Kong, but the Public Security Bureau refused to issue me a passport. All I could do was phone him before continuing my wanderings.

I travelled the four corners of China for three years. Whether in Yang Liuqing (in Tianjin), in Sanya, at the borders of Heilongjiang province in Hulin, on Wangfujing Avenue in Beijing, at the foot of Mount Tai or in the Tianya Delta – a trail of my calligraphies was left everywhere.

I knew that in 2009 I would recover my civic rights and get a passport, and that sooner or later I would be able to leave China. So I had to be patient. I wrote my memoirs, which came to more than 500,000 words. There was another book entitled “My return from the land of the dead,” about by life after leaving prison. I said I just did large calligraphies, never small ones. To my surprise, lots of people believed me, especially in early February after the exhibition. I even succeeded in deceiving the party’s agents. In reality, I had succeeded in putting into practice a phrase of Confucius I had read in prison: “One must be calm before making a move.”

I am now in a free world where I am revising my biography. At the same time, I continue to write for Vanguard and Reform. I no longer work fulltime for any newspaper but I have become a free journalist even if I have yet to be recognised as one.

At the age of 54, I am conscious of divine will and I have finally realised my dream.

### **Last Part: About press freedom**

Hong Kong and foreign readers who know that I was a journalist for 18 years before being imprisoned for five years, like to ask me if I know what press freedom is and if press freedom exists in China, if I can predict when the press in China will be free... I am not an expert on this subject and I will not attempt to make any big speeches. I will confine myself to giving a few conditions for the existence of press freedom. When the authorities allow free expression, when journalists can freely conduct interviews, express themselves and publish their articles and they are not imprisoned for what they write or remarks they make, only then will we be able to talk about press freedom.

Obviously, journalists owe it to themselves to be honest. This honesty is like a chain that restrains a dancer. Didn’t Rousseau say that “*man is born free but everywhere he is in chains*”?

After I was released on 4 January 2006, I was greeted by my family and friends who gave me more than one hundred articles about my case that came from websites of Hong Kong and

foreign newspapers. Naturally, I have constantly had to thank the people who supported me, but I have always felt I had not done as much as I could have. I only read one article about me that was critical, headlined “Bo Xilai swallows his bitterness”. I threw away all the articles that sang my praises and carefully kept only this one article that recounted my so-called dismissal from the Dalian Daily at the beginning of the 1980s, as well as the embezzlement of more than 800,000 yuan from the newspaper Wen Hui, both entirely invented. But fortunately my colleagues on the Dalian Daily and on Wen Hui are vigilant and can still testify to my good behaviour.

A lawyer friend then told me that I could get a lot of money by suing for defamation. As a joke, I replied that this was what press freedom meant, that thanks to this article I would not get big-headed. After all, I am just an ordinary journalist who had not dreamt of doing anything heroic. And I want to stress that I never took any bribes or was dismissed.

While around one hundred articles approved of what I wrote, one had been critical. I would have liked there to have been more. That is why I have kept it carefully. I do not know who wrote it. One day perhaps I will be able to thank him by giving him an example of my beautiful handwriting!

Praise can corrupt people. But it is the same for governments. A sole political party tends to delight in hearing praise, making any criticism impossible. Inevitably, as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) demonstrates, corruption becomes commonplace and the regime decadent. The CCP does not allow free expression of dissenting points of view, nor give journalists the chance to reveal the truth. It only endeavours to ensure that its leaders are kept in power. The People’s Republic of China has since its foundation in 1949 until the recent arrest of Liu Xiaobo, never stopped sending its dissidents to jail.

Press freedom therefore scarcely exists in China at this time. The only period of freedom for journalists came before the massacre of students on 4 June 1989. But on 4 June they had to pay paid for this freedom with their lives. Chinese journalists are not untouchable. They face constant interference when reporting, cannot express themselves freely and have to resign themselves to singing the praises of the CCP. I won’t even go into the requirement to submit articles to a censorship bureau, or the fear that follows publication of articles about sensitive issues. That is the kind of problem I have spent my life facing up to.

Today, the editorial positions in newspapers on mainland China are virtually indistinguishable. Certainly, there is toleration for minor variations but they must all been in harmony with the tune of the CCP. That is what I call media uniformity. The lying propaganda serves only to mask the countless social problems, certainly not to resolve them. In fact, the impossibility of relaying the feelings and complaints of the people, provoke even more upheavals and social unrest.

The burgeoning demands of these past few years demonstrate the growing importance of Chinese civil society. But in China, the sufferings of the poor struggle to get a hearing because of the lack of freedom. I consider the absence of free expression amounts to removing the *raison d’être* of journalists.

All media are under the control of the CCP because it is the party that decides who runs each newspaper, magazine and television station. It also fixes salaries, bonuses and housing subsidies. Impertinent journalists, who do not praise the CCP as they are expected to, can be demoted, sacked even imprisoned and put on trial. Naturally, in this case all benefits such as social security are also lost. How could one not be afraid of these sanctions, since one has to earn a living, get married have children and bring them up? That is why most of China’s 200,000 journalists are government lap dogs.

The still relatively high growth of the Chinese economy has allowed the CCP to alternate between violence and propaganda to maintain its pressure on the media. The likelihood of any change in the state of the media in the short term is therefore very slim. If there is no transformation of the political regime, we will be reduced to hoping for favours from the CCP. Freedom of information does not fall from heaven. In that case, how can we demand rapid change?

I think that the popular movements for human rights constitute one of the most significant points of pressure. This tiny spark, however small, could genuinely ignite people's determination and force the CCP to change.

However society develops, journalists and the media will certainly play a key role. In the current situation, the most effective thing would be the quick passing of an "information law", which was already sketched out during the 1980s, but which should be revived. Certainly the promulgation of this law will not have any immediate effect, but it will be a major step.

This law will allow the reformists within the CCP to bring China closer to democracy. Even if the law was not perfect, even if it was not subsequently brought in, its mere existence would encourage journalists, in knowing how to protect themselves and claiming their rights. I tried to raise the issue of freedom of expression in China at a conference in early June this year with colleagues with whom I previously shared the same ideas. But they thought I was too moderate, understanding or even full of illusions about the CCP. How could this be? These people left China around 20 years ago, and it seems to me that they have become disconnected and do not understand the current situation.

It is a rare editor or journalist, affiliated to the party, who would want to defy censorship and thus risk losing their job. However, everyone, or practically everyone, applauds the idea of establishing this law. One could therefore discuss the principles, how it will be put into force and monitored. Slowly but surely we could move towards a democratic China. Perhaps miracles could even happen. But you must always keep in mind that China is too large, state power too great, the government too authoritarian and the population too ground down. Also, if you want to set out on the rocky and windy road of free expression, you have to be methodical and tackle the problems head on.

This year, my nightmare has just ended. I have lived in China and in Canada and I feel able to compare the two countries. I have become even more aware of the importance of freedom of expression. The Canadian immigration minister told me in person that I could become a Canadian citizen and investigate corruption in his country...Of course, it was a joke, but it shows that the Canadian media and citizens can all keep a watchful eye on the authorities. Undemocratic regimes cannot have corruption scandals. But a democratic regime like that in Canada does not imprison people for what they write! Obviously, press freedom has to be legislated for. A real journalist would not make up reports or defame someone because he would be at risk of legal action.

As a result, freedom of the press can be fully achieved if the justice system is independent and can guarantee the freedom of journalists. But in China, individuals who should be defended are not and those who should have action taken against them do not. For example, while honest journalists are arrested corrupt journalists are paid handsomely for not revealing any scandals. Stating principles is not enough, there must be action. And without delay. We should work with all our strength to improve China. In this way, our lives will not have been meaningless!