

From the “Tiananmen Massacre” to the “Lhasa Protests”

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To mark the 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests, here is an article first published by Global Research April 10, 2008.

As I read and watched the media coverage of Tibetan “protesters” unleashing their “pent-up” anger against Han civilians in Lhasa on March 14, 2008, I sensed sympathetic sentiment from the reporters who portrayed violent acts as a “test” to “Beijing’s grip” on Tibet, while the victims were almost invisible in their coverage.

Unbalanced coverage, I thought. I looked online and found eyewitness accounts by Western tourists. They described “mobs” gone “crazy” in “riots”, and showed videos of civilians being chased, stoned and beaten. I felt sympathy to the victims.

Then, I came upon a video clip by CTV, a national television network in Canada, showing dark-faced Nepalese police beating Tibetan demonstrators with sticks while a Tibetan talked about Chinese suppressing protests. I felt such grafting a gross fabrication.

It didn’t appear to be a mistake as I found similar fabrications in other mainstream newspapers and TV programs in the West. I began to wonder: *Is there a Western conspiracy to smear China? Or this is merely a reflection of the West’s sentiment towards the Tibet issue?*

Either way, my trust in the Western media’s fairness and objectiveness began to waver. I wonder if I had been deceived by its report of the “Tiananmen Massacre”.

While a graduate student at the University of Toronto, I coordinated, immediately after the “Massacre”, the campaign to fax reports with pictures of the killed in Beijing to other parts of China, to tell people the truth.

My parents in China had warned me to not participate in any political movement since my father had been jailed for four years without a trial during the Cultural Revolution and everyone in my family had been implicated.

But I would not return to China. I had been driven out of China by the government’s declaration to the world that “homosexuals do not exist in China.”

For my fellow students “massacred” on Tiananmen Square, I must do my part to spread the Western media’s report of truth to other parts of China, safely from Canada.

One of our fax receivers faxed back to us to thank us for telling the truth. Then, they told us

to stop faxing because guards had been posted by fax machines. The Chinese government maintained that no one died on Tiananmen Square.

I disbelieved it.

Now, after witnessing the distorted coverage of the Lhasa riots by the Western media, I wasn't so sure if the "Massacre" that had been told to me was true.

I researched online and found a 20-segment video documentary in Chinese. It chronicled the Tiananmen student movement with interviews of the student leaders and other leading figures on Tiananmen Square. It seemed credible. It showed facts that I did not know before.

Some hunger strikers actually ate. I had seen a Chinese government's video showing some hunger strikers including the student leader Wuer Kaixi eating in a restaurant, and I had dismissed it, partly because I hadn't seen it in the Western media's coverage.

There was no democracy on Tiananmen Square. Whoever controlled the loud speaker spoke on behalf of everyone. Factions of students fought to control the loud speaker. There were almost three to four attempted coups daily.

After the government made one after another concession to the students' demands, on May 27, 1989, a coalition of the student leaders and supporting workers and intellectuals agreed that the students would leave Tiananmen Square on May 30 so that they could, as student leader Wang Dang had long advocated, continue to pursue grassroots democracy on campuses.

But radical student leaders changed their minds and decided to stay on the Square. One of them was Commander-in-Chief Chai Ling.

Chai Ling had confided to an American journalist: "what we are actually hoping for is bloodshed, for the moment when the government has no choice but to brazenly butcher the people... I can't say all this to my fellow students. I can't tell them straight out that we must use our blood and our lives to call on the people to rise up."

"Are you going to stay in the Square yourself?" asked the interviewer.

"No, I won't."

"Why?"

"... I want to live."

That explained why, in the wee hours of June 4th, when troops moved in from the outskirts of Beijing to Tiananmen, shooting at civilians blocking the roads along the way, Chai Ling insisted that students stay at the Square.

However, a popular Taiwan-born singer Hou Dejian who had been on hunger strike on the Square to show solidarity with the students since June 2, brokered a permission at about 4:30am through a military commander to allow students to leave peacefully.

"We filed out of the Square from the southeast corner. I was near the end of the line," said Liang Xiaoyan, a lecturer of Beijing Foreign Studies University.

(The following day, I began coordinating the fax campaign to tell people in other parts of China about “Tiananmen Massacre”.)

“Some people said that two hundred died in the Square and other claimed that two thousand died. There were also stories of tanks running over students who were trying to leave.” Hou Dejian said in the interview, “I have to say that I did not see any of that. I don’t know where those people did. I myself was in the Square until six thirty in the morning.”

“I kept thinking,” he continued, “Are we going to use lies to attack an enemy who lies?”

Tiananmen Massacre never happened! My heart pounded. I have faxed lies to China. No, this can’t be true. This documentary, in Chinese, is probably made by the Chinese government.

At the end of the film, I saw the credits:

Produced and edited by

Richard Gordon

Carma Hinton

I felt that I would be dealing with my conscience for the rest of my life. Yes, many people died in Beijing on June 4th. A former classmate of mine saw a man falling off his bicycle after being shot when all of them were running away from Tiananmen Square. But there was no massacre on the Square.

I began to see the wisdom in my parents’ warning. True, in any political confrontation, the opposing sides would be tempted to use lies to win justice, and naïve participants would be caught in between. To blindly believe in either side would be dangerous.

I wondered what if the Western media had reported the Tiananmen student movement with a critical eye, instead of with romanticized sympathy. Perhaps the Chinese students on Tiananmen Square, who had admired the West’s democracy so much to have erected the “Liberty of Goddess” statue on Tiananmen Square, might have followed the more practical voices of Wang Dang and Hou Dejian to leave Tiananmen Square and continue their democratic movement at grassroots level on campuses. The bloodshed on the roads leading to Tiananmen Square on June 4th, perhaps, could have been avoided.

Western media has a powerful influence on those who long for democracy. Such was the case in Tiananmen in 1989. Mainstream media is powerful in influencing the underdogs in Western societies. Such was also the case in 1989. I, like many Chinese students in the West, felt a boost of self-worth when the media gave our demonstrations supporting students in Beijing affirmative coverage. Not that long ago, we had felt being looked down upon because of our smelly food, poor English and dirty Chinatowns. Suddenly, we were looked at with respect.

It is not too late for the media to report on Tibet issues with a critical eye, which will ultimately benefit the Tibetans, the Han Chinese, the Olympics and the world.

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