

THE DIARY OF A PEASANT ADVOCATE

BY YU MEISUN

A former law draftsman for China's State Council, Yu Meisun was arrested in early 1994 on charges of leaking state secrets after he allegedly provided confidential documents to a journalist, and after a closed trial was sentenced to three years in prison. Following his release from prison, Yu became a senior researcher at Beijing's East-West Research Center in 2000. He now heads up a law office in Beijing.

In recent months Yu Meisun has been providing legal advice to peasants displaced by a dam in Hebei Province and resettled in a village on the outskirts of Tangshan. The peasants claim that funds set aside to compensate them were misappropriated by Tangshan's Municipal Party Secretary, Zhang He. Early this year more than 11,000 of the displaced peasants signed a petition calling for Zhang He to be recalled as their elected representative to the National People's Congress. Since then, the peasant leading the recall campaign, Zhang Youren, has been placed under increasing official pressure, including detention, forced medical treatment and 24-hour surveillance. In addition, outsiders who have been offering their assistance to the Tangshan peasants, including Yu Meisun, legal scholar Li Boguang, sociologist Zhang Yaojie and journalist Zhao Yan have also become targets of official intimidation tactics.

Following is a portion of Yu Meisun's online journal, which he posted on the Internet at the end of June and early July to keep the public aware of developments in the Tangshan peasant controversy.

Over the past four months I have been helping the Tangshan farmers present a petition to the National People's Congress. So far, our efforts have caused no damage to Zhang He, whose recall we're demanding. Instead, Tangshan police have launched a formal investigation against the peasant Zhang Youren, who is presenting the petition, on charges of slander. The police have also spearheaded an investigation against Zhao Yan, Li Boguang and myself, with the situation worsening on a daily basis. On July 2, I spotted plain-clothed Tangshan police officers watching over the entrance of my building again.

Zhang Youren is charged and detained.

Shortly before midnight on June 30, I received an urgent telephone call from Zhang Youren.

Back in late February, Tangshan police had rounded up ten peasant representatives who were in Beijing with Zhang Youren to present the National People's Congress with their "Signed Petition to Demand the Recall of Tangshan Municipal Party Secretary Zhang He as a Delegate to the National People's Congress." In that instance, Zhang Youren and I had been lucky enough to escape the dragnet¹. But 20 days later, police managed to monitor a phone call Zhang Youren made to his home from a public phone located near his hiding place, and he was tracked down and forcibly returned to Tangshan. After interrogation at the Fengnan District Public Security Bureau, Zhang Youren was sent back home that night under house arrest. Subsequently, Zhang Yaojie and I both called Zhang Youren to find out how he was doing, and he was also interviewed by a reporter, as a result of which he was admitted to the Fengnan District Hospital the next day for "treatment."

What looked like a measure taken for Zhang Youren's welfare was in fact a means of preventing him from making contact with the outside world and continuing his participation in the recall campaign. His treatment at the hospital was appalling, and more

than 20 local officials and police officers watched over him in shifts around the clock. Zhang Youren, who had been a stable diabetic, suffered a serious deterioration in his condition as a result of his treatment. In response to Zhang Youren's complaint, the police transferred him to a PSB contracted hospital, Fengnan District Central Hospital, in late April. By June 18, Zhang Youren had recovered, but his body was covered with track marks from countless injections. He was released from the hospital under the supervision of the police, who interrogated him at his home and kept him under constant surveillance. By then he had already been deprived of his freedom for 120 days, longer than is authorized under any legal process.

Zhang Youren told me over the phone: "I was confined in the hospital for a long time by the police. My nine mu field of crops was ruined, and now I'm trying to make up for it with a late crop of corn. At 10:00 this morning, while I was working in the field, Commander Xue of the Tangshan Municipal Public Security Bureau criminal division and the chief of the Municipal Public Security Bureau came with a group of others and took me to Fengnan District Central Hospital for interrogation. The police said Yu Meisun, Zhao Yan and Li Boguang all have criminal records, and they told me to disclose their crimes. The Tangshan Municipal Public Security Bureau's deputy director, surnamed Zhou, also told me these three cases had already passed through the security division and safety division, and were about to be filed for investigation. I angrily replied, 'Whether they have criminal records or not has nothing to do with us. These three people are working to protect the rights of us peasants. What am I supposed to disclose?'"

Zhang Youren also said that the police had read my article, "Record of a Great Escape" on the Internet, and through it had learned that I had edited and finalized the petition. They demanded that Zhang Youren admit that he had drafted the petition. Zhang replied, "It wasn't drafted by me, but even if it was, that's not against the law". The police became angry and threateningly told him, "You won't disclose other people's crimes, and won't admit your own crime. We now declare you under formal investigation for slander, and hereby issue this 'Notice of House Arrest.'" Zhang refused to sign the notice.

It was already noon, but criminal division commander Xue did not allow Zhang Youren to go home. Zhang Youren, covered with dirt from his labor in the fields, rejected the meal brought to him by the police and declared a hunger strike. Then he slammed his head against the wall in a protest suicide bid. Around five in the afternoon the police finally escorted him home. Two police cars remained stationed in front of Zhang Youren's home. The one in front of the house was a van with the license plate JiB-51519, and in back was a sedan with the license number JiB-0180 Jin. There were three police officers in each car, and they watched the house in six-hour shifts around the clock. On a rainy day, while the police were confined to their cars, Zhang Youren took the opportunity to call Zhang Yaojie and me with a cell phone his son had previously hidden in his home. Zhang's home phone, 0315-8156010, had been disconnected for a few days previously, and was now tapped, and he had already had two cell phones confiscated by the police.

Zhang Youren said the village of Tangshan had recently been named a "Model Village of Civilization and Ecology" for the entire province. Hebei Province Secretary Bai Keming came to Tangshan and held an exchange event attended by Party secretaries and governors from all of the province's counties. Tangshan's Municipal Party Secretary, Zhang He, presented himself as the most progressive of the leaders, who competed to have their pictures taken with him. Emboldened by this enormous boost to his reputation, Zhang He came back and chastised the protestors. In fact, Zhang Youren said, "This village is full of open sewers and rubbish piles. How in the world does it deserve to be named a 'Model Village of Civilization and Ecology'!?" Indeed, when I visited Zhang Youren earlier this year I found that village very dirty and messy, a real dump. Late in June, a farmer from Tangshan excitedly told me that Zhang He had not appeared on the TV news for more than ten days, and that it seemed that he would soon be finished for good. I couldn't have imagined that Zhang He, with his weakened power, would even more assiduously cultivate his image.

Zhang Youren said that another reason for his detention by police was that reporters from *Asahi Shimbun* and *Kyodo News Agency* had interviewed Dong Da and other representatives of the displaced peasants in Beijing, and reporters were preparing to visit Qinhuangdao and Tangshan. When local officials learned of this, they became frantically worried that Zhang Youren might fuel a new explosion.

Zhang Youren complained, "Our constitution has been changed and revised many times. The amendment passed by the National People's Congress in March states that 'human rights are protected by the constitution,' and that there will be compensation for land expropriation, but when we insist on our lawful rights and demand the recall of a delegate to the National People's Congress who doesn't represent our interests, all we get is harsh retaliation from the police. What kind of justice is this? Every one of those police officers and government officials who keep us under surveillance gets an extra allowance of 30 yuan per day. But we're not only deprived of the compensation due to us, we're detained on top of it! All this just proves that officials have privilege without being bound by law, while the people have no rights and no redress for injustice."

Zhang Youren repeatedly pleaded with me to report the misery of Tangshan's displaced villagers to Chairman Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and Prime Minister Wu Bangguo, and find a way to help them. I told him, "I can only publish your situation on the Internet and hope that the relevant officials will become aware of it and do something."

I sternly warned Zhang Youren against hitting his head against the wall, even though I fully commiserated with him. I said, "When I was poisoned by gas that time, I felt so ill that I violently hit my head against the wall, and I got a concussion as a result. My memory has weakened and my brain is dazed, and I have not recovered even up to now. We've both come close to death, so we should cherish our lives that much more. You must not cause yourself any further injury."

He said, "In the spring of 1998, during the Provincial People's Congress meeting, I was arrested for petitioning, and I

refused to eat for seven days in detention. After eight years of petitioning, all I've gotten for my trouble is even more violation of my rights. I've had enough."

I said, "If you're injured or killed, 40,000 displaced people, including 18,000 from Qinhuangdao, will have even less hope of their rights being protected."

Lawyer Zhang Sizhi takes the defense

In the four months since we presented the petition, Zhang He has suffered no ill effects, while Zhang Youren has been charged with slander, and Zhao Yan, Li Boguang and I have been targeted. Tangshan police went after us, and Zhang Youren and I fled in a panic and narrowly escaped with our lives. After my near death experience, nothing in this world can scare me any more. What I fear is not the situation itself, but the trouble it causes. So I have steeled myself to react calmly, to be prepared and to minimize loss.

I contacted the great lawyer Zhang Sizhi immediately, since he had expressed concern with my previous escape and injury. When he realized the terrible situation the four of us were in, he became very angry. I pleaded with him to represent us if we were arrested, and he agreed immediately. I subsequently sent him my power of attorney. The fact that one of our country's greatest legal authorities, now 78 years old, was willing to bestir himself in this perilous time made me feel awed but also regretful.

I immediately informed Zhao Yan of the situation. He said, "According to the provisions in Article 246 of the Criminal Law and its legal interpretation, slander is one of the personal legal complaints that are directly accepted and heard by the court. Based on this, Zhang He has personally filed with the court to sue Zhang Youren for slander, and Zhang Youren can likewise file a countersuit against Zhang He for slander. The Public Security apparatus can't intervene." He added, "By acting as a pawn of Zhang He's evil-doing, the Tangshan Municipal Public Security Bureau has violated the clear demand of the Minister of Public Security, Zhou Yongkang, who has ordered police to steadfastly protect people's legal rights and interests, respect and guarantee human rights and refrain from insulting human dignity. Although the Supreme People's Procuratorate in May announced a nation-wide campaign to investigate cases of human rights violations through abuse of power, so far all we've seen is a lot of thunder and not a drop of rain. Zhang He uses the Tangshan Municipal Public Security Bureau as his personal lackeys and bodyguards to suppress the people's boiling anger and resolve his personal crisis, and has reduced Tangshan's Party machine to little more than an underworld gang."

Zhao Yan also said, "A Tangshan farmer by the name of Hao Shuqing who reported the illegal and criminal behavior of officials such as Zhang He and Yao Zhimin² was arrested and charged with slander half a year ago. Despite the fact that he had an 80-year-old mother with no one else to care for her, they sentenced him to reeducation through labor for eighteen months. Hao Shuqing did not accept this ruling, and appealed to the Reeducation Through Labor Committee alleging an administrative violation of rights. A court hearing was held in his prison cell on June 25. I went there to represent Hao

Shuqing, but the prison refused to admit me. I referred a reporter from *China Reform* surnamed Wang to attend the hearing. The police said, 'Your reference letter from *China Reform* is invalid. You have to obtain approval from the Municipal Secretariat's Public Relations Bureau.' When we went to the Municipal Secretariat's Public Relations Bureau, a director surnamed Na said, 'This needs to be submitted to the State Council for approval.' If the news media are subjected to such harsh control, people will never enjoy their right to know. Once when I was passing by the main entrance of the Tangshan Municipal Government building, I saw hundreds of laid-off workers protesting the loss of their livelihoods. I stopped for a minute to observe the protests, and several plain-clothed police officers immediately surrounded me."

Zhao Yan continued, "Since early this year, displaced people from Tangshan and Qinhuangdao here in Hubei, and Fu'an City and Minhou County in Fujian Province whose rights have long been violated have been demanding the recall of their Party Secretaries and mayors, making 2004 a landmark year for peasant activism. But these campaigns have been unlawfully suppressed by local police. The corrupt officials who are the targets of the people's boiling grievances haven't been affected at all, and they continue to swagger down the street, deploying police power to force peasant advocates into a cul-de-sac. This will ultimately lead the peasants to despair of any method but rebellion, and we'll see a new peasant revolution. In a couple of days, I'll go to Tangshan to visit Zhang Youren. Let's see if Zhang He has the nerve to arrest and charge me!"

I contacted the constitutional scholar Li Boguang. He said, "If Zhang He wants to speed his fall, he can trample on the constitution and laws and send his police to Beijing to arrest the three of us. He could end the whole matter by immediately paying out the overdue compensation to the peasants in accordance with Premier Wen's instructions to govern by rule of law."

The three of us shared a bitter hatred for the same enemy, as well as a resolve for true justice, and a willingness to heroically face imprisonment rather than compromise our principles.

I packed some clean clothes to take with me if the Tangshan police came for me. I had a number of friends willing to take me in if I had to leave my home.

More police surround Zhang Youren's home

On the afternoon of July 1, Zhang Youren called me again to inform me that his house was now surrounded by three more sedans with license plate numbers JiB-7266, JiB-7748 and JiC-B0641. The last car was occupied by Wang Changchun and Li Guo'an from the Xuge Village PSB branch. Adding in the two cars that had been there since the day before, that made a total of five police cars at Zhang's home. With an average of three people in each car, multiplied by four shifts per day, there were some 60 people guarding Zhang Youren. I reflected with amusement that Zhang Youren enjoyed a Public Security bodyguard detail on a scale possibly unrivaled even by Chairman Jiang.

Setting aside the security problems created by so many police officers removed from regular duties, I made a quick economic calculation of the cost to the residents of Tangshan.



Peasant protests are increasingly targeting corruption and the inequities of rural development. Photo: Reuters

Those police officers receive an additional allowance of 30 yuan per day, or a total of 1,800 yuan per day for 60 people, for a monthly total of 54,000 yuan. Why not just pay the compensation due to the displaced reservoir residents? Instead, the people's police take taxpayers' money to trample on the taxpayers. However, those police officers might well be caught between the two parties. Regardless of wind or rain or scorching sun, or verbal abuse from Zhang Youren and his sympathizers, the police have to maintain their watch, or face the wrath of their superiors if during a lapse in their attention Zhang Youren should escape and succeed in delivering the petition to Beijing. The police might well be cursing Zhang He for all the trouble he was causing, and for preventing them from returning to their own homes.

What in the world happened to Tangshan? For the time being, let us not talk about Zhang He's ruthless perversion of the law, or about the police cooperation in his debased treatment of human life. Let us consider the patience and perseverance of China's peasant class. This is where the fundamental problem lies. China is an agrarian society, and the farmers' problems are China's fundamental problem. During my recent interaction with the peasants, I have deeply felt their forbearance and simplicity. As long as they have enough to eat they will slave away regardless of the unfairness of their lot. The ability to survive is where they place all their hopes. This is the forbearance of the Chinese peasant. The Tangshan villagers' recall campaign has continued for eight years. In these eight years, boys have become men, men have entered middle-age

and middle-aged men have become elderly. In these eight years, Zhang Youren's family has been reduced from a life of comfort to deep poverty, and Zhang himself has been reduced from an outstanding village official to a criminal suspect. Zhang Youren firmly believes that the people's petition is the solution, and he believes that when a father dies, a son will carry on, and when the son dies there will be a grandson, and that sometime in the future, however distant, officials such as Zhang He will get their just desserts.

Zhang Youren's current situation epitomizes the reality of life for those displaced from Tangshan's reservoir district. After 20 years of working in the legal profession, I still hope the rule of law can be more than empty words on paper.

Tangshan police on patrol in Beijing

On July 1, I contacted Zhang Youren and let him know that the great lawyer Zhang Sizhi had agreed to take up our defense case. I told him to send over his power of attorney, and gave him my home address so his detention would not prevent him from completing the power of attorney.

On the morning of July 2, Zhang Youren telephoned me and said, "You're too well known in Tangshan, and I'm afraid that if I mail something to you the police and postal authorities will confiscate it. I've sent my son Zhang Guodong to deliver it to you in person—he's already left and will arrive in Beijing sometime in the afternoon." I arranged for young Zhang to stay with me for two days so I could finish writing my legal brief and send it back with him.

Over the past two days I had been busy writing up the urgent phone call Zhang Youren made to me on the evening of June 30. Because of paralysis resulting from my earlier gas poisoning and stroke, my brain was weak, and my writing was very slow.

Around 3:00 that afternoon, I received a phone call from Zhang Guodong saying he'd just left the Beijing Xizhimen subway station. I told him to walk half a block west and pay one yuan for a ticket on the #601 bus to the Capital Normal University, after which he should continue walking another 200 meters to my home.

About 20 minutes later, Zhao Yan telephoned me and said, "There are Tangshan police vehicles outside your building." I anxiously demanded, "Are you anywhere near my home? Zhang Youren's son should be here at any minute. What should we do?" Fear addled my brain. He said, "I'm not at your house, I'm in my office. Go out and have a look, and if the police vehicles are still there, phone me back."

I forced myself to calm down, then hurried to the main entrance and asked the security guard, Xiao Zhang, who during the previous police surveillance had refused the "service fee" offered by Tangshan police. He said, "I haven't seen any Tangshan vehicles." I went out on the road to look, and finally spotted a new black Audi sedan (license number JiB-C0659) with a Tangshan registration parked across the street. The front of the car displayed a new Beijing traffic pass dated July 27. The car door was open, but I didn't see any passengers. About five meters away, a man aged about 30 and wearing a black round-necked shirt stood and watched me with studied nonchalance. I was stunned and returned to the building to ask Xiao Zhang about it. He said, "That car has been parked there a long time already." I rushed back home and telephoned Zhao Yan and asked him, "How did you know I was under surveillance? And how did the Tangshan police know that young Zhang would be coming to my house so they could lay in wait for him?" He said, "It's easy to anticipate, your phone is tapped. The Tangshan police have sent five vehicles, and the bureau chief himself is here."

I anxiously telephoned Zhang Youren and learned that young Zhang wasn't carrying a mobile phone, so there was no way I could warn him off. I could only go to the #610 bus stop to wait for him. I had never seen young Zhang, but plainclothes police officers knew him and knew me—what was I to do? I had already exposed myself when I went out to look at the Tangshan vehicle, and as soon as I went out, a plainclothes officer would follow me and arrest young Zhang. I was as nervous as an ant on a hot wok, and my brain started playing scenes from movies where Communist underground agents arrange to meet somewhere and are discovered by Kuomintang or Japanese agents and have to engage in a battle of strength and wits to survive. I could not allow someone to be arrested while coming to me for legal assistance! Imagining a fight to the death, I armed myself with a vegetable knife—unfortunately I don't own a gun. But after thinking it through carefully, I had to ask myself whether young Zhang and I really had a chance against a group of well-built plainclothes police officers, and what would happen to me if I were seriously

injured again. In any case, my hand weapon would be nothing against them, and would only subject me to arrest and very likely imprisonment on charges of resisting arrest. I recalled how the underground Party agents had outsmarted the Kuomintang agents with disguise, and decided it was best to use my intelligence against the enemy. So I put down my vegetable knife and took off my light-colored sweatshirt and shorts and changed into a dark sweatshirt and trousers, adding a yellow sun hat and a jacket.

At 3:30 I casually walked out of the main entrance, and noticed that another black luxury sedan (license JiB-7177, according to my faulty memory) had joined the first one parked imposingly beside the entrance. The inconvenience cause to others suggested that they were sealing off the building entrance to arrest me. Quaking at the thought of a major arrest operation, I steeled myself in my disguise and walked casually to the #601 bus stop. I noticed a number of black-clad, empty-handed men along the road, glancing vigilantly in every direction, and knew they must be plainclothes police officers. The area within 100 meters of my building entrance had become a police dragnet. I made a point of drawing close to a couple of the plainclothes officers and even pausing to look at them, but they didn't seem to recognize me. I continued on my way to the plaza outside the main entrance to the Capital Normal University, which was crowded with students during the term-end exam period. There were many parents who had driven up to meet students, and their cars formed a long line in front of the campus. I posed as a parent and joined the crowd, and it seemed that no one was following me. Then I turned sharply and headed for the #601 bus stop around 150 meters away.

I went to a public phone booth and called Zhao Yan to tell him the situation was urgent and that young Zhang would have to flee. Zhao Yan said that if it was possible, I should have young Zhang run to his place.

During this extremely tense juncture, Zhang Youren kept calling my cell phone and asking about his son, seriously affecting my ability to maintain a low profile. Anxious over the possibility of drawing the notice of the plainclothes officers, I blew my top and gave him a good scolding. In any case, the battery capacity of my old cell phone was limited, and after a few calls I would be out of power and no longer able to notify young Zhang to run to Zhao Yan's place. I asked, "What is Xiao Zhang wearing?" Zhang Youren said, "He's in blue." I asked, "What style?" He answered, "He's in blue." I asked again, "Is he in a shirt or sweats?" He thought for a minute and then replied once more, "He's in blue." It appeared that his anxiety had affected his brain. With nothing to go on but the color blue, I warned him not to telephone me again.

I arrived at the #601 bus stop and looked back at the area surrounding the Capital Normal University. Few pedestrians braved the blazing sun. I couldn't detect any plainclothes officers—it appeared they'd all been deployed elsewhere. Two #601 buses arrived, but none of the passengers was dressed in blue. I approached the bus to inquire, but then restrained myself. I was numb with fright.

In order to be less conspicuous, I went to a small eatery

near the bus stop and watched out the glass door, but didn't see anything suspicious. I was near the Linglonggang hutong, which was quite well known for the way one hutong joined another with many residences. I was very familiar with this neighborhood, and would be able to bring young Zhang into the hutong and hide in someone's home. It would be much safer than grabbing a cab and being pursued by police sedans.

They had tapped my phone and knew everything about my meeting with young Zhang, and had sent their officers 400 kilometers to Beijing stand guard and prepare for arrest. But their overlooking my instructions over the telephone regarding the #601 bus was truly a gift from Heaven that might allow us to escape. It looked as if the Tangshan police were at a disadvantage off their home turf, and that it might be a case of "the local snake defeating the dragon from afar," and my heart raced with excitement. At the same time, I felt a sort of pity for the defeat the police faced after such a long journey.

Suddenly my cell phone rang. Young Zhang said that he had gotten off the bus but couldn't find my building, and was now at the phone booth outside the entrance to the Capital Normal University. I excitedly told him, "Stay where you are, I'll come over right now and get you. There are police here, don't come to my home." Previous visitors had also become lost on their way to my home, and I'd been obliged to go out and meet them. In this case, the opportunity to evade the police at my home was again a gift of Heaven. The east entrance to the Capital Normal University was two bus stops away, and there were also the north and south entrances, and I couldn't be sure young Zhang had not misdirected me. If I took too long he might lose patience and do something that would complicate matters. The best thing would be for me to return home and fetch my bicycle. So I put on my jacket, removed my hat and took off my thick glasses to change my appearance again. Without my glasses I was half blind, and stumbled my way home, unable to see if there were still any cars outside the entrance.

Back at home I changed into a bright colored jogging suit and a new pair of pants, as well as switching to a purple sun hat and putting my glasses back on. After looking around I set off on my bike. The luxury sedan that had been parked at the entrance earlier (because of its quality, I suspect it was the bureau chief's car) was gone, probably parked somewhere nearby. But I saw another black Audi sedan (the license number started JiB-5, but I didn't catch the last three numbers), and this one was moving, so it was capable of overtaking me, which was even more frightening. Of the five cars Zhao Yan had mentioned, I had already seen three, which meant there must be two others nearby that I hadn't detected yet. In order to avoid being followed, I turned into a small hutong and then back out again into another street, entering the Capital Normal University by its north entrance. The entrance was blocked to motorized traffic, and even a helicopter, not to mention an Audi sedan, would have had difficulty following me onto the campus.

I took a turn around the university's east entrance, but couldn't find young Zhang. I then went to the south entrance, which was 200 meters from my home, but he wasn't there either. I went back once more to the north and east entrances,

but there was still no sign of him, and I became alarmed. I telephoned the phone booth, and a young woman answered and said young Zhang had left long ago. It turned out he had called from Beijing Normal University, which was 10 kilometers from my home. Young Zhang had made a mistake, and now he had been scared off. I had no means of telling him to take his materials to Zhao Yan, but at least he wouldn't come looking for me again—fools have their own luck, and it was best to let him go. I felt I'd been released from a burden, and uttered a prayer of thanks.

Improving the capabilities of the police has been a disaster for ordinary people.

As I pedaled my way home, I came across the Tangshan cars again. The car parked near the entrance to my building (JiB-C0695) was still there, but I couldn't see the bureau chief's car, and the black Audi sedan (JiB-5XXX) was still driving slowly back and forth. The police officer inside occasionally shot a glance at me on my beat-up old bike. I hoped he would notice me so I could keep them preoccupied here. But I didn't dare take out my camera for fear it would be confiscated.

At the public phone booth I telephoned Zhao Yan and told him what had happened, and we both regretted that we wouldn't be able to obtain the documents.

By the time I got home it was already 4:30. I had survived yet another contest, and although only a little more than an hour had passed, in my anxiety under the eyes of the plain-clothes police, it seemed even longer and more perilous than the last time I'd fled. Luckily, all possible dangers had been evaded, and the crisis was past. I let out a long sigh of relief, and only then realized that my clothes were soaked with sweat, both from the 35 degree Celsius weather and from the cold sweat of fear—I had a real feeling of having gone to the end of the earth and back. My bed was piled with the clothes I'd worn and discarded.

I had just sat down when my cell phone rang again. Young Zhang was still waiting for me at the eastern entrance of the Beijing Normal University. I told him he was far from my home, and gave him Zhao Yan's cell phone number. I instructed him to go to Tsinghua University, which was relatively close, and from there to go to Zhao Yan. I emphasized that the police were still around my home, and he must on no account come here.

Then I immediately went out and called Zhao Yan from a public phone booth, telling him to expect young Zhang.

We had successfully evaded the police, and I uttered another prayer.

Back at home I picked up my camera, and from behind the iron railing in the courtyard of my building I used a telephoto lens to photograph the Audi (JiB-C0695) parked across the street. Unfortunately I wasn't able to photograph the license plate.

Back at home I took a drink of water, and after a short rest packed my camera into my pocket and went out again with the intention of photographing all three cars. But once I went out on

my bike I saw the cars were gone. It was possible that they'd listened in on my cell phone conversation with young Zhang and had rushed off to grab him. I was suddenly filled with terror, and quickly telephoned Zhao Yan from the phone booth. Zhao Yan said he'd already been in contact with young Zhang and was about to go and meet him. He urged me not to worry and assured me that he would not let the Tangshan police grab him. After that, Zhao Yan switched off his cell phone. It is said that the Tangshan police have fitted out their vehicles with satellite position locators. I recalled that Saddam Hussein's son Udi had been killed because the American and British forces had been able to trace his location when he made a call on his cell phone.

Zhao Yan had once worked as a police officer and was extremely savvy, and his uncanny abilities had saved me on more than one occasion. But if the Tangshan police decided to challenge him, he might fail miserably.

The Tangshan police who had chased me like a mouse into his hole had evaporated, and I felt somewhat at a loss. There is an old saying, "A genuine opponent is your only true friend." I'd had a notion of inviting the police officers who had been sweltering outside all day to come back to my home for a glass of water, to talk things over and resolve the confusion. If I gave them all the articles Zhang Yaojia, Li Boguang and I had written regarding the Tangshan election recall, they wouldn't have to go back empty-handed, and perhaps it would lead them to drop the charges against Zhang Youren.

Improving the capabilities of the police has been a disaster for ordinary people.

I observed that the Tangshan cars that came to my home this time were shiny black new Audis, and they were not merely parked in front of the building, but were patrolling the area and prepared for action, with movements more covert and adroit than last time. In comparison, the old sedan that had been parked in front of my door last time had four plainclothes police officers sleeping in it in broad daylight, making it very conspicuous.

It appeared that in order to protect his position as a People's Congress delegate and prevent a recall vote, Zhang He was willing to deploy a considerable amount of human and material resources from the Tangshan police. He had established a world-class rapid response anti-riot squad that could confine petitioning villagers to a no-man's land and prevent so-called "unexpected incidents." The cost of this massive operation to monitor and suppress the villagers over an extended period was enormous. Zhang He, who considered himself clever and omnipotent, was foolish beyond measure. He had already violated Article 254 of the Criminal Law, which states, "Workers of state organs who abuse their authority by retaliating against or framing accusers, petitioners, critics or informants, in the name of conducting official business, are to be sentenced to two years or less in prison or put under criminal detention. If the case is serious, they are to be sentenced to two to seven years in prison."

It would be better for Zhang He to return the compensation funds due to the villagers; in this way the government's record could be cleaned up and the practical issues resolved, and Zhang He's term of office could become a benefit to his juris-

diction. The villagers would be able to tolerate their officials enjoying a lavish lifestyle while they remained poor, but taking it a step further and backing the peasants into a corner only exacerbated social contradictions and class conflict, causing ordinary administrative problems to become legal problems, and eventually transform into major social issues and even political issues.

What society most lacks now is for those in power and the judicial authorities to administer the Party for the common good, and to serve the people with a genuine concern for the future wellbeing of mankind. Only under such conditions can officials and the people enjoy dialogue, consensus and resolution of disputes to mutually beneficial ends.

Since 1979 the Party and the government have deployed vast quantities of manpower and material resources to build up an enormous political system, which instead of preserving social order often accomplishes exactly the opposite, exacerbating social conflict and resulting in mountains being made out of mole hills. Reading the history of the Party's early peasant revolutionary movement or the *Water Margin* leads one to deep reflection.

In the *Spring and Autumn Annals* [Lü Shi Chun Qiu] it is written: "If the soup is boiling over, one must first address the fire." In facing the steaming wrath of the people, the only effective solution is to run the Party for the common good and administer the government on behalf of the people, protecting the basic rights of the majority, and acting appropriately to resolve social contradictions.

Translated by Akiko Kageyama and Stacy Mosher

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A translation of an earlier segment of Yu Meisun's diary, along with more material on the Tangshan peasant controversy, is available on the Web site of Three Gorges Probe at: <http://www.threegorgesprobe.org/tgp/index.cfm?DSP=content&ContentID=9695>

1. Yu Meisun describes this incident in an earlier segment of his online diary. An English translation of his account can be read on the Web site of Three Gorges Probe: www.threegorgesprobe.org/tgp/index.cfm?DSP=content&ContentID=9695.
2. A Party official in Qianan City.