

# A Tempered Heart: Valentine's Days in a Chinese Odyssey

by Lizhi He (March 2016)

## Part I: A Valentine's Day in the US: No Enemy

Being a native Chinese, I had no knowledge of the Valentine's Day until in February 1992 when I was visiting the US for the first time as a member of Chinese engineering team working on a project in northeast China. A Milwaukee-based company was the contracted equipment vendor for the project. The team was composed of a few engineers from different disciplines and a client representative who played the lead role for the group. I was responsible for the translation during the visit as others did not speak or understand much English. It was a 2-week trip and all the flights were booked beforehand.

A friendly and considerate gentleman called Gregory from the US company had been with us for the first week in Milwaukee, taking care of our activities, including office visits, meetings, and technical discussions, and especially, had helped me make the technical minutes more professional with correct English, to which I was grateful. We finished our planned job with the company on Friday, and would fly to Los Angeles the next morning on Saturday. Gregory would be coming to pick us up from the hotel and then give us a ride to the airport.

With our suitcases lined up close to the hotel entrance, we anxiously looked for Gregory to show up. He did not, unfortunately, until we were undoubtedly too late to catch the booked flight. He appeared, eventually, but as a totally different person: no longer the confident, energetic, talkative engineer he had been in the past week. Now he appeared rather crestfallen and nervous. He kept saying he was terribly sorry, and looked so embarrassed that he even tried to avoid any eye contact with us. Most notably, his face, the whole face, from forehead to neck, was strangely red, too red, and looked scary. His terrible countenance aroused me so much concern about him that my hours-long anxiety and worries about our flight were replaced by a caring sympathy toward him. What on earth happened to him? He explained that Friday was Valentine's day and he had stayed with his girlfriend until very late; he had some drink, maybe a little

too much of it, he had a headache, went to sleep very late and accidentally did not wake up on time.

Valentine's Day: What's that about? Who is Valentine? I never heard of this name, even though I knew some English. Somebody else in the group quickly figured it out based on the context: it must be an American holiday which was referred to as "the Western Lover's Day" in China, literally. Yes right, so I believed. Oh my, poor Gregory! How his romance was followed by such a miserable situation! Anyway, it was not our fault to have our flight missed. He had to find a solution for this.

Without more to say, Gregory started to make a series of phone calls, namely from my guess to his boss and company office, to the airlines and to his bank and insurance company as well. He could not reach his boss, nor anyone in the office over the weekend, so he made the decision to buy us new tickets with his own money. He drove to a bank where he withdrew money from a machine using his bank card and then had our new tickets prepared. Then Gregory sent us to the airport.

All was fixed so quickly, efficiently, and professionally, it seemed like magic to me. It would have been absolutely unimaginable if this had happened in China at that time. Everything seemed to have been amended, perfectly, I would say, except that Gregory might subject to the loss of a couple of thousands dollars from his own pocket. But what really made him more unhappy came next, after he apologized to us again, wished us a good trip and enjoyable days in California.

Our team leader could not forestall an outburst of the great anger he had been holding on to for hours. As he did not understand English at all, when he wanted to say something as client representative, I had to translate for him. He started to criticise Gregory, in a voice much louder than necessary, with words so harsh that I could not bear to listen as I struggled to convey his meaning. The harmony and friendliness in the past week all suddenly vanished, and the team leader now spoke like a commander in chief on the battlefield, fulminating against his enemy with no mercy, or like a spokesperson from China's Foreign Affairs, strongly condemning a severe offense to China, using the same odd jargon. I had to translate his words to Gregory, but those which were too aggressive and provocative, I carefully ignored, or, used weaker substitutes, in order not to hurt Gregory too much. I did not think it right to hurt him, so

I softened the team leader's words, lest he sounded too rude or vexatious. Gregory's oversleeping was an insult to the Chinese team, to the Chinese client, even to China as a nation. The anger of the team leader kept escalating, with his bitterness upgraded to the extremity of patriotism, and finally he engaged in castigating the nature of American imperialism. While Gregory was listening to me, I felt so empathetic with him as I found myself trembling too. I was afraid Gregory would eventually fail to remain composed, while being treated like this. But this American did not show any emotion on his face, nor give any visible indication he wanted to react at all, which surprised me and impressed me very much. There was no enemy at all. I do not remember whether he said anything more, but I remember I said "don't worry" to him like a whisper and thanked him for all the help, when we departed. On the plane flying to California, my eyes were full of tears as I felt rather guilty because it was from me that Gregory received all the harsh words intended to hurt him as a penalty for his mistake, and he must have suffered. I asked to be forgiven in my heart.

Should I have complained about the narrowmindedness of the team leader? No. He simply behaved as an "educated" person from communist China. He thought that way, he felt that way, and he acted that way quite "naturally," without any pretension. Actually a few years back, I was reacting to an incident in the very same manner.

In about December 1988, after finishing the scheduled work in Dusseldorf, every member of the engineering team from China received a little gift as a souvenir from the management of the German company. It was a lovely solarpowered calculator that I had never seen before. Joyfully studying every detail of this little gadget, I found on its back a small round gold-colour sticker which read "Made in R.O.C."

R.O.C? What does it stand for or where is it? "It is the abbreviation of the Republic of China, or, Taiwan, to put it simply," replied the translator. What did he say? Taiwan?! Ridiculous! How can we be given something as gift that was made in Taiwan our territory occupied by the enemy? Are the Germans suggesting that R.O.C. is the authority to represent China rather than P.R.C. – the People's Republic of China? I instantly felt my blood boiling and rushing wildly to my head. The intense sense of indignation burned me like a fire, so that I could not help but shout, "This is an insult! This is unacceptable! I

protest!" "Shut up!" yelled back the translator who was an employee in my company and had been to European countries many times for similar jobs. "Don't be so stupid like a fool. Don't bring your disgrace to us all!" He added. I was reduced to silence but still puzzled as to why no one else, all from mainland China and older than I, made any comment. Then I had to calm myself down. Perhaps this was not a circumstance that my reaction would be appropriate or likely to produce a positive effect. Nevertheless, I was quite confident that I was doing "politically correct" on the issue as a Chinese.

Several years passed, now came my turn to be a bystander watching how others do "politically correct." As a matter of fact, we all were substantially alike – everybody from mainland China had been educated, or brainwashed, to be exact, to see the USA as an enemy country of the P.R.C. and that we "must not ever forget that the Imperialists have never given up the wild ambition to subjugate [our country]" as we were admonished by communist propaganda.

The coming days in California developed before my eyes a panoramic view how Valentine's Day had been celebrated. Stores were decorated in pink, many things were made like a heart and it looked dazzling everywhere! Wow, the fancy chocolate boxes were on sale! The heartshaped, big box of delicious chocolate only sells a few dollars! What a deal, just because Valentine's Day has gone overnight! Unbelievable! This never happened in China. The heartshaped big boxes of chocolate will be the perfect gift to bring home for my wife. Oh yes, she will be told also that this is the very American thing for lovers!

A big dinner was prepared in my apartment in Beijing for friends and colleagues to come and celebrate my trip to the United States. In 1992, very few engineers from my workplace had had the privilege to go on a business trip to (hence an opportunity to ever visit) the US, a country that we had identified as an enemy for many years and that we all have complex or perplexed feelings about. At the dinner, guests insisted that I elaborate on what the USA is like, how modernized it is, what I saw and what I experienced, particularly, upon such a rare trip, what had impressed me most. I pondered a little, and then seriously uttered out the very special, keen and sincere feeling about the United States: "The USA is not in darkness and their sky is not in black."

"What?! What did you say? What do you mean by that?" They were puzzled by my words. Then I had to explain that, starting from my childhood all the way down

till this trip to the United States, I always thought the USA is in darkness forever, their sky is black, their days are like nights. Since I had an idea there was a country called USA in the world, all descriptions and available information about it were related to darkness in a way, as a result, whenever I thought of this place, this enemy country, I came up with envisioning a land enshrouded with a black sky, in total darkness like in the night. Although occasionally I did have doubts whether this were truly so, and although I was aware that since the earth is round and it spins, the sun is bound to move to the other side of the earth, hence the sun will inevitably shine on the land where the United States of America is located, and what's more, the sky above that land could not be perpetually overcast, and so on and so forth, still, I could not remove from my mind the dark image I had of the USA. Now, I had had a real firsthand experience of placing myself in person on this land and what I saw were a clear blue sky, pure white clouds, radiant sunshine, therefore I could say without a tiny trace of doubt that "The USA is not in darkness and their sky is not in black."

Upon listening to my narration, friends burst into raucous laughter, falling out of their seats at the table. Seeing their reaction to my words, I suddenly felt a sorrow and grief for my innocence, or naïveté, to be more accurate. Yes, they had a good reason to laugh. A person who has had an education in university, and now a respected engineer, why should I have such ridiculous and unreal understanding of the United States?! Funny enough, but I was not in a mood to laugh with them. Was it not true that my mind was stuffed with ridiculous Communist propaganda? How laughable it is, but am I alone? Who in China has not been contaminated by Communist ideology?

Living under the red flag of the Communist Party is an experience of living in hatred and terror. The Party always set up enemies one enemy followed by another, so as to justify its existence and the legality of its ruling power. As a Chinese, you are forced into a political obligation to hate and attack the state's enemies, and you are forced to experience the terror and fear as well that someday you may become an enemy of the state to be hated and attacked. You have to forget about humanity, virtues, values, conscience, morality, and principles to keep yourself in conformity to the Communist Party's directives so that the probability you become an enemy is reduced. This is the very disaster of one's life in communist China.

When, one day in 1995, I realized I would no longer have any enemy in my life, no hatred and no fear anymore, I burst into tears of gratitude to what had enlightened me into such a bright and magnificent realm in my heart. It is the teachings of Falun Dafa (also called Falun Gong). It is through the teachings of Falun Dafa that I learned that the sole criterion to discern good and bad is contained in the universal principles of Truthfulness, Compassion, and Tolerance! My soul is now liberated from the shackles of the communist ideologies; I am free! What profound inner peace and harmony is in my heart! I am so happy to be a Falun Dafa disciple!

## **Part II: A Valentine's Day in China: "Not a Human Being"**

There happened to be another February 14th which is unforgettable in my life. It was in 2001. That morning, I was handcuffed in a prisoner vehicle, being transported from a detention centre in Beijing to a prison located a few hundreds of kilometers away. The destination was a place named Chadian, in the suburb area of the city of Tianjin, close to the Tianjin Harbour. Tianjin was not strange to me, neither the harbour. Because, in my engineering career, I had spent 10 years working on a steel pipe plant project in Tianjin, which might have been the largest industrial project in this city at that time.

The project was awarded nationally for excellence in engineering design and I was awarded for my performance too. The construction site was located close to Tianjin Harbour, but never had I imagined that just a few years later, I would be sent here to live a life behind bars as a prisoner of conscience.

I don't remember if my eyes were covered, but I remember I could see nothing before the vehicle arrived at the new prison. After a few hours of blindness and dizziness, the vehicle stopped, I was forced out of it, facing a gate in the new prison. Stepping on the open ground, I found my legs and feet rather awkward in trying to walk. I had hardly had a chance to walk in the past 7 months. Being locked in a dark cell, every day I was forced to sit in a fixed posture for long hours, and any slight movement would incur beatings. My underwear often got stuck to the festered skin due to the lasting pressure from being forced to sit on the board. Now in the new prison, I didn't know what awaited me as a captive, but at least I could again see the sky, and would again have a normal sense of the time of day from dawn to dusk. It was overcast that day and everything in view looked ghostly pale. "Don't look around!" shouted one of the armed

soldiers.

The weather was so cold, I was constantly shaking. I was still in a fever which had already lasted for one and a half months. The high fever started from torture which consisted of freezing water being poured over my forced-to-be-naked body in winter. For a few weeks I went through a life-and-death struggle. My face became deformed due to large pus blisters that covered my nose, around my mouth and eyes. I felt all the organs inside my chest were burnt down or melted or had lost any support inside. The extreme sharp pains inside my chest and ribs made me hardly able to breathe or lie down for any sleep at night. I was struggling for breath and life, but each breath could trigger unbearable pains and convulsions. I was striving to survive for the next minute, the next hour, the next day. "I am a Falun Dafa Disciple," I said to myself determinedly over and over. I thought, whatever is going to happen to me, this conviction will remain and enable me to go on. It was my strong hold to my faith in the principles of Truthfulness, Compassion and Tolerance that had helped me through the life-and-death tribulation.

I was assigned to a young policeman who newly graduated from a police training school. He did not conceal his strong desire to prove to his boss that he was competent enough to sort out a "stubborn" case like me. His beginning talk to me marked my first day in this prison as an unforgettable one. "Do you know what day it is today?" He asked. "February 14, 2001. I do not know what day it is," I replied. "You ruined my day!" He said loudly and angrily, "Today is the Lover's Day (*I figured he meant Valentine's Day*). I should be on a date with my girlfriend but I'm not because of you. What a huge sacrifice I am making! Are you aware of the consequences?" I did not know what he meant by the consequences - the consequences for him because of the cancellation of his date that day, or the consequences for me because of my ruining his date, but as he was really upset because of my arrival on this particular day, I felt sorry for him indeed. If he was going to do me harm out of his personal revenge, I would forgive him; however, if he were to do anything bad to target my belief in Falun Dafa, that would be an inhumane crime and question of moral conscience. In the coming years of my imprisonment, he repeated several times that I had taken up his first Valentine's Day, but interestingly, I learned later that he married the same girl and she was a policewoman.

"Listen! I have been waiting for you for long. I started to study psychology in

particular 3 months ago to prepare for working you out. My job is to get you transformed - make you give up Falun Dafa by whatever means that work." He was far from boasting. I soon became part of their 24/7 campaign to subject Falun Gong practitioners to severe torture until they renounced their faith. During the daytime, I was forced to run and jump in the freezing winter wind beyond exhaustion. I grew faintly weak. I could not even stand firmly, and a jump movement meant simply one of my falling and hitting the ground. "Don't pretend like that!" He shouted. Then came the electric batons, prodding to make me move. My clothes were soaked with sweat, and then I was forced to stand motionless in an upright posture until my sweat turned to ice, followed by the same running torture again and again. "Don't think this is torture! The concept of torture is nonsense in a Chinese prison. Prisoners are state enemies. Remember! This is how the communist party takes care of Falun Gong practitioners!"

During the night, I was held separately and deprived of sleep and not allowed to use the toilet. This was the dedicated session to work on my mind and destroy my spirit. Several police guards took turns to insult, threaten, defame and attack my faith and forced me to read the materials of murder and suicide cases which were fabricated to demonize Falun Gong practitioners, which were also being aired by the state media nationwide all those years. "Don't think any more you are a good person and have not committed any crime. You are held here just for the purpose to be isolated from the society. Falun Gong practitioners are NOT human beings!"

"What?" I was shocked upon hearing such a statement once again. Even though the demonization of Falun Gong practitioners was going on ever since the persecution started on July 20 of 1999, when a hundred million people were deprived of the right to practice their faith overnight, this was the second time I heard exactly the same thing from the mouth of a government official. One year before my arrest for the first time, my wife and I went to Tiananmen Square to appeal for Falun Gong like many other practitioners did. Soon after I entered the square, a police van rushed to me. An armed soldier jumped off the van, and a few policemen started to push me into the van. I resisted, and questioned what was wrong with a citizen being at the public place. Upon being questioned with apparently no answer to give, the soldier grew greatly exasperated, his eyeballs were popping out, and he yelled with the loudest noise he was able to make that "Falun Gong practitioners are NOT human beings!" He had put too much



effort into the yelling that his throat sounded like it had been damaged at the end of his sentence. Why he was making such a ridiculous statement, why did he yell so loudly? Was he trying to convince himself of what he was saying by the strength of his voice? I did not know, but his desperation made a scenic and lasting moment in my memory.

I gradually began to realize that this statement was not just an apparently ridiculous claim but a gruesome guide to the dehumanization of Falun Gong practitioners on the way to physically eliminating them. Such a statement served the mental preparation necessary to encourage and justify the eventual mass killing of Falun Gong practitioners. This reminded me that many years ago, I heard something similar from the Hong Kong-produced war film "Men Behind the Sun" (or, literally, "The Black Sun: Unit 731"). The film is a graphic depiction of the war atrocities committed by Unit 731, the secret biological weapons experimentation unit of the Japanese Army during World War II. "Chinese are not human beings" was routinely repeated as a brainwashing tool to train and strengthen the nerves of the Japanese soldiers before they committed the various cruel medical experiments that Unit 731 inflicted upon the captured Chinese. Didn't the Nazi Germany do the same thing to initiate and justify the atrocities against Jews? I believe so.

The torture on me continued day and night, from day to day, week to week, and soon caused me to cough up blood every day. I could not move a single step with my swollen legs and feet. Severe kidney problems nearly killed me. The X-ray could not make out a clear image of my lungs but instead a dim area. My breathing capacity was reduced so much that I couldn't even sneeze or yawn.

One day, all Falun Gong prisoners were assembled to have a blood test and physical examination in the prison-affiliated hospital. It was obviously not motivated by concern for our health, because Falun Gong practitioners were being brutally tortured all the time, and it would make no sense if the physical examination was to investigate and measure how much torture had affected practitioners' health. From the hostile and coercive atmosphere in the blood test and examination one could tell that it was the systematic collection of detailed physiological information from Falun Gong practitioners, as if the authorities wanted to have much more extensive "inside prints" rather than just the fingerprints to identify Falun Gong practitioners individually. The blood extraction was in a rather large amount, and the items for the body

investigation were elaborate. Such an organized group blood test happened exclusively to Falun Gong prisoners, which even sparked the curiosity of other inmates in the prison: "Why only Falun Gong (prisoners) are given such a treatment, and we aren't?"

I survived the torture in the three and a half years of imprisonment and managed to come to Canada in 2004, but the whereabouts of countless "unidentified" practitioners remained a haunting concern in my heart. In those years, millions upon millions of Falun Gong practitioners came to Beijing from all over the country to appeal for their rights to practice Falun Gong, exhorting the government that Falun Gong is good and to explain how they had benefitted from the practice, but what they encountered were arbitrary and systematic abductions and arrests, followed by being sent to labour camps or prisons, or simply the forced disappearance of the majority of them.

Once practitioners were arrested, families, relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues, employers, local government leaders would all be in danger of being implicated and penalized. This evil policy of "guilt by association" worked to incite hatred against Falun Gong practitioners and forcibly instigate the whole society to get involved in the persecution. Out of pure compassion and the noble heart to protect families and people who were related to them and to avoid the imposed hostility of the people in their locality, many detained practitioners abandoned their identifications and refused to disclose their personal information so that nobody in society could or would be associated with them. However, their kindness not only incurred unspeakable brutalities from the police, but they also risked falling into an utterly undefended and vulnerable situation. They were abysmally dehumanized and became nobody – just numbered for headcount in their captor's hands. During my detention, every now and then these unidentified practitioners were removed from the cell at night and heard to be "transported" or "relocated" to unknown places.

When the large-scale organ harvesting crime of the Communist regime became known to the world in 2006, it was an agony to think that my fellow imprisoned Falun Gong practitioners could have been thus murdered. The exposure of organ crime also revealed the answer to why all imprisoned Falun Gong practitioners, as I had experienced, were exclusively blood-tested and physically examined.

In 2006, international human rights lawyer David Matas and the former Canadian

secretary of state for Asia Pacific, David Kilgour, investigated allegations of forced, live organ harvesting and concluded that Falun Gong practitioners were the only plausible source for the 41,500 organ transplants performed in China between 2000 and 2005. Independent investigator Ethan Gutmann, author of *The Slaughter: Mass Killings, Organ Harvesting, and China's Secret Solution to Its Dissident Problem*, estimated that 65,000 Falun Gong practitioners were murdered for their organs from 2000 to 2008. The World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong has concluded that the large-scale organ harvesting from living Falun Gong practitioners is a state-organized crime, ordered by the former head of the Chinese Communist Party Jiang Zemin, with the aim to "physically eliminate" Falun Gong practitioners. The sheer number of on-demand transplants in China requires the existence of a massive living "donor" pool. Unwilling organ donors are held to be harvested as matching patients come along. Since the year 2000, hundreds of military and civilian hospitals and transplant centres have been carrying out organ transplants in full swing, making the lucrative transplant industry part of the massive state machinery of genocide. Bodies of killed Falun Gong practitioners are plasticized and sold for exhibit worldwide.

Since World War II, "Never Again!" has been repeated to remind us of the lessons learned from the Holocaust, to prevent the reoccurrence of mass genocide and man-made catastrophes. Tragically, the brutal persecution of Falun Gong in China has been ongoing since July of 1999, along with the forced live organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience quoted as "a new form of evil on this planet" by D. Matas & D. Kilgour, and this 16 year-long genocide and crime against humanity under the communist regime's state terrorism has continued beyond the span of the world's attention and untouched by any counter-action.

February 14 is a day in Western countries to honour St. Valentine who was martyred during the persecution of Christians under the Roman Empire, and is now associated with romance and love. The story of the two Valentine's Days in my life is not one of romance, but a story of my heart's tempering. Every year comes Valentine's Day to refresh of my grave memory. The two Valentine's Day experiences are framed in my memory like windows, through which I peer into my heart, my life, my spiritual path and witness a period of history. It is in this very period of history the future of humankind is being shaped.

---

**Lizhi He** is an award-winning engineer from China who was imprisoned for practising Falun Gong in July of 2000. His wife, also Falun Gong practitioner, managed to get to Canada in 2001 after being detained in China three times. With help from Amnesty International and Government of Canada, Lizhi was reunited with his wife in Canada in May of 2004.

[To comment on this article, please click](#)