

## CHALLENGE to the power / The Interview

### TANG BAIQIAO, dissident in exile and promoter of the Jasmine Movement.

“If Egypt can do it, China can, too.”

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To date, Chinese supporters of the Jasmine Movement (“*molihua*” in Mandarin) suffer from low numbers. They have achieved a goal by raising alarms in Zhongnanhai, the headquarters the Communist Government, but the foreign press continues to demonstrate more interest in other matters.

The massacre at Tiananmen Square still resides in the collective memory. In addition to the fear of retaliation, some observers of China point to the lack of harmony between what the people want and who among them are willing to take to the streets against the regime.

A leading member of the 1989 reform movement who’s been exiled to the United States since 1992, Tang Baiqiao (Hunan, 1967) is one of the more visible heads of the [Chinese] dissidents abroad. The dissident movement has fragmented, plagued by internal struggles and rivalries which have eaten into much of its prestige.

Tang escaped to Hong Kong after spending 19 months being tortured in prison. He tells the world, “I never kneeled and I never gave up.” Now he has written his memoirs with journalist Damon DiMarco. Hollywood has already bought the rights to take the story to the screen.

Question. – How do you see the progress of the Movement today?

Answer. - I think that this is only the beginning of the end of autocracy. More and more people will be added to the Jasmine Movement, and the Communist Party knows that very well. If Egypt can have a revolution, why not China? I believe that this year will see a big change in China. Social networks and the Internet will eventually turn China around.

Q. - Who developed the Jasmine Movement?

A. - Nobody knows who started it, really, since the calls for action were distributed anonymously over the Internet. In fact, it’s not important. Now we just want to know if [these calls] will lead to a simple reform or if democracy can be achieved. We want a revolution and a turnaround for China, but we want it to be achieved without violence.

“More and more people will be added to the protests; the Internet will change my country.”

Q. – Do you seek to put an end to the Communist Party?

A. - No. Eventually, we want to establish social stability through justice. But only a democratic country can really be stable. We want to end the autocracy of the Communist Party and its dictatorship.

Q. - After two Sundays of altercations, how do you rate the official response?

A. - The Communist Party has responded by taking a harsh line, arresting dissidents, trying to destroy the movement in its infancy and flooding the Internet with messages they have paid for on their behalf. They have attacked the international press. They are taking the Movement seriously, but if they do not change the ways they operate, they will suffer great problems in the future.

Q. - To date, the initiative has gathered more police and press than protesters, has it not? Does it strike you as a failure?

A. - No. A handful [of protestors] is better than nothing. The Chinese have remained silent about the democracy movement of 1989, at least insofar as the political sphere. This has been the only clear call to democracy since then, so it's a big step. In the coming weeks, more and more people will join our movement.

Q. – Do you believe that the Chinese people want riots like the kind in the Middle East?

A. - Yes, but not, I think, like the kind that we saw at Tiananmen Square. They will choose a different way, more gradual, to gain similar achievements as those won by the Tunisians, Egyptians, or the Libyans. But we cannot expect [to wait] another 20 years. The situation will get worse if the political system of the country doesn't change. The Chinese people know this, but they simply live in fear.

Q. - Is there also a gap between the immediate needs the majority of people have and the political agenda of exiled dissidents?

A. - It would seem that the gap is great, but that is not necessarily true. Consider what occurred in Egypt. The majority of Egyptians just wanted to have a better job. Before the revolution began they couldn't imagine that they could live in a free country. But when the Tunisians defeated their dictator and the Egyptian dissidents abroad instigated the revolution, all joined together to oust Mubarak... in only 18 days! Most Chinese want to

live in a free country, but the citizens do not believe that they can get this for themselves. We dissidents must help them.

Q. – Your book, “*Memoirs of a Chinese Counterrevolutionary*” says that there are “two Chinas.” How are they different?

A. - One is ancient, beautiful, with a traditional culture, elegant and moral. The other is represented by the culture of the Communist Party of China -- without freedom, unfair, with deplorable conditions for human rights and an outdated political system.

Q. - Speaking of two Chinas, what differences can be seen between the China of 1989 and that of today?

A. – Some things have gotten better while others have gotten worse. The economy, for example, has done better. The political system has gotten worse. It has improved protections for some rights, such as the conditions of internal immigrants and education... But everything else -- freedom of religious expression or the rights of prisoners – these things have gotten worse. Twenty years [after Tiananmen Square], China should have improved many more things than its economy.

