

A TRUE STORY OF CHEN?

PERSPECTIVE ANALYSES OF TWO REPORTS ON CHEN

GUANGCHENG'S ARREST AND TRIALS

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1 Introduction

ONE of the *Time 100* (2006) and the laureate of the *Ramon Magsaysay Award* (2007), Chen Guangcheng, a Chinese blind self-taught 'barefoot lawyer', is known to the world as a civil rights activist who advocated women's rights, welfare for poverty-alleviation in rural areas of China, and is best known for his significant efforts in exposing the alleged abuses in the implementations of the 'one-child policy' which involved violence and forced abortions. [1] Recently, he gained even more fame for his miraculous escape from the 'home-prison' in Shangdon Province to US embassy in Beijing. Approved by the Chinese government, he left the US embassy and moved to New York together with his family, safe and sound, and now is a special student at School of Law of New York University. As for his escape, China's state-run media condemned the US government and claimed that it is diplomatically inappropriate to interfere China's internal affairs. [2, 3] Yet, they turned silent about his arrival at the new world which was merely mentioned

briefly in a one-line report of Xinhua agency. Behind those high dramas, it is expected by the public that a true story of his activism and the followed legal charges, which is the purpose of this essay. Now allow me to briefly review the sequence of events related to Chen.

The timeline goes back to the early 2006, when Chen was arrested for protesting in Linyi city. Later in summer, he was sentenced for more than 4 years in prison and he appealed to intermediate court of China but failed to change his fate. Four years later in 2010, released from prison, he continued to be detained at home with family, surrounded by security forces and constantly harassed and threatened by ‘thugs’ who were actually hired by local authorities. [4] Meanwhile, on the US side, efforts had been made to add pressure onto Chinese government about Chen’s case. In April 2012, with the help of some human rights activists, he dramatically escaped the home-prison and made his way to US embassy in Beijing where he posted a video online putting forward his three requests. [5] And in May, after intense negotiations between China and US, he and his wife and child were allowed to leave for US with China’s guarantee of safety of other extended family members. [6, 7]

In order to recover a true story of Chen’s past, this essay is focused on Chen’s trials and different versions of reports on his protests. Perspectives of the two reports, one from Xinhua agency [10] and the other from Washington Post [9], will be analyzed in detail in the next section.

Perspectives are ways of viewing. In general, perspectives in journalism differ in the following ways: (i) for the same event, you may choose different themes, implicitly or explicitly; (ii) for the same theme, you may report and emphasize different stories; (iii) for the same story, you may tell it in different styles, by which I mean the diction, sentence structure, formality, degree of detail, point of view, tone and etc.

2 Detailed analyses

2.1 Summaries of the two reports

Chinese court rejects blind mob organizer's appeal *Xinhua, JINA, January 12, 2007*

This report is basically an announcement of the result of Chen's appeal to the intermediate court in Linyi city, that is the intermediate court rejected Chen's appeal and upheld the 4-year-and-3-month sentence issued in November by the Linyi local court. It says Chen was convicted of (i) damaging public property, (ii) organizing a mob to disrupt traffic and (iii) pressurizing the government. It also emphasized that the previous trial had been based on facts and the term was appropriate, and that the retrial was fair by specifically mentioning the guarantee of Chen's rights to defend. In the last two paragraphs, several details of the protests which leads to his criminal charges were specifically magnified. (i) Chen smashed office windows in February to 'vent his anger at workers who were carrying out *poverty-relief* programs.' (ii) The protest in March delayed more than 290 vehicles for 3 hours, including an ambulance carrying a pregnant woman.

Chinese to Prosecute Peasant Who Resisted One-Child Policy *Washington Post, BEIJING, July 8, 2006*

This article was written before the trial on July 17, and it was mainly about the background, including Chen's scenario, the brutal enforcement of the family planning policy in Shangdon, and more importantly, the dilemma faced by the ruling class. It was mentioned that the incident in March was caused by local officials' illegal confinement of Chen to his house and violent threats to villagers who tried to help Chen. By quoting Li, Chen's lawyer, it pointed out that the village was isolated to avoid information outlet to Beijing. It said that two US diplomats attempting to visit Chen, were 'physically removed' and quite a few lawyers from Beijing failed to access Chen and several reported being threatened, detained or beaten by officials and hired

thugs. Chen's efforts in exposing illegal implementation of the one-child policy, including forced abortions and sterilizations and 'crackdown' towards pregnant women's relatives, did pay off but local authorities fought back in revenge. They defamed him as a tool of 'foreign anti-China forces' and lobbied Foreign Ministry and Propaganda Department to ban discussion of Chen among the public. The tolerance of injustice was described as 'a prolonged bureaucratic stalemate' in the ruling class and, as it said, reflected the pressure faced by President Hu, from the hard-liners within the party as well as the party debate over the future of one-child policy. Furthermore, without the support of top reformer Hu, it became too risky to help Chen.

2.2 Analyses

Above all, the two reports took opposite stands on the nature of Chen's protests. The Xinhua report insisted that Chen was a criminal and deserved all his charges whilst the Washington Post report characterized the protests as the outcry of justice by elucidating the previous illegal handling of one-child policy and extreme means imposed on Chen as well as some villagers. As in the Xinhua report, firm languages, such as 'reject' and 'convict', were used to emphasize the authoritativeness of the decision made by the intermediate court. Also the two magnified details, which makes about one third the short report, portrayed Chen as diabolical criminal who attacked poverty-relief program workers and a public nuisance who delayed traffic including an ambulance carrying a pregnant woman. Moreover, the protest was called a 'mob' which in contrast to a 'protest', suppresses the purpose of the protest. In the Washington Post version, however, details of protests were not covered but brutal means by the local authorities were described in great detail, such as forced abortions and sterilizations, tortures of pregnant women's relatives, isolation of the village in terms of violence, defamation of Chen and etc.

Furthermore, the two media concerned about different aspects stemming from the

same incident. The Xinhua story cared more about the fairness of the trials while the Washington Post wrote more about the political picture behind the scene. Xinhua story pointed out, first, the term was appropriate and based on facts, and second, statements of Chen's lawyer were heard and Chen's rights to defend were guaranteed by the court. Whereas, the Washington Post, clarified that Chen's case was 'a prolonged bureaucratic stalemate' in the ruling class and it reflected the pressure faced by President Hu and debate over the future of one-child policy within the party.

Finally, the purposes of the two articles are completely different. According to my analyses, the Xinhua article was aimed to confirm and back the stand of the local government; the other article was to reveal the difficulties and resistance faced by the reformers inside the party especially President Hu. During the first trial, it was reported that Chen's lawyers were arrested and Chen was defended by state appointed lawyers instead [8], therefore, the fairness was questioned and hence, the primary goal of the state-run media was to fight back. Washington Post, the paper that favors politics, however, was concerned more about the internal structure of Chinese ruling system, and this incident, shed light on the complexity of China's politics at a time when reformer Hu came to power for only 3 years.

3 Conclusion

In this essay, I first outlined a sequence of Chen's stories, from the protests to the escape from Chinese governmental control, and then came to the two stories from Xinhua and Washington Post, concerning Chen's arrest and trials. Major points of the articles were summarized and analyzed in three respects, (i) the stands, (ii) the selected topics and (iii) purposes of writing.

The goal of this essay is to recover as much as possible a true story of Chen. According to analyses presented above, Xinhua version took the stand of local authorities,

and tried to suppress the illegal deeds committed by local authorities beforehand and isolate protests related to Chen as independent incidents and the supplemented details imposed upon Chen the image of a criminal and nuisance; the Washington Post version, even though cared more about the political background inferred from Chen's case, still it provided detailed accounts of Chen's actual scenario and a higher-dimensional view of Chen's incidents involving the villagers, local authorities and the central ruling class, and hence the latter is more convincing.

References

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