



# The “June 4th” Generation Today

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**F**EW EVENTS IN RECENT HISTORY ARE ETCHED SO SHARPLY IN THE MINDS OF TV viewers as the brutal suppression by Chinese government forces of the pro-democracy demonstrations at Tiananmen Square in Beijing on June 4, 1989. The crackdown seemed to end, for now, hopes for democratic renewal in China. But what has become of the participants in those demonstrations and their democratic ideals?

The key participants in the 1989 Tiananmen Square Democratic Movement fell into three categories: (1) young students, twenty to thirty years old, most of whom came from institutions of higher education in Beijing, (2) intellectuals—including teachers, journalists, writers, entrepreneurs, and government officials—most of whom were thirty to fifty years old, and (3) large numbers of young laborers.

After the violent “June 4th” suppression by the Chinese government, these key participants began to flee. More than half escaped to other countries. In the beginning, most of these people ended up in Paris and later came to the United

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*Many of the participants in the democracy movement that ended in the tragedy at Tiananmen Square were able to flee China. A surprising number of them have come in contact with the gospel and have either become baptized Christians or developed an open interest in the Christian faith.*

States. Some, however, remained unwillingly in Hong Kong and, in fact, are still there. Those who were caught and jailed by the government have mostly been released, but certain restrictions on their freedom are still imposed.

In the beginning, those who escaped abroad joined the Overseas Democratic Movement. As time passed, many gradually redirected their efforts to their own goals: young students enrolled in American universities, intellectuals concentrated on their own writing and research, others found jobs or started their own businesses. Today, very few still remain dedicated to the Overseas Democratic Movement.

Many of the students have completed their education. For example, Tiananmen Square's executive director, Ling Chai,<sup>1</sup> received her masters degree in international relations from Princeton University; vice-executive director, Lu Li,<sup>2</sup> received his doctoral degree in law from Columbia University. Kaixi Wuer<sup>3</sup> and others are still studying.

Of the older intellectuals, some remain in Princeton University's "China Society," while others are spread across the country in different universities as visiting scholars or professors. Some have been publishing books, and others have been working on periodicals. Many of the younger ones have received degrees from American universities. Most of these people's families have also since come to America.

After coming abroad, all the key participants of the "June 4th" incident have come in contact with the Christian faith. Many American and Chinese Christians were concerned about their livelihood, families, and psychological needs. These Christians were eager to share the gospel with them. To my knowledge, several of these people have now become baptized Christians, including former student leader, Yan Xiong<sup>4</sup>; former Tiananmen Square vice-executive Director, Boli Zhang<sup>5</sup>; former chairman of the Self-Managed Labor Association, Dongfang Han<sup>6</sup>; former journalist of the People's Central Broadcasting Station, Min Zhang; script writer of the TV series "The River Elegy,"<sup>7</sup> Xuanjun Xie; and I myself. Among them, Boli Zhang, Min Zhang, Xuanjun Xie, and I are planning to study or are already studying Christian theology with the purpose of dedicating our lives to serve God.

Although many others have not been baptized, they have, however, accepted the basic teachings of Christianity. Some even call themselves "half Christian" or "cultural Christian." Many have attended Christian churches, Bible study groups,

<sup>1</sup>Ling Chai was then a student at the University of Beijing.

<sup>2</sup>Lu Li was a student at Nanjing University.

<sup>3</sup>Kaixi Wuer, one of the leaders of the Tiananmen Square Democratic Movement, was a student at the University of Beijing.

<sup>4</sup>Yan Xiong was one of the student leaders of the Tiananmen Square Democratic Movement.

<sup>5</sup>Boli Zhang was a student at Beijing University.

<sup>6</sup>Dongfang Han was a laborer in Beijing.

<sup>7</sup>This is the TV series that was very popular in China in the months before the fateful Democracy Movement resulting in Tiananmen.

and gospel camps—including, for example, former chair of the China Political Research Institute, Jiaqi Yan; former chair of the China Literature Institute, Zaifu Liu; executive script writer for the TV series “The River Elegy,” Xiaokang Su; famous writer Yi Zheng; and the first person to initiate the hunger strike in Tiananmen Square, Meng Bai.<sup>8</sup> These people frequently read the Bible, and they have written articles about Christianity that have been published in *Overseas Campus*, a Christian magazine. Some of their family members have become baptized Christians. The main obstacle for them to accept the Christian faith is that they still think Christianity is only one among many religions in the world. Its formation, tradition, organization, and other aspects are too westernized. Therefore, they cannot accept the Christian faith totally. They do believe in God. Most of them also believe in Christ’s incarnation, but their idea of God is not limited to Christian doctrine and tradition.

Most of the people who escaped to the west after the “June 4th” incident have been deeply influenced by the Christian faith. Whether or not these influences have affected their individual daily lives, they have at the very least impacted their political perspectives and have refreshed their cultural quest. These Chinese people have discovered that the values found in western democracy, including freedom and human rights, have undeniable connections with the Christian faith. On the other hand, they have discovered that China’s authoritarianism has close connections with atheism. They all agree that in the midst of the many human desires, moral decline, and crisis of faith among the Chinese, the Christian faith will only benefit the people of China. They have come to recognize the upright character of sincere Christians—Christians with a love and integrity that are seldom found in this world. They respect Christians. During the election meeting of the Overseas Democratic Movement organization last year in Los Angeles, several candidates professed their Christian faith and shared the stories of their faith journey. They won applause from the audience as well as the election. They have formed a small prayer group and issue a publication that shares their faith testimonies.

My Christian faith journey began when I was with Princeton University’s “China Society.” At that time, I was angry and hurt as a result of the “June 4th” incident. As I came in contact with Christians from the college Bible study group, I was attracted by their love, integrity, and peace. I frequently attended their Bible study group and gradually learned that their upright and positive personalities had to do with their faith in Jesus Christ. At their suggestion, I began to read the four Gospels. Jesus’ godliness attracted me, changed me, and brightened my life. My hatreds were being replaced by love and peace. I began to understand life’s meaning and vastness. One day, I submitted to Christ and admitted that I was a sinner and could not be saved by my own strength. I prayed with tears and asked for Christ’s mercy. When I was baptized, many friends from the democratic movement attended the service. My educational background was in philosophy. After

<sup>8</sup> Meng Bai was a student at Beijing University.

becoming a Christian, I lost my interest in philosophy. I thought about God and issues about God constantly. I discovered that the thoughts of all philosophers—whether positively, negatively, or indirectly—actually witnessed to the existence, greatness, and undeniable realities of God. So, under the encouragement of Rev. Samuel Lin, I went to a Reformed seminary to study theology. After graduation, I joined *Overseas Campus* and served through Christian publications. After becoming a Christian in 1991, I have been to many places in North America, Europe, and Asia to witness to the power of the gospel.

Looking back from the faith experiences of my friends and myself, I can say that we had never come in contact with the Christian faith while we were in China. We did not understand how real this faith was. Therefore, in the beginning, our attitudes were just to observe, to be suspicious, and even to be hostile. On the other hand, we were disgusted with communism. While living abroad, together with our reassessment of many problems, we ended up with an opened heart and a willingness to listen and observe. Within these few years, to various degrees, the light of Christ has shone through our journeying souls and made us realize that the real hope of the Chinese does not rest in money or democracy. Instead, the real hope rests in the God who created us, feeds us, loves us, and gives us the grace of life.

God has called a large number of overseas Chinese intellectuals, including many influential ones—"the best and the brightest"—to become his children. In China, God has raised up many house churches. I believe this is the providence of God for tomorrow's gospel ministry in China. It is to be spread further and deeper. ⊕