

EUGENE MIHAESCO

# EVERYTHING IN THE UNIVERSE IS EQUAL

"...some of us dare not speak out. But if we all spoke out there would be nothing to be afraid of...."

— Fang Lizhi (1988)

The values underlying human dignity are common to all peoples, universally applicable standards of human rights that hold no regard for race, language, religion or other belief. These standards, symbolized by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, have increasingly earned the world's acceptance and respect.

When a commemorative gathering was held in November 1988 in Beijing to honor the 40th anniversary of the declaration, many of us were delighted, because it seemed to us that the principles of human rights were finally starting to take root in our ancient land. After last June's bloody tragedy, we must admit to having been far too optimistic.

Some of those who were responsible for the repression have recently attempted to defend their behavior by declaring that "China has its own standards of human rights." They appear to think that as long as they can dub something a "household affair," to be dealt with internally, they can ignore the laws of human decency.

During China's long period of isolation, this ideology of purporting to be "master of all under heaven" may have been an effective means of controlling the country. But in the latter part of the 20th century, such statements have lost their capacity either to intimidate or deceive.

From the movement for science and democracy in 1919 to the rising demand for intellectual freedom in 1957, from the protest marches

BY FANG LIZHI

in 1926, which were met with swords and guns, to the demonstrations in 1989, which encountered tanks, we can see how passionately the Chinese people want a just, rational and prosperous society. When it comes to such common aspirations, the Chinese are no different.

Allow me to draw a historical analogy. Recent propaganda to the effect that "China has its own standards for human rights" bears an uncanny similarity to pronouncements made by our 18th century rulers, who declared that "China has its own astronomy." Why? Because the laws of modern astronomy made it clear that the "divine right to rule" claimed by those leaders was a fiction.

The principles of human rights, which also pertain everywhere, make it clear that the "right to rule" claimed by today's Chinese rulers is just as baseless. This is why rulers from every era, with their special privileges, have opposed the equality inherent in such universal ideas.

The feudal aristocrats of 200 years ago saw astronomy as a bearer of modern culture and, as a result, ruthlessly persecuted those who engaged in its study and practice. During the early Qing dynasty, for example, five astronomers of the Beijing Observatory were put to death.

Equally terrified by the implications of universal human rights, modern-day dictators also resort to murder. But no more than in the case of their feudal predecessors should this be construed as an indication of their strength.

Remember that in the current climate of terror, it may well be that those who are most terrified are those who have just finished killing their fellow human beings. We may be forced to live under a terror today, but we have no fear of tomorrow. The murderers, on the other hand, are not only fearful today, they are even more terrified of tomorrow.

Thus, we have no reason to lose faith. In the short term, ignorance may dominate through the use of violence, but it will eventually be unable to resist the advance of universal laws. And this will come to pass just as surely as the Earth turns.

Of course, it takes time for Earth to turn, and, for China, things could take even longer. I know that many young Chinese have dedicated their lives to building our country anew. Since the road to rebirth will be a long one, I fervently hope that they will not discontinue their education, but instead will work even harder to deepen and enrich their knowledge.

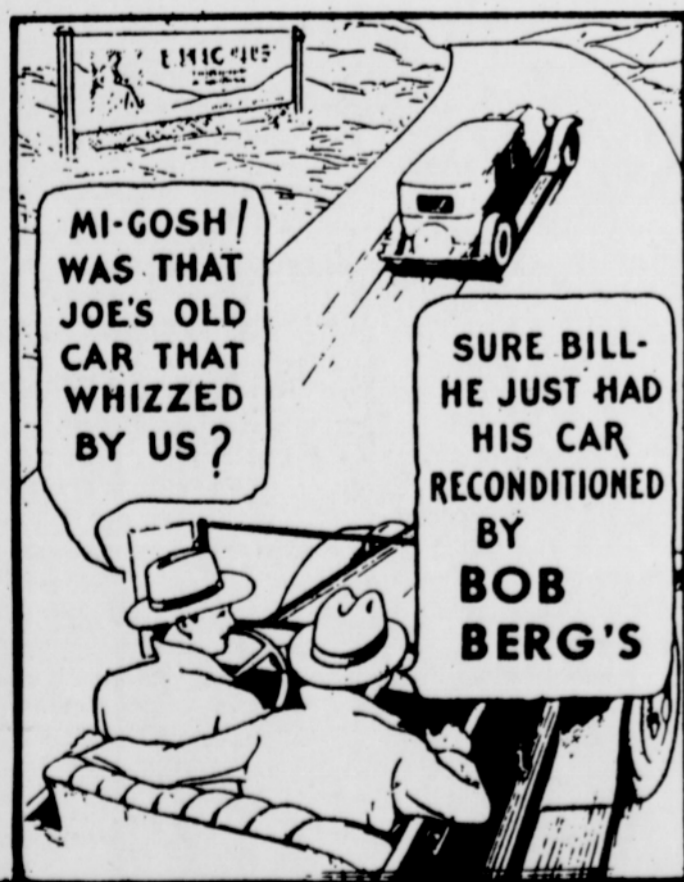
What power can nonviolence summon as a means of resisting the violence of guns the world over? There are many strategies of non-violence, but what is most basic is the force of knowledge. Without knowledge, nonviolence can deteriorate into begging, and history is unmoved by begging. To paraphrase Albert Einstein, it is only when we stand on the shoulders of the giants of knowledge that we will truly be able to change the course of history.

Only with knowledge will we be able to overcome the violence of ignorance at its roots. Only with knowledge will we have the compassion necessary to deliver from their folly those with superstitious faith in the omnipotence of violence. As Henrik Ibsen said, "If you want to be of value to society, there is no better way than to forge yourself into a vessel for its use." I hope all of us will strive to forge ourselves into such vessels.

In the field of modern cosmology, the first principle says that the universe has no center, that it has the same properties throughout. Every place in the universe has, in this sense, equal rights. How can the human race, which has evolved in a universe of such fundamental equality, fail to strive for a society without violence and terror? How can we fail to build a world in which the rights due to every human being from birth are respected?

May the blessings of the universe be upon us all.

Fang Lizhi is a physicist and China's leading dissident. He is living in asylum in the U.S. embassy in Beijing. This article has been excerpted by the Los Angeles Times from his acceptance speech for the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award.



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