



Life Without Freedom

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After decades of abusing human rights, China's tyranny continues uninhibited. Does no-one dare offend the economic superpower? In light of the recent violence between Tibetan protestors and the Chinese Government, the condemnation of China's appalling human rights history has been renewed by politicians, the media and the public alike. Unfortunately, these mere words of opposition have no more impact than a slap on the wrist.

China's mistreatment of Tibet is no revelation. Since the Communist Party seized power in 1949, the Government has crushed the freedom and rights of not only Tibet, but its own people. Despite President Hu Jintao's claims of 'peaceful unification', China's disturbing history tells a different story of communist dictatorship.

In 1950, China sent 40,000 troops to invade and conquer the nation of Tibet in an unprovoked attack on independence. When the Tibetans rallied for their freedom, the Chinese Army massacred 87,000 people, including women and children.

Further demonstrations in 1988 and earlier this year were violently suppressed, destroying the right to protest that is taken for granted in our part of the world. Even with the current media attention, armed police continue to beat and arrest monks for peaceful demonstrations.

Amnesty International reports that since the invasion, 430,000 Tibetans have been killed by Chinese forces and 260,000 Tibetans have died in labour camps or prisons.

In the minds of many, China's violations of human rights are symbolised by the horror of 1989. At a peaceful student protest, the army mercilessly slaughtered hundreds of unarmed civilians. Ambulances were barred from tending the wounded and innocent bystanders were viciously shot dead.

China's Constitution claims to guarantee the freedom of expression, but the reality could not be further from the truth. Any criticism of the Government is not tolerated and viewed as 'social chaos'. Since 2003, the Internet has been nationally censored to prevent the public from forming alternative political views. Heavy restrictions are placed on foreign media, effectively concealing China's activities from the rest of the world.

Overwhelming restraints are imposed on the local media, with journalists ordered to act as the 'mouthpiece of the Party'. With the content of news and education in their unyielding grasp, the Government has managed to fill the minds of younger generations with unchecked communist propaganda.

Cases of impeded free expression are far too numerous, and considering China's secrecy, our awareness of them is surely a mere fraction of the truth. From Mao Zedong's mass murder of intellectuals to today's imprisonment of democracy advocates, China has transgressed the agreement it signed in 1998, vowing that "everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference".

The idea of state authority over an individual's life is a theme deeply embedded in Lois Lowry's *The Giver*. Jonas, the protagonist, lives in a safe, controlled society, yet one devoid of choice and individuality. He soon begins to realise a life without freedom is "not a real life at all" and escapes the confines of his overbearing community. For the Chinese Government to strip away the freedom and rights of its people, it also strips away their humanity.

Just as Jonas's people are condemned to a life without colour, music or love, the Chinese and Tibetan people have been sentenced to a shackled life of torment. Sadly, the Government's complete and utter dominance knows no bounds and nothing remains sacred.

The followers of a peaceful religion, Falun Gong, are being unfairly arrested and tortured, simply because the religion is not officially recognised. Witnesses have reported incidents of physical and psychological abuse by government officials, with Falun Gong cases comprising 66% of all torture cases in China.

In 2005, Liu Jizhi, a 51-year-old mother and practitioner of Falun Gong was arrested without a warrant, beaten with stun batons and raped by policemen. Eighteen women were thrown into a labour camp where the male criminals were encouraged to rape them repeatedly.

These disgusting acts of cruelty are not isolated occurrences, nor are they problems of the past.

Within China, all opposition to the communist regime is crushed. Yet oppression breeds rebellion, and the seeds of dissent have been sown all over the globe.

China's abuse of state power is reminiscent of Anthony Burgess's 1962 classic, *A Clockwork Orange*. Through the eyes of young delinquent Alex, the novel explores the consequences of totalitarian government. The fictitious government's manipulation of Alex's mind produces a person incapable of moral choice, obeying the law only to avoid punishment. Alex's imposed loss of humanity inspires rebellion in his countrymen and the government is forced to restore Alex's right of choice.

Both China's government and the story's share a common disregard of human rights, which only invites revolution.

All over the world, people have deplored Communist China's actions and governments have announced their disapproval. Such declarations are answered with calm assurances from President Jintao of 'notable and historic progress'. Progress or not, the victims of despicable cruelty are still bleeding and the existence of human injustice should never be accepted as progress.

While the fault lies with China, we as a global community have thus far failed to recover basic rights for our fellow human beings.

Instead of holding China accountable for its actions, democratic governments are anxious not to damage trade

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relations. Billions of dollars of imports and exports have convinced our world leaders to chastise with their mouths, but accept money with outstretched hands. In a world where actions speak louder than words, we are making a clear statement that money takes priority over ethical standards.

If it is our goal to protect the rights of those unable to defend them. We must take the course of action that is both the hardest, but also the most honourable. To stand idly by as oppression tightens its stranglehold would be an atrocity in itself.

The governments of all free nations need to unite in the boycott of economic and political relations with China, creating pressure of immense magnitude. Nothing short of world-wide commitment will stop the slaughter in the streets of Tibet. Only then will our friends experience the freedom that we relish every day.



Dan Truong wrote this in 2008 when he was in Year 12 at Brisbane Grammar School in Queensland.