

“THIS WAS A MAN”

Robin James Munro

1952-2021



# In Memoriam



Robin James Munro

1952-2021



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*A digital collection of the contents is available at  
<http://bit.ly/munrodocuments>*

*A recording of the June 19, 2021 Zoom memorial is available at  
<http://bit.ly/munromemorialvideo>*



# **OBITUARIES**



*China Labour Bulletin*

<https://clb.org.hk/content/tribute-robin-munro>

*A tribute to Robin Munro*

*20 May 2021*

China Labour Bulletin is deeply saddened by the passing of our former deputy director and great friend, Robin Munro.

Robin set the gold standard for human rights research in China, and also took direct action to help countless people in China suffering from political persecution. At CLB, Robin not only ensured that our reporting on workers' rights was of the highest quality, he also guided us into a position where we were able to provide lasting support to labour activists and the workers' movement.

CLB Executive Director Han Dongfang paid tribute to his old friend and colleague:

"Robin worked tirelessly over the past two decades to provide legal assistance for tens of thousands of Chinese workers seeking justice through the court system. Many of them had suffered terrible work injuries, contracted occupational diseases, or were desperate to get the back pay owed for months, even years, of hard labour. Many workers faced imprisonment for defending their legal rights. These workers and their families should know that it was this Scotsman, Robin Munro, who helped them obtain justice.

"Even before joining CLB, Robin helped many Chinese dissidents, who might otherwise have died in prison, to gain their freedom. I was one of them.

“Robin was not only a colleague but a teacher and mentor who helped me fly higher, further and better. He was like an older brother who loved and cared about me. He was a member of my family and a caring and funny Scottish uncle to my children. We will all miss him dearly.”

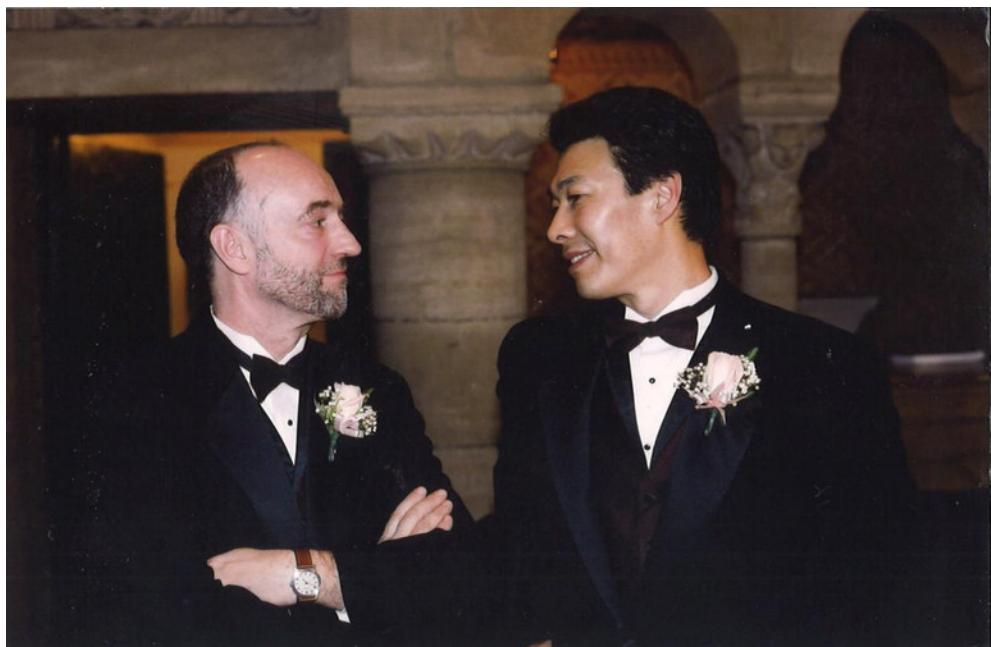


*Robin Munro introduces Han Dongfang at the 2005 Gleitsman International Activist Award ceremony in Hong Kong*

Robin's association with CLB dates back three decades to 1989. As a human rights activist monitoring the protests in Beijing, he was a regular visitor to the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation encampment in Tiananmen Square, where Han was based at the time.

Han was arrested and contracted tuberculosis while in prison. Following his release from prison in 1991, Robin was instrumental in arranging medical treatment for Han in the United States. When Han settled in Hong Kong, Robin ensured that he had the support he needed to set up CLB and continue the struggle.

Throughout the 1990s, as China researcher for Human Rights Watch, Robin produced numerous ground-breaking reports on political repression and social injustice in China, most notably, the use of state psychiatric institutions in the crackdown on dissent. Robin developed this research in his PhD thesis, which was published in 2006 as *China's Psychiatric Inquisition: Dissent, Psychiatry and the Law in Post-1949 China*.



*Robin Munro and Han Dongfang in 2002.*

Robin stepped back from day-to-day work at CLB in 2011 but he was always close by, offering advice and unflagging support. As Executive Director of Friends of China Labour Bulletin, Robin helped ensure that CLB kept to our core mission and had a sound strategic plan for our future development.

Robin will be greatly missed by his friends and colleagues at CLB, and everyone who was touched by his fierce intelligence and dedication to the workers' cause.

“Robin’s life mission was to help people and save lives. We will honour his legacy and continue the long journey we started 30 years ago.” — Han Dongfang.

**悼念罗宾·芒罗 Robin Munro先生**

2021年05月20日

中国劳工通讯痛悉我们的挚友、前副主任罗宾·芒罗（Robin Munro）在2021年5月19日与世长辞。

罗宾先生是研究中国人权问题的权威，他身体力行帮助过无数中国政治犯。在中国劳工通讯的工作中，他不仅完成了大量有关工人权益的高质量报告，更引领我们制定长远支援工运人士和工人运动发展的方向。

中国劳工通讯负责人韩东方向他的老朋友和老同事致以哀悼：

“过去的二十多年，在数以千计的中国劳工需要法律为他们主持公道的时候，罗宾不知疲倦的为他们奔波、提供法律援助。其中有很多工人遭受严重工伤、罹患职业疾病、或者遭遇数月甚至数年的欠薪，困顿不堪。甚至有很多工人仅仅是为了维护自身权益而身陷牢狱之灾。是罗宾·芒罗先生，这个苏格兰人帮助他们讨回了公道。”

“在加入中国劳工通讯之前，罗宾先生一直都在拯救身陷牢狱之灾的中国政治犯，帮助他们重获自由，远离死亡的威胁。我本人便是其中一个。”

“罗宾对我来说不只是朋友，更是一个教导我飞得更高更远更好的导师。他像兄长一般照顾关爱我，他就是我家庭中的一员，是我孩子眼中爱他们的、有趣的苏格兰伯伯。我们会永远怀念他。”

罗宾与中国劳工通讯的渊源要追溯到三十多年前的 1989 年。他当时作为人权工作者，对北京的示威状况进行观察。他也经常探访天安门广场上北京工人自治联合会的营地，当时韩东方也身在其中。

韩东方被捕后，在狱中罹患肺结核。1991 年韩东方甫一出狱，罗宾便促成了韩东方赴美治疗的行程。韩东方定居香港之后，罗宾支持韩东方成立中国劳工通讯以继续开展工人运动工作。

九十年代，罗宾作为人权观察研究员，针对中国的政治压迫和社会不平等现象，撰写一系列突破性的重要报告。尤其值得注意的是中国利用精神病机构作为打压异见者的手段。罗宾将此文进一步深化成他的博士论文，在 2006 年以《1949 年后中国的精神审讯：异见、精神病学与法律》为题发表。

2011 年，罗宾退出中国劳工通讯的日常工作，但他从未离开，他担任中国劳工通讯之友执行主任，一直为中国劳工通讯的核心使命而努力，更为我们制定未来发展良策指引方向。

作为罗宾的朋友、同事，我们会永远怀念罗宾，他的睿智和对工人的热诚深深感动着我们。

“罗宾一生都致力于帮助他人和拯救生命。我们将荣幸地继承他持续了 30 多年的奋斗遗产。”— 韩东方



*Donald Clarke (The China Collection blog)*

<https://perma.cc/GQN5-CDDI>



*Robin Munro, 1952-2021*

*May 19, 2021*

It breaks my heart to announce the passing on May 19th in Taiwan of my dear friend of over 40 years, Robin Munro. I am posting this mini-obituary (a full one will follow in due course) here because of Robin's contributions to China and China studies.

Robin was a passionate and committed human rights activist, but crucially he was also a meticulous and gifted scholar. Some people work on the individual level, some on the systemic level. Robin did both. Many individuals owe to Robin's unstinting efforts on their behalf the fact that they are not in jail in China (or worse). Painting on a larger canvas, Robin identified and wrote pathbreaking reports on key human rights issues in China: among others, psychiatric abuse, abuses in orphanages, and organ harvesting. He was there first. And his reports were meticulously and irrefutably documented with Chinese sources. (Check out this colloquy with his critics in which – perhaps I am biased – he pretty clearly comes out on top.)

I think that a key part of Robin's success as an activist was his sense of responsibility, as a scholar, to the truth as supported by evidence. Despite his passion – who could make a career out of human rights activism without passion? – he never exaggerated. Here he is writing that the June 4th massacre (which he personally witnessed) was indeed a massacre, but was not a massacre of students and did not take place in Tiananmen Square, and why that is significant. This is why when he told journalists or government officials that something was happening, they could have confidence that it was the truth.

In an era when the term "Renaissance man" is overused – I once heard David Byrne described as such pretty much because not only did he write songs, but he also sang songs, produced songs, and recorded songs – I think Robin truly fit the description. In addition to being both an activist and a scholar (earning a Ph.D. at the School of Oriental & African Studies, for those who want an official seal of approval), he was a tremendously talented guitarist, largely in the realm of folk music, and a keen student of music history and lover of all kinds of music, from Josquin des Prez to Schoenberg and beyond. He spent many happy hours tinkering with his audio system at home, eagerly telling me of the latest upgrade. It was indeed a revelation to

me when I first heard the system he had set up in his home in Taiwan, which could make even the Barney song sound exquisite, and it's because of Robin that I now listen mostly to vinyl records through a vacuum tube amplifier. He was also skilled with his hands, from rebuilding guitars to outdoor projects.

I should not leave unsaid that Robin was a devoted husband to his equally devoted wife, Pao-lien, a talented writer. As many others have told me and as I know myself, visiting them was always a pleasure.

In the few hours since I posted the news of Robin's passing on Twitter and within the China studies community, I have seen many tributes from those who worked with him, sought his knowledge as journalists, or learned from him as junior colleagues. What really comes through in all these messages is the sense of his integrity and his decency. I don't know if I would describe Robin as an especially charismatic character; I don't know what you would think if you had only a passing acquaintance, and he certainly did not shy away from an argument (which I am in no position to consider a character flaw). But everyone who got to know him — at least, everyone who shared his basic values — came to appreciate that, in Shakespeare's words, "His life was gentle, and the elements mixed so well in him that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, 'This was a man.'"



*John Chow (Doctorjohn Cheaptubeaudio blog)*

<https://perma.cc/JDU4-78UH>

*In Memory of Robin*



*In Memory of Robin (The Scot)*

*Hi-Fi Basics XIII: The Preciousness of a Fellow Traveler*

Regular readers of this blog will be familiar with my friend Robin (not Hood, but a proud Scot), whose audio endeavors in Hong Kong (and later Taiwan) I have chronicled as much as I could have. Now, the sad news: he had passed away in Taipei some weeks ago.

I mentioned before that Robin had harbored a chronic illness for the last decade. As one would have expected of him, he not only had weathered it well, but lived a very full life. He died from an unrelated and unexpected illness. I had also never mentioned Robin's professions, and am not going to do so now. Suffice to say he devoted

most of his life to helping others, mostly people he had never met. A noble endeavor.

The mid eighties were my halcyon days in New York. Those were the days when artists from all the Chinese worlds started to converge in NYC, and I count myself lucky to have been part of the crowd (as you know, doctors are frequently negatively portrayed by artists, certainly in music, as in *Wozzeck*). Believe it or not, even in that age, when excessive and ugly financial practices started to dominate the world and set the world on the path to the unprecedented global inequity of today, there were plenty of innocence to be had, more so than today, I'd say.

I actually knew Robin's wife before I met Robin. I really did not see him that many times in NYC, but I remember for some reason his looks one evening on the street. I can only say he was on fire. I don't remember why; maybe he had just met his future wife? But that look has stayed in my mind all these years. Robin was a man of passion, and not afraid to show it.

Our paths converged again when the couple relocated to HK, but I didn't see them often at all, especially since they were in and out, had busy professional lives, and lived on Lamma Island, far away from me. It was not until they moved to Central that we met more often, especially since Robin by this time had taken up audio.

This late phase, where we saw each other more often (but not often enough) started when I paid them a visit in the Central flat. Then Robin came to my place and was stricken by the Yamaha NS-1000, which he instantly knew was what he wanted. It transformed his entire audio journey and he then went up to the FX-3, which I'd never have heard otherwise. It was what he gave me in turn. Then, he restored my Garrard 301 and went on to R2R. If you look at the timeline in my blog, for the past decade I had made few home visits but, for this article, I revisited the posts and am shocked by how many

of my yumcha friends I had taken to experience his setup. Indeed, with Robin, I probably did some of my best writing, and that is for a good reason. For this, below:

*The Preciousness of a Fellow Traveler*

When I chewed on the news of Robin's passing, in no time it dawned on me how much he stood out for his sincerity and lack of pretense, rare among audiophiles. He became an audiophile because he loved music and wanted more fidelity, which is me too, despite my excesses.

Then, it occurred to me that I should write an (Hi-Fi Basics) article on the importance (or luck) to have a fellow companion on an audio journey. Perhaps due to a past life of an academic (albeit somewhat forced upon me) I tend to be methodical, and inclusive, so in the end I often become long-winded. So, I started to draft a long article on how important a fellow traveler can be in audio. What I mean is the presence of meaningful exchanges, to-and-fro. However, true exchanges like this are still regrettably rare in audio, as most focus more on the hardware than the meaning of music (which a proper vintage mono setup can probably convey as much as modern "state-of-the-art"). Accordingly, I planned the article and wrote quite a bit before I realize that, in re-visiting what I wrote about Robin, I had already conveyed most of my feelings.

Even if the methodical in me often re-synthesized an old article or idea into a new one, what I wrote about Robin and I, together on a journey, cannot be superseded. Once I re-read everything I had written about our encounters, I knew that this series is the perfect ode to Robin. It has a coherence of its own, rare and precious. Plus, I am very glad to have shot a short video footage of him, which to this date I have not done for anyone else. It is all for the glory of music. SO:

If you haven't read these, they encapsulate the philosophy of this blog. I am also glad that my good friend icefox, very discriminating, shared

in our joy together. Click and read, and I am sure you will not be disappointed:

<https://cheaptubeaudio.blogspot.com/search?q=robin>

[17 January, 2009 Home Visit:: Robin's Nest](#)

[15 October, 2009 Part II. From Beryllium to Beryllium](#)

[07 September, 2010 04-09-10 Return to Robin's Nest](#)

[27 January, 2011 Talk Vinyl: Restoration of Garrard 301 Part II](#)

[03 February, 2011 Talk Vinyl: Restoration of Garrard 301 Part III](#)

[09 February, 2011 Talk R2R: How to Describe the Sound of R2R?](#)

[26 June, 2011 Audiophiles in Illness - Music as Therapy](#)

[27 August, 2011 Welcome back Robin, we'll be missing you!](#)

[30 June, 2012 Letter from Robin in Taipei](#)

[29 August, 2016 Home Visit: My Dear Old Friend Robin the Scot](#)

[29 October, 2017 Letter from Taipei: Robin's New Toys](#)



### ***Human Rights Watch***

<https://perma.cc/84TB-NTLS>

Human Rights Watch mourns the death of Robin Munro, who joined Human Rights Watch in 1989 as China researcher and Hong Kong office director. His eyewitness reporting on the 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy protesters at Tiananmen Square in Beijing helped the world understand and respond to the Chinese government's violent repression.

Munro passed away in Taiwan on May 19, 2021.

While working at Human Rights Watch from 1989-1998, Munro did pathbreaking research on China's psychiatric abuse of political prisoners, abuses in orphanages, and organ harvesting of convicts. He also broke new ground reporting on Inner Mongolia, the laogai ("reform through labor") detention system in Xinjiang, and repression of Catholics in Hebei province. While researching the first major report on China's Three Gorges Dam, Munro unearthed a government coverup of the collapse of a different dam several years earlier through malfeasance and shoddy construction.

"Robin Munro was a powerful advocate for human rights in China who played a pivotal role in helping dozens of dissidents from China resettle abroad and pursue their activism," said [Kenneth Roth](#), executive director of Human Rights Watch. "He was a colleague whose passion for research, the truth, and justice inspired us all."

He was the lead researcher on groundbreaking reports, including *Detained in China and Tibet: A Directory of Political and Religious Prisoners* (1994); *Death by Default: A Policy of Fatal Neglect in China's State Orphanages* (1996); and *Dangerous Minds: Political Psychiatry in China Today and its Origins in the Mao Era* (2002).

Munro, a prolific writer, and George Black, in 1993, co-authored *Black Hands of Beijing: Lives of Defiance in China's Democracy Movement*, which traced the lives of three leading Tiananmen activists to explain the genesis of pro-democracy movements.

After leaving Human Rights Watch, Munro studied at the University of London's School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS), where he continued his research on abuses of psychiatry and earned a doctorate. Throughout his career as an activist, journalist, and scholar, Munro was known for his meticulous research, repeatedly fact-checking and

re-interviewing sources. After SOAS, Munro joined the Hong Kong-based China Labour Bulletin, founded by Han Dongfang, one of the Tiananmen leaders Munro helped escape to freedom. He stepped down from the organization in 2011.

Munro inspired and mentored subsequent generations of scholars and activists, giving them time, attention, and advice. He read drafts of manuscripts and journal articles, debated political trends inside China, offered advice on advocacy strategies, and always had recommendations about great music and stereo equipment (old-style valve amplifiers were, in his view, *de rigueur*).

Munro, who was from Scotland, always proudly listed among his professional experience his stint as an Edinburgh bus driver. He liked to joke that learning Chinese might mean finally being understood in at least one language. He always brought warmth and support to discussions, encouraging people whose human rights were already secure to deploy those rights in service of helping others.

"For Human Rights Watch and especially its China team, Robin was a hero, a role model, and an extraordinary friend," said Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch. "He will be deeply missed as a scholar and an activist, but his legacy will live on in our work, and in the lives of so many he kept out of China's prisons and supported at critical moments."

Human Rights Watch sends condolences to Robin's longtime partner, the writer Pao-lien Huang.



*School of Oriental & African Studies*

<https://perma.cc/3RWS-UE7Y>

*Robin Munro, 1952-2021*

Robin Munro, human rights scholar and activist, and the author of pathbreaking studies of human rights abuses in China, passed away peacefully of complications from illness on May 19, 2021.

## I

Robin was born in London on June 1, 1952, a brother to 4-year-old Sandra. He had a peripatetic childhood. His father Sandy was at the time a lecturer at King's College London in physiology. When Sandy decided to study medicine, he and Robin's mother, Ailie, sent Robin and Sandra in 1955 to live in Aberdeen for a year with their paternal grandparents and other extended family members, so that Sandy could better focus on his studies. It was a difficult time for both Robin and Sandra, despite the warm care they received, and was the beginning of a special closeness and love between them that lasted all of Robin's life.

After his return from Aberdeen, Robin lived in London until 1958, when his father, who had always wanted to return to Scotland, took up a lectureship at the Veterinarian School at Glasgow University. In Glasgow, Robin went to Hillhead High School, where he flourished academically and personally. In 1962, however, his parents split up and his father moved to Edinburgh. After about a year, Robin asked if he could live with his father because he felt sorry for him and wished to support him, and with the consent of his mother went off to Edinburgh. This move, however, had an unhappy outcome; his father was in an emotionally unstable state and Robin was under unbearable pressure. Nevertheless, he managed to do well academically at George Watson's College and got the necessary qualifications to enter Edinburgh University in 1969.

Like many young people in that era, Robin tried a number of things. His first chosen subject at university was psychology, but neither the subject nor university life appealed to him and he left before the end of the year. He later returned for a second year to study a different subject, but—fortunately for the human rights community—still felt he had made the wrong choice. At some point during his time in Edinburgh, he worked as a bus driver, a job he was proud of and always put in his CV, in addition to regaling friends with tales of Scotsmen on public transportation.

He eventually left Edinburgh again and went traveling around Europe, living rough and eventually settling into a hippie commune in Formentera. New Age dietary practices proved less than salutary for him—he would later wonder with amazement that he had ever thought it a good idea to eat uncooked brown rice at one point, with predictable and unpleasant consequences—and he fell ill, appearing gaunt and unhealthy when he showed up again in London around 1974.

By this time, he was ready to go back to university, and now he wanted to study Chinese. Could it have been family history? His mother had been born in Swatow in 1918 to missionary parents, as had her mother. His mother's parents stayed in China until 1925, when they felt the political situation was too dangerous and returned to Edinburgh to live. Robin always denied the connection to family members, and rarely if ever mentioned it to friends. Perhaps it was a youthful Marxism—although if, like many of a similar political disposition at that time, he thought of China as a potential model Marxist society, that view did not survive his first few months in China.

Regardless of the motivation, the subject worked for Robin. He was very happy with Chinese, and graduated with First-Class Honours from the University of Edinburgh.

In 1977, Robin went to China for two years as part of a China-UK student exchange program, and there mixed happily with a cosmopolitan group of foreign and Chinese students. That period proved to be a critical turning point in modern Chinese history: Mao Zedong had died just a year before Robin's arrival, and the rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping, the pathbreaking 3<sup>rd</sup> Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee, and the rise and eventual crushing of the Democracy Wall all took place while Robin was there. Robin was fully alert to the significance of events as they happened, collecting documents and talking to as many people as he could.

During the 1977-78 academic year, he was at Peking University, where foreign students roomed with the last group of worker-peasant-soldier students to attend Chinese universities. (At the same time, another worker-peasant-soldier student, Xi Jinping, was just down the road at Tsinghua University.) Robin elected to take classes in philosophy, which at the time meant stultifyingly dreary lectures on the intricacies of dialectical materialism, read word-for-word from a textbook.

The following year at Nanjing University, he shared a dormitory with the first group of students to attend university after the post-Cultural Revolution restoration of the college entrance examination: the famous "Class of '77". (Although the Chinese students actually began their studies in the spring of 1978, the class is named after the academic year in which it began its studies.) It was quite a contrast. The classes were quite a contrast as well, with real intellectual content. There he studied modern Chinese history, learning about 19<sup>th</sup>-century secret societies and the Taiping Rebellion from the renowned scholar Cai Shaoqing.

Robin's time in China shaped the rest of his life decisively. Observing the political ferment, recognizing the special moment in history, collecting documentation, watching the Democracy Wall go up and then come down—all this turned him into a lifelong activist (or perhaps simply solidified an existing predisposition in this lapsed Marxist and ex-bus driver) who felt the suffering of others, waded through mountains of documentation to expose the individual and institutional perpetrators, and did not blink when his help was needed to get people and documents out of China.

After leaving China in 1979, Robin returned to London, where he began working for Amnesty International. While at Amnesty, he laboriously researched and wrote a report on rehabilitation through labor (*laodong jiaoyang* 劳动教养) in China, a form of administrative punishment that despite its innocuous label involved detention in a camp for years with virtually no meaningful procedural safeguards. But upon handing over the draft, he was told that Amnesty did not work on administrative detention; that it was “outside the mandate.” It still rankled decades later.

While in London, Robin also amused himself and others with a regular column called “Monkey Business” in *China Now*, the journal of the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding (or SACU, which Robin sometimes referred to as the Society for Accepting China Uncritically). The column typically consisted of translations of, and commentary on, items in the Chinese press that tickled Robin’s fancy, such as advertisements for male cosmetics or breast-enlarging machines guaranteed to turn around one’s social life, or an account of how Jiang Qing tried to stir up nationalist fervor by seeing a grave insult in a gift of glass snails to a Chinese delegation visiting abroad.

In about 1987, Robin moved to New York to work for Human Rights Watch. The move proved fortuitous, because it was there that he met Pao-lien Huang, then an aspiring Taiwanese writer and now the well-known author of some sixteen books of fiction and non-fiction, including five published in mainland China. She became his lifelong partner and wife, the serene rock to which his happiness was forever firmly anchored.

In 1989, he moved with Pao-lien to Hong Kong to work as the principal China researcher and director of the Hong Kong office of Human Rights Watch. A major event in Robin's life occurred in May and June of that year, when he was in Beijing for the Tiananmen Square protests and the subsequent June 4<sup>th</sup> massacre. After almost all journalists and other foreign observers had prudently left the scene, he stayed in the Square for the entire period from the evening of June 3<sup>rd</sup> until the morning of June 4<sup>th</sup>, writing a key eyewitness account. This account made the important point that it was not in fact students who were massacred in the Square, but rather the citizens of Beijing—the *laobaixing*—who were supporting the students in the streets outside the Square and were slaughtered there. As he wrote,

insisting on factual precision is not just a matter of splitting hairs. For the geography of the killing reveals much about the government's cold political logic and its choice of targets . . . . [T]he students and the intellectuals would, by and large, be spared. The *laobaixing*, on the other hand, would be mercilessly punished in order to eradicate organized popular unrest for a generation.

It was during his time at Human Rights Watch that Robin researched and wrote some of his most important work. In 1994, he was already writing about organ harvesting in *Organ Procurement and Judicial*

Execution in China. In 1996, he wrote, together with Jeff Rigsby, Death by Default: A Policy of Fatal Neglect in China's State Orphanages. In 2000—after leaving Human Rights Watch, but based on research he conducted while there—he published Judicial Psychiatry in China and Its Political Abuses. All of these works constituted the first serious and scholarly examination of the problems they addressed.

Doing China-related human rights work takes a heavy toll. In addition to his day job of writing the meticulously researched reports on human rights abuses that constitute the gold standard in the field, he undertook a tremendous amount of individual casework, helping countless democracy activists escape from China to safety. Individual cases are extraordinarily time-consuming and emotionally draining, but he never hesitated to move heaven and earth for those who needed his help. He relentlessly lobbied diplomats so that they would give humanitarian visas and refugee status to individuals. Some people fleeing the post-June 4<sup>th</sup> crackdown literally showed up at Robin and Pao-lien's doorstep and spent weeks at their place, being fed and accommodated by Pao-lien while Robin tried to find solutions for them.

Thus it was that after several years at Human Rights Watch, Robin was exhausted. Having accumulated an immense amount of material and needing to do something different, he decided to pursue a doctoral degree, and in 1999 entered the Law Department of the School of Oriental & African Studies of the University of London as the Sir Joseph Hotung Senior Research Fellow, where he continued his work on psychiatric abuse in China. This work culminated in his 2005 doctoral dissertation, published a year later in book form as China's Psychiatric Inquisition: Dissent, Psychiatry and the Law in Post-1949 China.

In 2003, Robin went to Hong Kong to join China Labour Bulletin, a labor rights organization founded by Han Dongfang, a railway worker and labor activist Robin had met in 1989 in Beijing. Han had been imprisoned in China for his activities—and not just imprisoned, but held in a cell shared with tuberculosis sufferers, with the evident intention of causing him to become infected. This duly occurred, and he would likely have died—he lost a lung—without Robin’s superhuman efforts to get him released and out of China.

The next year, Robin and Pao-lien were married. They lived in a few places in Hong Kong, but their friends best remember their house and hospitality on Lamma Island. Robin’s commute often involved him arriving at the pier seconds before the ferry was to depart. He liked living on the edge.

In May and June of 2011, Robin was diagnosed in Hong Kong with carcinoid tumor, a rare kind of cancer that affects the neuro-endocrine system and displays almost no symptoms, and so is rarely detected until it is quite advanced—as it was with Robin. His doctors in Hong Kong expressed sympathy, opined that surgery or other treatment would be pointless, and advised him to settle his affairs expeditiously.

Not being quite ready to go gentle into that good night, Robin managed, through the good offices of Pao-lien’s brother, to get connected with a cancer specialist in Taiwan who took a more sanguine view of the possibilities. Before long, Robin and Pao-lien had decamped to Taiwan, where Robin was to spend the rest of his life.

## II

In the course of his life, Robin left a deep impression on everyone who got to know him well. He was no Mr. Rogers; not a few of the tributes that poured in after his death mentioned that the writer had on one or

more occasions gotten into a fierce argument with Robin. He could at times be prickly, although he mellowed considerably over the years and particularly after his move to Taiwan. But he was at the same time warm and generous, without a trace of pettiness.

Robin was a passionate and committed human rights activist, but crucially he was also a meticulous and gifted scholar. Some people work on the individual level, some on the systemic level. Robin did both. Many individuals owe to Robin's unstinting efforts on their behalf the fact that they are not in jail in China (or worse). Painting on a larger canvas, Robin identified and wrote pathbreaking reports on key human rights issues in China. He was there first, and his reports were meticulously and irrefutably documented with Chinese sources.

A key part of Robin's success as an activist was his sense of responsibility, as a scholar, to the truth as supported by evidence. Despite his passion—who could make a career out of human rights activism without passion?—he never exaggerated. This is why when he told journalists or government officials that something was happening, they could have confidence that it was the truth.

In an era when the term "Renaissance man" is overused, Robin truly fit the description. In addition to being both an activist and a scholar, he was a tremendously talented guitarist, largely in the realm of folk music, and a keen student of music history and lover of all kinds of music, from Josquin des Prez to Schoenberg and beyond.

And it must not be left unsaid that Robin was a devoted husband to his equally devoted wife, Pao-lien. It is an unsettled question as to who enjoyed more the many visits their many friends paid them at their home in Taiwan, the hosts or the guests. All remember it as a pleasure.

### III

Life in Taiwan with Pao-lien was good to Robin. An important part of his new health regimen after the cancer diagnosis was reducing stress. He stepped back from the grind of day-to-day work at China Labour Bulletin, later serving instead with its fund-raising arm, Friends of China Labour Bulletin. He spent countless contented hours over the next decade working on his magnificent audio system. He sawed, sanded, planed, and glued to restore and upgrade his beloved guitars, and read musical supply catalogs for relaxation. (He sometimes felt he had missed his calling as a luthier.) And he spent little time on email debates and no time at all on Twitter.

With the help of his doctors in Taiwan and an experimental treatment that required periodic trips to Germany, Robin managed to shrink the tumors to the point where the cancer could be said to be in remission. He took up biking and rode extensively with friends along the hilly roads around his home. In April of 2021, however, a liver problem put him in the hospital and eventually proved intractable. Because of Covid-19, his sister and friends outside of Taiwan were unable to be with him. But with Pao-lien at his side, he died peacefully on May 19.

For many in the human rights community, his passing marks the loss of a giant figure. For his wife, sister, and friends, it marks the loss of a part of themselves. For everyone, his life is a reminder of what matters in this world. In Shakespeare's words, "His life was gentle, and the elements mixed so well in him that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, 'This was a man.'" *Ave atque vale.*

—Donald Clarke



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by David Frazier

*China human rights ‘legend’ laid to rest*

*Robin Munro, a key Western observer of the 1989 Tiananmen student protests who also published reports on China’s psychiatric abuse of political prisoners, abuses in orphanages and organ harvesting of convicts, passed away in Taipei last month*

The international community of China human rights watchers lost a legendary figure last month with the passing of Robin Munro, who was one of the key Western observers of the 1989 Tiananmen student protests in Beijing. He died on May 19 in Taipei at age 67.

Tributes have poured forth from ranking journalists and top figures at Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, China Labor Bulletin and London’s School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS), calling Munro a “legend,” who set the “gold standard” for human rights documentation in the post-Tiananmen era.

“Munro was [Human Rights Watch’s] first researcher on China. He was the last known Westerner to leave Tiananmen Square. He did pathbreaking work on China’s horrible orphanages and on labor rights,” tweeted Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch.



*Robin Munro stands in his studio last year in Taipei's Yangmingshan. Photo: David Frazier*

“Robin helped many Chinese dissidents, who might otherwise have died in prison, to gain their freedom. I was one of them,” wrote Tiananmen democracy activist Han Dongfang (韓東方).

“His work on China human rights issues was hugely important,” tweeted Bloomberg reporter Benjamin Robertson.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN CHINA**

Over the last three decades, Munro authored groundbreaking reports on China’s organ harvesting, abuses in orphanages, psychological torture of political prisoners and early rights abuses in Xinjiang.

Munro came into the human rights field when China was largely sealed off to the West and its human rights issues were little understood. He began his career in 1979 with Amnesty International in London, then in 1987 moved over to Human Rights Watch in New

York. In early 1989, Human Rights Watch sent him to Hong Kong as its first dedicated China researcher and office director.



*Students clean the Pillar of Shame sculpture on June 4 at the University of Hong Kong, which commemorates China's bloody crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in and around Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989. Photo: Bloomberg*

Within months of the posting to Hong Kong, student demonstrations erupted in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, and Munro traveled north to witness them first hand. He is acknowledged as the last Western observer to leave the square early on the morning of June 4, 1989, staying on to witness the arrival of the People's Liberation Army. Munro's documentation of that event, and interviews he gave on Western TV news programs, became crucial to the world's understanding of what was happening on the ground.



*Robin Munro raises his fist in June 1989, during student protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Photo courtesy of Huang Pao-lien*

A recent obituary from SOAS observed that Munro's "account made the important point that it was not in fact students who were massacred in the Square, but rather the citizens of Beijing — the laobaixing (老百姓) — who were supporting the students in the streets outside the Square and were slaughtered there."

In 1990, on Tiananmen's first anniversary, Munro explained in an article in the US magazine *The Nation*, "A massacre did take place — but not in Tiananmen Square, and not predominantly of students. The great majority of those who died... were workers, or laobaixing ("common folk" or "old hundred names"), and they died mainly on the approach roads in western Beijing."

Later in the article he explained that the reason these common citizens were “mercilessly punished [was] in order to eradicate organized popular unrest for a generation.”



*In this June 5, 1989 file photo, a man stands alone to block a line of tanks heading east on Beijing's Cangan Boulevard in Tiananmen Square. Photo: AP*

“Journalism may be only the rough draft of history,” wrote Munro, “but if left uncorrected it can forever distort the future course of events.”

“I think that a key part of Robin’s success as an activist was his sense of responsibility, as a scholar, to the truth as supported by evidence. Despite his passion... he never exaggerated,” observed Donald Clarke, a specialist in Chinese law at George Washington University and one of Munro’s closest personal friends.

## MAN OF THE PEOPLE

Robin Munro was born in London on June 1, 1952. At the age of six, he moved with his family to Scotland, where his father was a lecturer at the Veterinary School of Glasgow University.

His mother's line included three generations of missionaries in China, going back to the 1800s. His own mother was born in 1918 in Swatow, China — present day Shantou, Guangdong Province — but as political upheaval swept China in the 1920s, the family returned to Edinburgh in 1925.

Munro began his studies at Edinburgh University in 1969, but dropped out for some time to live in a hippie commune on the Balearic island of Formentera, just next to Ibiza. In Scotland, he also drove a public bus, an item he kept on his CV for years as a nod to his labor credentials. When he returned to school in 1974, he changed his academic tack and began studying Chinese.

He traveled to China for the first time as a visiting student from 1977 to 1979, a period which perfectly straddled the end of the Cultural Revolution. In his first year at Peking University, his classmates and roommates were workers, peasants and soldiers assigned to the university by the Communist Party, while in his second year he studied with intellectuals returning from rural communes, who had been sent down by Chairman Mao Zedong (毛澤東).

In the decade following the Tiananmen massacre, Munro helped numerous fleeing Chinese dissidents attain asylum in the West.

He also "did pathbreaking research" — published as reports and books — "on China's psychiatric abuse of political prisoners, abuses in orphanages and organ harvesting of convicts. He also broke new ground reporting on Inner Mongolia, the laogai (勞改, "reform

through labor”) detention system in Xinjiang and repression of Catholics in Hebei province,” according to a statement by Human Rights Watch.

“All of these works constituted the first serious and scholarly examination of the problems they addressed,” wrote Clarke.

One of the Chinese dissidents Munro helped, Li Jinjin (李進進), tweeted, “It shocked me, the sad news that my friend Robin [is] gone. He met me after I was released from Qincheng Jail in Beijing in...1991. He helped me come to the United States in...1993.”

### **PLIGHT OF ACTIVISTS**

Munro chronicled the plight of Li and other activists in the 1993 book Black Hands of Beijing, which he co-authored with George Black.

Another dissident assisted by Munro was one of the founders of the Beijing Workers’ Autonomous Federation, the aforementioned Han Dongfeng, whom Munro became friends with through frequent visits to the workers encampment in Tiananmen Square.

Following the 1989 crackdown, Han was imprisoned for two years and placed in a cell with tuberculosis sufferers. Han eventually lost a lung to the disease and might have died had Munro not lobbied for his release and helped arrange medical treatment.

In 1994, Han had settled in Hong Kong and there founded an NGO, China Labor Bulletin advocating for labor rights in China. Munro began working with him at the organization a decade later in 2003.

“Robin worked tirelessly over the past two decades to provide legal assistance for tens of thousands of Chinese workers seeking justice through the court system,” Han wrote in a recent tribute.

“Many of them had suffered terrible work injuries, contracted occupational diseases or were desperate to get the back pay owed for months, even years, of hard labor. Many workers faced imprisonment for defending their legal rights. These workers and their families should know that it was this Scotsman, Robin Munro, who helped them obtain justice.”

In 2004, Munro married the Taiwanese writer Huang Pao-lien (黃寶蓮), today a well-known author of 16 books of fiction and non-fiction.

### **PERSONAL CONNECTION**

In 2011, the couple moved from Hong Kong to Taipei, after Munro was set upon by medical issues. For a decade, he managed to beat his illness, living happily in semi-retirement on the slopes of Yangmingshan, north of Taipei.

I met him there last year, where he helped me make a digital recording of old analogue audio tape, using one of his vintage reel-to-reel tape players.

Munro was a high-end audiophile, who spoke gleefully of his German hand-crafted turntable arm, his 1950s French amplifier and his unbelievable music collection, which included some of the first ever stereo recordings on analogue tape. I now regret that I never had the chance to return so that he could play them for me — he had of course made the generous offer, and spoke with vast and marvelous knowledge on the nuances of high fidelity.

Munro was taken by a sudden illness in April and died on May 19 at Taipei Veterans Memorial Hospital. He is survived by his sister Sandra and wife Huang Pao-lien, who was by his side to the last.

Munro influenced an entire generation of human rights workers in Asia, and recent numerous tributes acknowledge this legacy.

Their sentiments are best summed up in the eulogy of his longtime friend, Donald Clarke: "For many in the human rights community, his passing marks the loss of a giant figure. For his wife, sister and friends, it marks the loss of a part of themselves. For everyone, his life is a reminder of what matters in this world. In Shakespeare's words, 'His life was gentle, and the elements mixed so well in him that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, This was a man.'"

# **MEMORIES AND TRIBUTES**



*Pao-lien Huang 黃寶蓮*

To my dearest husband Robin James Munro:

O Rose thou art sick.  
The invisible worm,  
That flies in the night  
In the howling storm:  
Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy:  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.

— The Sick Rose, by William Blake

It is unexpected yet inevitable, or you could say it's destiny if you believe in fate.

When he was sick at the end of March, Robin, my dearest husband, read this poem to me, with tears in his eyes. He sensed that his time was up. Cancer didn't take his life. Since he was diagnosed with the last stage of Carcinoid cancer ten years ago, he had lived with the disease healthily. In Taiwan he had enjoyed music, reading, cycling, fresh mountain air, beach, good food, hearty friendship .... Life is beautiful.

Then unexpectedly, a little tiny abscess with unidentified and vicious germs in his liver eventually turned into septicemia.

On his last day under unconscious condition, he waited, waited, and waited until the right moment.

Then his heart stopped beating.

It was May 19, 5:20 p.m. I was then told that 5:20 in Chinese is pronounced wo-ai-ni (I LOVE YOU).

He left with peace and grace, as he said, he had no regrets in life.



***Sandra Moscardini***

Robin was my little brother and I loved him.

We spent only a small part of our adult lives on the same continent but we remained always close and great friends. The memories of time we spent geographically close are very clear and precious, especially during the time he worked for Amnesty and was based in London. I was pregnant with my second son and we spent many happy hours swinging the 2-year-old, Joe, between us in the park while I waited for the birth of Max, my second baby. Shortly before Max was born in May 1989, Robin went off to China and the rest is history.

I have so many great memories of him playing the guitar beautifully and us singing together, so many rambling talks by Skype between Italy and Taiwan these last ten years, where we discussed anything and everything. My great regret is not having been able to see him again before he died but I am comforted knowing that Pao-lien, who he adored, was with him to the end.

He and Pao-lien were due to visit us here last summer but of course Covid put a stop to that.

For most people Robin was a courageous champion of human rights in China, and to me of course he was that, but also just my little brother. Infuriating at times but an exceptional human being and a wonderful brother who I will miss terribly.

Rest in peace dear Robin, and wherever you are now I hope there is good music.



*Anonymous (Chinese labor activist)*

工友之友

中国工人权益的维护者和推动者，其实有很多，诸如官方的工会、劳动部门和各行业协会等。民间社会的力量也不可或缺，民间社会力量总能扮演一种积极的角色，或隐或现一直是现象级的存在。比如身在香港的美国人罗宾，就是这样的一位，他低调、睿智，极具大局观。

2005年，我应邀参加一家香港社会组织主办的世贸多边谈判论坛，在会议上经朋友介绍认识了Robin，一个工作生活在香港的美国人。

经过了短暂的一个多小时的交流，Robin知识广度与深度、观察社会维度和精度都是超出我的想象。当时，中国受加入世贸的影响，劳动条款逐渐被商业行为所吸纳，受到了世界广泛的关注，维权个案成井喷状。Robin自问到，诸多的个案发生，正是我们工人组织的弱化，民间社会组织如果只考虑替工人维权显然是不够的，怎么能把工人组织起来，通过赋能，提升其谈判能力。

Robin还讲到，社会经济快速发展，社会组织的出现正是社会需求的体现，在维护劳工权益的大环境下，如何同工会合作，扮演更多更好的角色也是我们社会组织主动要去思考的。

确切地说，Robin的分析给我上了一课。我自认为已开办热线5年，接听数万个电话，但是相比较Robin的分析，自叹不如。

后来每次去香港，都要电话联络见个面，一起聊聊天。每次交流都是那么的通畅，一些观点，一些思考问题的方法直到今天还影响着我。

2009年，听朋友说Robin辞去了工作，去了台湾，专心的修养身心，调理身体。期间也偶有电话和视频聊天，总是那么的亲近，让人难忘。

2018年，回国途径香港，到朋友办公室拜访。朋友说，等会儿有一位意想不到的朋友要见你，五分钟后，Robin的出现，让人兴奋不已，喜极而泣。身体瘦了，头发白了。

Robin说，目前身体很好，可以继续出来工作了。看到一些老朋友依然活跃在为工人说话，为工人办事的领域，深感欣慰。听到这句话时，让

我最为感动的是，年届七旬，仍在为工人谋幸福，为劳工组织搭建国际交流而努力着！如此的敬业与职业，我们身边的工人却少有耳闻。

因为疫情，本来有多次见面的机会却随之东去，只能远在千里之外默默祝福。昨日惊闻不幸病逝，痛心不已，彻夜难眠，无数次循循教导的场面在眼前浮现……

祝愿在天堂里一切安好！



### ***Philip Baker with Bing Sum Lau***

Bing and I are both greatly saddened to hear of Robin's death.

Robin was one of a small group of friends whom Bing and I knew separately from different contexts before we even met each other. Bing was a fellow student of Robin at Beida in the late 1970s, and she often tells the stories of bicycle rides around Beijing and trips to other parts of the country. At Beida, Robin already showed his interest in the rights of individuals in China, including collecting information from dazibao. I met Robin when I was at SOAS in the early 1980s, and he was working on human rights in China at Amnesty.

From 1989 for around 10 years, we worked on and off with Robin, mainly on individual cases coming through Hong Kong to the UK and onwards. We can attest that there are many people who now owe their freedom, and in some cases their lives, to Robin's work in Hong Kong.

Bing and I were also part of the small conspiracy that succeeded in persuading Robin to take a break from front-line work and spend some time at SOAS completing his PhD, partly because we knew how important it was that he completed and published his work on the misuse of psychiatric facilities in China.

Personally, we both feel this loss very deeply, but he leaves a great legacy in the work that he carried out

We send our condolences and love to Pao-lien on behalf of ourselves and our children.



***Scott Bellard***

Robin and I struck a great friendship and partnership when I was head of the PRC Unit within the US Consulate General 1989-1992 and he ran the HK office of what was then called “China Watch.” We did a lot of work together on prison labor issues in China, in particular. He was fearless and tenacious, yet essentially a gentle soul. The world is an emptier place without him. Condolences especially to the lovely Paolien.



***Jean-Philippe Béja 白夏***

Robin Munro has spent most of his adult life fighting for human rights in China. A very courageous man, he was on the Square for most of the 1989 pro-democracy movement, and wrote one of what remains the best book on these events. While in Hong Kong, he devoted most of his life to saving people who were threatened by the regime because of their political positions. He was not only a great specialist as his dissertation on psychiatric repression in China has shown, he showed empathy to the victim, and was much appreciated by Chinese dissidents. After leaving Human Rights Watch, he joined his friend Han Dongfang and was instrumental in developing *China Labour Bulletin*. He therefore returned to one of his early passions as he himself had been a working class activist in Britain. His involvement in the 1960s mass movement explains his remarkable action after 1989.

But Robin was also a great friend, fascinated by music who appreciated good food and good wine. He was beautiful company, and I spent wonderful moments with him and Pao-lien, in Taiwan as in London and Hong Kong. With Robin gone, an important page of history comes to a close. He leaves a huge void in our lives.



### *Nicholas Béquelin*

It is difficult to talk about Robin without talking about his special relationship to time: "Nico! I am terribly sorry, I was finishing something and..." were more than often the first words I would hear from him as he finally appeared, generally not earlier than a good hour late, for a meeting at a café or restaurant, at the office, or even for dinner at his own home. And right away, one would be exposed to Robin's truly unique quality: his genuine, deeply felt empathy for anyone who had suffered a wrong, or a hardship.

The same Robin that had left you in limbo wondering for an increasingly uncomfortable amount of time whether he had not forgot all together about the appointment (something that—truth be told—did occasionally happen), was suddenly the Robin that genuinely experienced and fully empathized with your by now fairly restless state.

There was no show of pro forma contrition there: it was evident that he was experiencing genuine compassion for what you had just gone through. He would then launch into a rich and fascinating explanation about what had kept him, something he had been engrossed in, an urgent correspondence to finish, a critical repair to one of his beloved guitars, a call with a friend from another part of the world... it was always interesting and one's momentary irritation would just melt away. Who would hold a grudge even for an instant for someone who

so completely sympathised with you and had been just been dealing with something so compelling or important?

This ability to identify with people from all walks of life, rich or poor, young or old, educated or not, “important” or not, and this across cultures and languages, fuelled his passion and determination to stand for the inherent human dignity and rights he saw in everyone. And there, he was served by his formidable intellect.

For Robin was not only driven by compassion; he also believed in the power of meticulously exposing the truth, in the power of patiently building devastating indictments of state cruelty and wrongful policies, and in the rightness of his cause. His method was in-depth research, the gathering of incontrovertible evidence, the full historical mastery of the question he was looking at, an intimate understanding of the logic at play from the state authorities’ perspective and the tireless collection of detailed testimonies from victims or their relatives, with many of whom he stayed in contact for years afterward.

He also reached out to the leading authorities and professional associations in the field, pushing them to stop closing their eyes to the scale of abuses he had uncovered: his exposé on orphanages ultimately contributed to a change in adoption laws in China; his report on political psychiatry forced the World Psychiatric Association to take action against its Chinese affiliate; his research on organ procurement and extra-judicial executions ultimately led to the (at least formal) ban of the practice—and so on and so forth. And along the way, he continued to pick up on countless individual and asylum cases, agitating and working the phones to find solutions.

Robin was very aware of his strong intellectual capabilities, of his ability to write in an elegant and precise prose (he was never hyperbolic), and of the soundness of his judgement: such is the nature

of human rights work that a great deal of time is spent assessing the credibility of claims, the authenticity of documents, and the reliability of witnesses, and experience and judgement is often the only reliable guide. In all his reports he was aiming for the “gold standard”. And, as someone who saw himself as a sort of disciple of his (more on this later), I do think he did set that standard, which still holds.

His predilection was for investigating large-scale, institutional, state-led abuses: reeducation-through-labor, prison conditions, the post-1989 nationwide crackdown, state orphanages, the persecution of Falungong, the use of psychiatry for political repressive ends, etc. His exposés were devastating, delivering an avalanche of new, precisely sourced information, and often backed by the offending institution’s own secretive documents, reports and instructions. The “adversary” in these reports was always a specific arm of the tentacular machinery of the one-party state, something about which he had inside-out knowledge and understanding. In fact, a regular detour in our conversations was mimicking the twisted logic and abstruse vernacular that the Party and the state bureaucracy deploy to justify actions that are in fact nothing other than sheer political repression.

I would point out at something I was currently working on—for instance, the recent imprisonment of an environmental activist—and Robin, assuming the tone of a stultifying local Chinese cadre, would compose in precise Chinese official phraseology an imaginary internal report, replete with empty slogans and phantom menaces that had been valiantly quashed. I would join in and mimic a Party Central telegram congratulating the local authorities for their outstanding work in ensuring that deadly pollution remain unchecked, and that any public-minded citizen be immediately rounded up. These made for much-needed comic relief in an otherwise not always cheerful line of work.

One thing that sustained Robin in both his work and in his life was his insatiable, joyful curiosity. In fact, I struggle to think of anything that Robin would not have been curious about. Every time I would see him, he would have developed one, or several, new interests—and accumulated precise knowledge about them. It could be purely intellectual (the Scottish enlightenment), practical (the best way to win eBay auctions for rare hi-fi recordings), or about one of his enduring interests: how to live a good, purposeful life.

In fact, there was no knowledge rabbit-hole that Robin would not jump into, especially through a fortuitous encounter. He was always keen to learn about other things, asking people about their occupations, their experience and their professional field. This applied to a distinguished authority in the medical field as well as a Taiwanese fruit grower, a new religious convert, or the local electrician. Yet, there was nothing random in the way he then organised this new rubric of knowledge freshly acquired in the larger tree of his impressive culture: each new rubric belonged to a specific branch of his wide-ranging interests.

This made conversation with him an absolute delight, as he was able to mobilise his own experience, what he had read, or what someone with specialized expertise in this field had told him. This ability to assimilate new areas of knowledge in a rigorous but enthusiastic way was to prove very helpful as he successfully kept at bay his cancer for many years, having educated himself into quite advanced medical scientific research and identified the best possible treatments.

It is not possible to talk about Robin without talking about his symbiotic love for Pao-lien. He often mentioned (to me at least) how fortunate he thought he was to be Pao-lien's husband, and how wonderful she made his life and their environment. He often enthusiastically mentioned to me what new thing Pao-lien was doing,

or experimenting with, and there was no small amount of pride in being her partner. I was many times myself the beneficiary of the wonderful atmosphere of their home, full of artful qualities and infused with simple elegance. Around a delicious and inventive meal prepared by Pao-lien, conversation flowed freely, ranging from the personal to the political, peppered with Robin's anecdotes from his work and travels. He often mentioned how grateful he was to Pao-lien for creating such an environment for their life. And anyone who has had the chance to be their guest would concur...

I first came to know Robin in the mid-1990s. At the time, he and Pao-lien were living on Lamma Island, in a quiet house with a sunny garden perched on a hill. I was working on my PhD on Xinjiang. Jim Seymour, a professor at Columbia University and close friend of Robin, had recommended I go visit him. (They had worked alongside on China's network of labor camps, of which Xinjiang maintained—and still maintains—a large number). At the time Robin was still working for Human Rights Watch, and he invited me over for coffee (which he never turned out to prepare) and cigarettes (of which countless were smoked). We spoke for several hours, interrupted by a couple of calls from journalists, and I was immediately struck by how interesting the work he was doing was. I walked down home that evening dizzy with excitement: here was someone who was writing research at the highest academic standards, but whose research had an immediate impact and was written about in the newspapers! I couldn't imagine anything more exciting and meaningful.

It speaks to Robin's profound generosity and kindness that he would pay any attention to someone who was not much more than, as he used to tease me, a "bright-eyed and bushy-tailed" apprentice researcher. But that he did, and in no small measure. He opened his work, his experience, his network of contacts and his home to me.

Several of his friends in time became friends of mine too. He provided sage advice. He read my early scribblings. He urged me to write about the situation in Xinjiang. And he encouraged me to join the human rights field.

Most importantly, he let me hang around him, in his office or in the garden, while he was working. I was meeting his visitors (Robin always had a stream of visitors coming to talk about China: activists, journalists, diplomats, academics...); I was overhearing him giving long (often very long) media interviews; I was looking at some rare mainland material he had unearthed, proudly pointing to the stamps that marked the publications “Classified” or “Highly Secret”...

(Several years later, I would spend an inordinate amount of time researching and writing a report about China’s state secrets classification system—a report that showed how extensively the Party-state was intent on governing out of any kind of public scrutiny. One category of information that was mandatorily classified was the breakout of epidemics...)

Robin was too modest to see himself as a mentor, even though this is probably how one would read it now. Sometimes I would jokingly address him as the disciple of a martial art artist or Taoist mystic would, and he would impersonate a learned master dispensing priceless pearls of knowledge in esoteric terms. While this was a playful act, it was not lost on him that behind it was the deep professional and personal respect I felt for him. A few years later, when I was hired by Human Rights Watch as their China researcher, the most thrilling aspect of it for me was to occupy the very position he had been in (never matching his achievements, needless to say).

As someone who knew intimately the ins and outs of this particular job, we often had long conversations about its ups and down: the

excitement about bringing to something to light; the discouragement about the seemingly endless task; the wonder at the courage and decency of the laobaixing; the relief at the resolution of an individual case; the satisfaction about crafting a perfect media quote; and what he called “the chance of seeing the world as it really works”, as one ricochets between activists, victims, diplomats, lawyers, journalists and government officials.

After Robin stepped away from day-to-day work to focus on his health and moved to Taiwan, he was determined, as he put it simply, “to enjoy life”: he applied to this the same determination he had showed for his work for decades. “You have to enjoy life, Nico, don’t work too hard!” he would often say, and he would list all the things he was now enjoying doing: what he called his “hobbies”, which included perfecting to no end his hi-fi system (in this, too, he was a purist), playing the guitar, working on their home, reading about his new interests.

Visiting Robin and Pao-lien at their home in Taiwan was always an enchantment. To me, this was Robin at his happiest. All the qualities that made him a wonderful human being, his intellect, his empathy for people, his kindness, his erudition, and his humour were given full play during these years.

He was still late for most things, and I wish he had been late leaving us too.



*Aris Chan*

I first met Robin in 2007, when I joined China Labour Bulletin as a researcher. My first impression of him was quite favourable but our work relationship deteriorated over time. We often argued and it

caused a lot of emotional distress for both of us. He could be overbearing, extraordinarily opinionated and impatient. After three years, I left China Labour Bulletin to pursue another career path.

Even though we quarrelled a lot, I never lost my respect for Robin. And once I stopped working with him, I was able to appreciate again just how funny, warm-hearted, sincere and generous he was. He had a wide range of interests and it was never boring with him around. I enjoyed visiting him and Pao Lien in Taiwan, and am glad that I was one of the many people who counted themselves as friends with this colourful and charismatic man.



*Jianfu Chen*

It saddens me tremendously to hear the passing of Dr Robin Munro, and the news is particularly sad at a time when we need truth-tellers most.

I did not have the privilege to know Dr Munro personally, but I have read many of his publications and I know well of his endeavour in the areas of human rights. I have always held him high as a truth-teller in China-related studies. His passing is not just sad; it is a great loss to China studies and its scholarship.

His passing will be mourned by many and he will forever be missed.



*Yu-jie Chen 陳玉潔*

I was sad when I heard of Robin's passing. I only met Robin once some years ago at a social gathering in Taiwan (after I had heard much about his work on China and at CLB). It was a wonderful dinner along with a pleasant stroll down the Tamsui riverbank, with him, Paolién, and a

dear friend. Robin was generous, intelligent, and fun to talk to. He was easygoing, but he could also get into a passionate argument when he disagreed with you. Underneath, however, I think he was a kind, gentle soul. That's why he had so many dear friends who will always remember him. He and Paolien were a great, loving couple. My heart goes out to Paolien, a strong, beautiful human being too.



*Donald Clarke*

It is very hard to lose Robin. I knew him for more than 44 years and he was my closest friend.

I first got to know Robin, but only slightly, in the 1977-78 academic year when we were both students at Peking University. To be honest, my first impression was not very favorable, and I was a little apprehensive when we both arrived at Nanjing University in the fall of 1978 and I discovered we were to be roommates. But I quickly discovered the warm and witty guy beneath the occasionally prickly exterior and we became fast friends literally for life.

Fortunately, our lives frequently brought us together. When I was getting an M.Sc. degree at SOAS in London, Robin was there. When I was frequently traveling to Hong Kong, Robin was there. And when Robin was in Taiwan, I regularly went simply because I wanted to stay in contact with him and Pao-lien.

Robin managed to excel in many things. He was a talented and diligent scholar. The written work he produced in his human rights research was thoroughly documented and has stood the test of time. I was honored to be on his Ph.D. committee at SOAS and to be part of giving his work the academic recognition it deserved.



*Robin's Ph.D. viva, London, 2005. Left to right: Michael Palmer, Philip Baker, Robin, Don Clarke*

But he was also committed to working with actual people and saved countless individuals.

Outside of the human rights field, he was a very talented guitarist and we had many happy hours playing together, some of which I managed to record and still have. He was great with his hands and loved to spend time restoring or improving guitars. As he once wrote to me,

I always say, I should have been a carpenter (or luthier) rather than an intellectual of any kind. I'm rarely happier than when I'm surrounded by my tools and doing some woodworking or fixer-upper project. In the new house, I have a great little eyrie-style workshop, with one side looking out onto a eucalyptus forest.

In 2014, he sent me an email saying,

I may need counselling: I'm on the brink of blowing a big wad of cash on a George Lowden guitar. (Specifically, a Lowden O-35 with cocobolo back and sides, and a redwood top -- about 4,000 Euro new.) I've twice played Lowdens and the experience was unforgettable -- incredible sustain and bell-like sonority. Just gorgeous!

Apparently he did not get the counselling, because the following year I got the following email from him:

I stopped off on the way home [from Germany] in Amsterdam for a couple of nights, so I could go visit what's probably the best guitar shop in Europe, The Fellowship of Acoustics (TFOA). It's in a little village about 90 minutes' train ride from Amsterdam, and they have a fantastic range of high-end instruments on show. I spent about five hours playing non-stop, and in the end placed a custom order for a Lowden, using a selection of exotic tonewoods that I've been lustng after for the past few years.

It's a Lowden O-50 guitar, made with African Blackwood (back and sides) and Adirondack Spruce (for the top). My custom model, which should be ready for delivery in about three months for now, will have the 45-degree armrest bevel option, as well as a 50-year old mahogany neck, and using flamed mahogany (instead of african blackwood and elm) for the binding, the rosette and the top headstock facing.

Price: 6,600 Euros! Sounds a lot, but if I'd ordered it direct from Lowden in Northern Ireland, with the various custom options I've chosen it would have cost about 9,000 Euros.

There's a good lesson for all of us in how he ended the email:

And as the TFOA's company motto goes: "Life's too short to play a shitty guitar."

As his friends know, you could not visit his house in Taiwan without getting treated to his magnificent sound system. It was one of Robin's great pleasures to be constantly upgrading it with this or that. He once wrote me:

My latest hi-fi system tweak is going to be a Townshend Super Tweeter, which can easily output frequencies of up to 70 KHz, which approximates to what one actually hears (or rather: senses, since your ears don't go that high) with live music -- and the inclusion/transmission of which has the effect of clarifying the entire frequency range right down to the bass level (i.e. all the parts you *do* hear).

And he sent me this gentle bit of self-mockery:



*"The two things that really drew me to vinyl were the expense and the inconvenience."*

Indeed, it's because of Robin that I now listen to music mostly on vinyl and through a vacuum-tube amplifier. In addition to all this, Robin

had not just an amazing knowledge of music, but what is to me an amazing ability to appreciate all kinds of music. "You've got to hear this!", he would tell me excitedly before putting on a recording of some piece of modernist dissonance. I am afraid I must often have disappointed him.

One particular memory I will always treasure is visiting Robin and Pao-lien in their house in London around 2002 and reducing each other to helpless laughter as we read each other passages from a book about China written in a literary style that is best described as the full Foucault. The only other way that I can recall of making him laugh so hard was to voice Monty Python skits I had committed to memory.



*Don and Robin, London, 2002*

Often someone's passing makes us think about our own lives, and Robin's passing is no exception. He is quite an inspiration to all of us to see what we can accomplish in the time we have been allotted on

this earth. Robin's was truly a life well lived. He did great things, and at the same time did not let his work consume him. After his cancer diagnosis, he very wisely chose to live a much lower-stress life—as he wrote me, “Just browsing [[the stewmac.com](http://stewmac.com)] catalogue is an effective form of anti-stress therapy, I find”—and who could have been a better partner for him than Pao-lien? Whenever I saw him in Taiwan, his smile was always broad and relaxed. You could see he was truly happy.

In my high school Latin class, we learned a poem by Catullus that has always stayed with me. *Ave atque vale*, Robin.

Multās per gentēs et multa per aequora vectus  
adveniō hās miserās, frāter, ad īferiās,  
ut tē postrēmō dōnārem mūnere mortis  
et mūtam nequīquam alloquerer cinerem  
quandōquidem fortūna mihi tētē abstulit ipsum  
heu miser indignē frāter adempte mihi  
nunc tamen intereā haec, prīscō quae mōre parentum  
trādita sunt tristī mūnere ad īferiās,  
accipe frāternō multum mānantia flētū.  
Atque in perpetuum, frāter, avē atque valē.

Carried through many nations and over many seas,  
I arrive, brother, for these wretched funeral rites  
so that I might present you with the last tribute of death  
and speak in vain to silent ash,  
since Fortune has carried you, yourself, away from me.  
Alas, poor brother, unfairly taken away from me,  
now in the meantime, nevertheless, these things which in the  
ancient custom of ancestors  
are handed over as a sad tribute to the rites,

receive, dripping much with brotherly weeping.  
And forever, brother, hail and farewell.



*Xiaoyang Clarke*

It is heart-wrenching to learn of Robin's passing. Robin did fantastic work and had a significant impact on many people's lives. What a great loss to the community! I heard a lot about Robin through Don for many years. However, I can never forget first meeting him almost 30 years ago. In the summer of 1992, I had just gone through a traumatic experience in Beijing, and Don arranged for us to meet. Because of his human rights work, Robin was the only person who really understood in detail what I had been through. His sympathetic questions and understanding moved me to tears.

Robin made me realize the fundamental rights and freedoms that belong to all of us, from birth until death. Robin has lived an entire life and contributed to humanity in ways we could all aspire to. Robin will be greatly missed.



*Sarah Cook*

I first met Robin myself when we both happened to be grad students at SOAS in London in the mid-2000s. In addition to his own cutting-edge research, he was brilliant, candid, and gracious in advice he gave me on a later visit to Taiwan. A conversation over dinner at his home with him and his wife ultimately inspired our 2017 Freedom House report on religious revival, repression, and resistance in China. I'm sure he was a mentor and adviser to many of us young China watchers and rights advocates, leaving his mark for years to come.

A sad loss.



### *Geoffrey Crothall*

I was lucky enough to have known Robin for more than 30 years. At different times, in London, Hong Kong and Beijing, we were work colleagues, journalist and expert commentator, and, most importantly, just friends. Throughout, Robin was kind, generous and appreciative of my work. We had our disagreements – such as the week-long debate at China Labour Bulletin over whether to use an upper case or lower case P for “province” in a forthcoming research report – but the friendship survived.

I have many fond memories but the one that stands out – mainly because Robin would constantly remind me of it – is the time he came to Beijing in 1992 to debrief Han Dongfang after his release from prison, and prepare for his much-needed medical treatment in the United States. Robin stayed in my apartment in the Jianguomenwai diplomatic compound because he assumed it would be a relatively secure location for his interviews with Dongfang. Unfortunately, I neglected to tell him one day that I had agreed to let friends of mine shoot the interior scenes for a beer commercial in my apartment. They arrived in the morning, while I was in the office, set up their lights and cameras, and then left for lunch. Robin came back to find the front door open, lights and recording equipment everywhere. In a panic, he gathered up all his documents and rushed to the US embassy a few blocks away and left the documents there for safe keeping. In the end, no damage was done except to the beer bottles my friends had put in the freezer, which subsequently exploded.

On another occasion, Robin should have perhaps been more guarded. In 2006, he gave a talk at the School of Oriental and African Studies to the mark the publication of his book, *China's Psychiatric Inquisition*. In

the audience was the first political secretary at the Chinese embassy in London. Robin and I were going to dinner after the talk and the secretary asked if he could join us. Throughout the meal, he asked Robin a lot of very specific questions about his research and documentation, which Robin was happy to answer. It was only after he left that Robin had pause for thought. He turned to me and asked, "Do you think that guy was a spy?"

But my favourite Munro observation of all time is when he joined a few China Labour Bulletin staff for lunch one day at a tea house in Sheung Wan. Robin studied the exhaustive menu intently for a few minutes and was drawn to one item in particular, 法式多士 (Faatsi dosi in Cantonese). "What is this?" Robin asked, "Fascist toast?" For non-Chinese speakers, it was actually French toast.



### *Meg Davis*

I first encountered him when I started working as China researcher at HRW in 2002. Robin had been out of the China researcher job for at least five years by then - I think he was actually the first HRW China researcher, if I'm not mistaken - but he left huge shoes to fill, given his extraordinary work in Hong Kong during and after the TAM protests and massacre, when he helped rights defenders get to safety, gathered and published research based on data they gathered, and authored the first groundbreaking reports for HRW. I didn't get to meet him in person until I'd been in the job at least a year, and had heard more than an earful by then about how amazing my predecessor was. So when we met for tea in Hong Kong, I was expecting a titan. Instead, he struck me as a kind, generous and gentle thinker, totally alive to all the postcolonial nuances and ironies of his/our jobs, careful, scholarly and thorough in his research, a staunch ally of Chinese rights advocates.

His time on earth was not long enough, but he used it wisely and well and the world is a better place for having had him in it.



*Jørgen Delman*

Robin was a true friend when we were students at PKU 1977-78 and our relationship continued for years. We met in London and Aarhus subsequently and last time in Hong Kong in 2004. Robin taught me to run, we biked and studied together, followed big-character campaigns at PKU and in Beijing in 1977-78, we sang and partied together, and we shared our passion for digging deep into China's realities, even the harshest of them. I have the deepest respect for Robin's work as a human rights scholar and for the work he did with Chinese dissidents. He stimulated my interest in China's secret societies which I have followed since, taught about and recently made a podcast about (thinking again about Robin's 1989 report on the issue when doing it).

At times, our relationship moved into our innermost feelings and emotions, and we shared the joys and sorrows there.

May he rest in peace. My warmest sympathies go to his wife and others close to him.



*Hualing Fu*

Like many of us, I read Robin's seminal work on political psychiatry before meeting him in person. He was then working with Dongfang on some collective bargaining projects with Chinese workers. It must be in the immediate aftermath of the Honda strike. I recall we co-organized some trainings and I got myself interested in labor dispute

resolution and industrial action because of my involvement in some of the project activities.

Robin was a meticulous and forceful organizer - it was not easy to walk those activists from factory floors and NGO leaders through well-structured training sessions. The collective bargaining mock exercise that Robin led was in particular exciting, all those bargaining, trade-offs, and handshakes at the end were eye-opening, bringing an ideal type of labor relations, with great potentials in those days, to life.

We worked together on a number of projects, all related to labor relations in Guandong. Through the projects, I got to know some of the NGO leaders, and their lawyers, and some of their legal and industrial actions. Robin was a core member of the project team. I remember Robin was the person who introduced me to hushmail and reminded me firmly not to forward a message in hushmail to a non-hushmail address!

Robin maintained a high degree of idealism in working toward changing China and was at the same acutely aware of the practical constraints on the ground. He had a great sense of what was feasible as a project.

RIP, Robin. You will be missed.



### *Mary Gallagher*

I first met Robin in the mid-1990s as a graduate student based in Beijing, but traveling to Hong Kong to talk to people like Robin, Han Dongfang, Tim Pringle, Geoff Crothall and others involved in the human rights scene post-1989. I had a friend, Joyce Wan, who was working at Human Rights Watch with Robin and she must have introduced us. I remember him as a kind and serious person, who was

always willing to help out students and people just starting out in the field as I was. He was unpretentious and unassuming, even though he was incredibly well-respected and admired. He will be sorely missed in the human rights community and by his many friends, including me.



*Scott Greathead*

Robin Munro was my good friend and colleague who worked for my pro bono law client China Labour Bulletin for 18 years. I first came to know of Robin during the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, when he was the Human Rights Watch representative in Beijing. As many have noted, Robin has saved many lives. One life Robin saved twice, the life of his great friend and comrade Han Dongfang, the workers' rights advocate and founder of China Labour Bulletin. During Tiananmen, Robin became interested in meeting Han Dongfang, the young railway worker who helped organize the delegation of workers at Tiananmen known as the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation, China's first independent trade union. As one of the busiest foreigners reporting the events of Tiananmen to the world, Robin did not make it to the site of the workers' delegation until June 3. Robin was among those who expected the military to invade the Square that night, and at their meeting Robin urged Dongfang to leave the Square before the military arrived. Dongfang was reluctant to do that, but followed Robin's advice, left the Square and avoided the military's massacre that night. Dongfang ultimately turned himself into the police after learning he was at the top of the government's most wanted list. In 1992, after 22 months in prison, Dongfang was dying of tuberculosis. Robin came to Dongfang's rescue a second time by leading an international campaign that pressured the Chinese government to release him to the U.S.,

where he was treated for his tuberculosis. As Robin later told a journalist about Dongfang's commitment to workers' rights and his willingness to face arrest, Dongfang "is just not prepared to back down . . . [He] has just got integrity and determination."

I came to know Robin personally in 2003 when Bob Bernstein, the founder of Human Rights Watch, asked for my help in getting Robin to Hong Kong so that he could help Dongfang with the important work of China Labour Bulletin. Robin was then in the UK, where he held a prestigious research fellowship at SOAS and was completing a groundbreaking work on psychiatric hospitals in China that was about to be published. But Robin's commitment to human rights compelled him to leave the safety of Britain and join Dongfang in Hong Kong in the dangerous work of advocating workers' rights in China.

Robin had long been a hero of mine for the lives he has saved and his brilliant reporting on China. But when he joined CLB he also became my *braw* friend who shared with me the stony beauty of our Scottish heritage, from Hamish Henderson and his *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica* to Neal Ascherson's book *Stone Voices* to countless songs and poems. Robin embodied all that Robert Burns meant in *A Man's a Man for A' That*, and much more than that to me. I will miss him greatly.



### **Peter Harris**

I knew Robin for more than forty years, and always admired him as a human rights advocate and as a person. His rigorous scholarship and unbending commitment to human rights were remarkable. I also liked him very much - clever, witty, humane, with a droll Scots sense of humour. We first met by chance in China in the bleak days of the 1970's, then worked together at Amnesty International in London in 1987-1988, when his investigations into the systemic use of torture in

China, drawing extensively on Chinese sources, showed what careful human rights research could achieve. After that our paths crossed now and then, over dinners on Cheung Chau island in Hong Kong, and lastly in Taipei in late 2011, where I spent a happy weekend with him and his partner, even though his cancer was already wearing him down. His views about China were well-informed, trenchant and intolerant of cant, and so were his thoughts on the world. Robin, you will be greatly missed.



### *Hong Ying 虹影*

我还没有准备好，罗斌（Robin M）昨天下午走了的事实，虽然是远在美国的好友告诉我，我在脸书上找，有台湾朋友说到，他是不在这个世界上了。为了他所爱的一切，他从得病后，从香港搬到台湾淡水近十年时间，他和病抗争，读书听音乐，他收集黑胶唱片、养生练中国气功，身体如常！我都以为他顺利过了另一个世界的召唤，没想到今年四月时我和宝莲联系，得知他住进医院，是身体新地方有了问题。那时我有个不好的感觉，但坚信他这一次能挺过。我不敢打电话，怕又是她在医院里照顾他。但是没想到一个月，他就走了，早知这样，一定要打扰他，和他说话。他曾救了多少生命，做了多少了不起的事，他对一般的人，好朋友，都慷慨大方、正义、充满同情，失去他，对我们都是巨大的损失。瑟珀成长的过程中一直得到他的关爱，我们若在一个城市，不是见面，而是经常，也常约到一个国家旅行，好在他最后的岁月里，他们要么来意大利，要么我们去香港、台北，我们住在一起，吃在一起，谈论天地，如同家人，尤其是我在伦敦返回中国的那段时期。找了一些我给他拍的照片，很庆幸，我们五个人同游天桥立，住在同一家日本艺术家的酒店。看着你的照片，你是那么快乐睿智。在我生活的世界里，到处都是你的身影，亲爱的罗斌！你永远在我们的心里，爱你，永远不会改变！

May 20, 2021

世间万物

给Robin

听，风很轻，轻得像这黑夜  
像这天上闪烁的星辰  
你需要水，需要更多的水  
流过更多的山峦和森林  
你转过身  
风也转过身  
水也转过身  
世间万物，有风，就有你的声音  
有你的声音，我们就能感觉到你

因为水是这样流过我们，水也是那样流过你  
在我们与你之间  
突然隔着一层看不见的墙  
但流过我们的风，流过我们的水  
在不停地融化它  
让我们一次，又一次地感觉到你，你的存在

June 19, 2021



*Sidney Jones*

I worked with Robin from Amnesty days in the mid-80s, through Tiananmen Square (before Asia Watch became the Asia division of Human Rights Watch), through the opening of HRW's Hong Kong office and the handover of HK to China. One side of Robin was the brilliant writer and analyst. He got access to information that no one else could dream of acquiring and produced reports (never to deadline, always in sudden spurts of hyperproductivity after long droughts) that were models of clarity and compassion. Robin broke every rule in the book to help people in danger. I don't know how

many lives he saved, but it was more than a few. He would risk everything if he thought he could help. Sometimes we wanted to strangle him, and then we had to take it all back because he did so much and wrote so beautifully. Each of his reports was an adventure (trying to track products made by Chinese prison labour that made their way to the US at one point led us to look at the Minnesota Twins' "homer hankies" -- no evidence emerged of links to a laogai -- and at another to try and engage murder mystery writer Sara Paretsky, unsuccessfully, to look into a plant outside Chicago.) On top of everything, he was so entertaining and so much fun to be with, especially after a few beers, with tales of socialist Sunday school when he was little and his exploits as a Scottish bus driver. I can't even remember when I last saw Robin but he was still living on Lamma then, going for long walks and playing his Martin guitar. It seems like the distant past, when we were all so much younger and still believed we could change the world.



### *Tom Kellogg*

Robin was so full of life that it's hard to fully grasp that he's gone. He was a man of many talents, and also a warm and caring friend who, along with his wife Pao-lien, was great company.

I got to know Robin at least a bit during the 1990s, when he was the Hong Kong-based China researcher for Human Rights Watch. I was fresh out of school, working for HRW in New York, and anxious to absorb everything I could about the practice of human rights research and activism, and also the situation in China itself.

Given that Robin was half a world away, I first learned from him through his writings on China, including the indispensable *Detained in China and Tibet*, and also various reports on human rights abuses in

China. I was impressed by his scholarly rigor, and also by his commitment to taking on impossibly difficult subjects, such as the post-June 4, 1989 crackdown on protesters, academics, and activists. Robin's work was required reading for younger would-be China hands like myself, who were both trying to wrap our heads around human rights in post-Tiananmen China, and also trying to understand how the research and reporting tools of human rights advocacy groups could be used to push Western governments to press their Chinese counterparts to end rights abuses.

As far as I can recall, we never met in-person during those early years: Robin never made it to New York during that time, and I didn't make it to Hong Kong.

After I left HRW for law school, I continued to follow his work from a distance. As it happened, Robin himself departed HRW soon after I did, and headed to SOAS to take up a post as a senior research fellow. While there, he researched and wrote what I consider his most important scholarly contribution, China's psychiatric inquisition: dissent, psychiatry, and the law in post-1949 China. A path-breaking work, the book – and other writings that preceded it – dramatically expanded our understanding of psychiatric abuse in China. (Indeed, Robin's writings constituted the first major research works in English that allowed the world to even know that this problem existed.) Since its publication, China's psychiatric inquisition has served as a key reference for countless Chinese and international scholars who have continued to investigate psychiatric abuses in China. I have also worked closely with Chinese lawyers who have done pioneering work on using the court system to free those who have been arbitrarily detained in mental institutions across China. They all openly acknowledge Robin's vital contribution to our understanding of this cruel and under-studied phenomenon.

Our paths crossed once again in the late 2000s, when Robin was at China Labour Bulletin. I was traveling regularly to Hong Kong as part of my work for the Open Society Foundations, and I routinely met with Robin to get his take, both on the labor rights situation in China, and on human rights matters more generally. The work suited him: he was working for one of the top NGOs in Hong Kong, and was able to infuse CLB's research reports and press statements with the same level of scholarly rigor and deep analytical insight that he had brought to his work at HRW years before. He was immersed in CLB's work, was part of an amazing team that included his dear friend Han Dongfang and other top Chinese and expatriate activists and researchers, and was living in Hong Kong, a city he (mostly) loved. He seemed happy.

It was only after Robin left his full-time post at CLB that our friendship truly blossomed. I heard through the grapevine about Robin's illness in 2011, and sought him out at his home outside Taipei soon thereafter to check in. He was recovering from cancer treatment, and yet he was still very much his old self: anxious to chat about China, and to swap stories about old friends in Hong Kong, London, New York, and beyond.

The fact that we were meeting outside the confines of work meant that our friendship also expanded and evolved in other directions. Though I had known Robin for several years by this point, it was only on that first visit to his home that I learned of his passion for music, and his serious addiction to high-quality sonic equipment. Both on that visit and on subsequent ones, we passed countless wonderful hours together, listening to records, sipping whiskey, and generally enjoying each other's company.

It was also during that time that I got to know Robin's wife Pao-lien, who somehow managed to keep Robin on his health regimen, which

included taking various medicines on time, eating more healthy foods, and keeping the single malt consumption at reasonable levels. Their deep affection for each other was readily apparent; more than once, Robin remarked to me how lucky he was that he had found Pao-lien all those years ago.

In the years that followed, weekend visits to their home took on a loose routine: mornings would feature coffee and conversation, both about China and everything else that was capturing our interest. Then, a hike on the trails in the Yangmingshan National Park a short drive away, which whetted our appetite for dinner at one or another local restaurant. Then back to the turntable in the evenings, during which Robin would indulge my much narrower musical tastes (he was truly omnivorous, boasting a record collection that ran into the mid-hundreds at least). As the music filled Robin's upper floor office and living room, we chatted away and Robin explained the many virtues of his truly world-class stereo system. Then to bed, only to do much the same the next day, before I would have to regretfully make my way back to Taipei.

As COVID put a stop to international travel last year, I fell out of touch with Robin and Pao-lien – I waited for normal life to resume, and for my next visit to Taipei to get on the calendar, after which time I would shoot Robin a note and we would arrange to meet. News of his untimely death took me completely by surprise – I had just assumed, as perhaps many of his friends did, that someone as vitally alive as Robin couldn't be taken from the world. But of course he could, and he was, and we are all left to mourn the loss of a prolific scholar and a dear friend.



### *Barry King*

I am one of Robin's newer friends, having known him for 3 or 4 years only. But we bonded immediately, both having interests in music, DIY home improvement, and bringing old things back to life. I found a 1963 Tesco electric guitar in a second-hand shop that Robin took passion in and taught me how to properly restore. He helped me rebuild a back deck at my house, and I introduced him to biking the scenic mountainous roads around where we live. Biking seemed to open a whole new passion for him, and Robin would often go out on his own if he couldn't find friends to ride with—even to the point of competing with himself on a timing App on his phone. One self-described "Crash-Boom-Wallop" while biking alone nearly took him from us earlier, but he recovered quickly (big thanks to Baolian) and jumped right back on the saddle.

I was really looking forward to having him as a nearly next-door neighbor for many years. At least Baolian is still there and Robin's presence is felt. He will be missed.



### *Dinah Lee Küng*

Thanks for letting some of us weigh in, even if it is only a few happy memories of Pao-lien and Robin. While I was bureau chief for Business Week in HK, Robin and I discovered through Scott Bellard at the US Consulate that we were both working on prison labor from very separate angles. So Robin and I decided to pool our resources and research and we agreed to time our releases for the same day for both the BusinessWeek Int. feature and his Human Rights Watch report. Frankly, that's not someday any journalist risks doing with someone they don't know well as a rule, but Robin was the kind of professional and gentleman one could trust not to jump the gun.

Similarly, my husband Peter, then the East Asian delegate for the Int. Red Cross covering China, Tibet, Taiwan, and the Koreas learned Robin was gathering names for a directory of detainees. Peter came pretty close to breaking the ICRC rules by supplying an updated list of Tibetan prisoners gathered by Tibetan Red Cross workers and smuggled out to HK. To do that, Peter had to trust that Robin was not going to betray his sources of the Tibetan names as linked to the Red Cross.

Amusingly, Robin could be a little too pre-occupied with his work. When my husband Peter and I were leaving Hongkong for good in 1992, we scheduled a smallish good-bye dinner with close friends at our apartment at Branksome Towers. The night before, the doorbell rang and Robin and Pao-lien were there on the doorstep beaming hello, but one day early. It was pretty obvious that Robin had scrambled his dates. So, inadvertently, we had them as guests for two nights in a row instead of one—and how lucky we were.



### *Nancy Li*

With his razor-sharp intellect, grotesque encyclopaedic knowledge and memory, multilevel-penetrating analysis, his eloquent précision, his 4th-dimension humour that often does not make you laugh right away but makes you laugh all the time for the rest of your life, his ever simmering anger – just this side of explosion - for justice, Robin sweeps you off on a crazy-ass mission, things that you would not do for anybody else, When you are in the eye of Typhoon Robin, you are living the most febrile moment of your life. You live on no food, no sleep, just your common conviction and the fuel of his charismatic passion. How not to mention the pale fire warming Robin all these years? Paolien, her uncanny spiritual perspective, her silence and that

quality of silence, her striking looks, her limitless kindness and patience, she has given the 空間 that allows Robin to be fully the Robin that he is, that we love. Once I heard Jim Wong 黃霑 say in a talk show: "Men don't want women to give them complete freedom, but the illusion of freedom. We men are all big monkeys. We want to be tied to a woman on a long leash, at the end of which he could move and jump and agitate, yet he is on a leash." Jim might as well be talking about, well, about so many, especially Robin. Robin, I have no words to say how much I miss you, how you took so much of me with you. You liked to say about our work together: "We had a good run." Robin, you had a fabulous good run.



### *Jutta Lietsch*

I first met Robin in 1979 as a student at Nanjing University. He was fun and serious at the same time, had a wonderful scottish lilt, and the walls in his dorm room were full of calligraphy that he and his roommates did on the side.

Later on we met again once in a while, when Robin worked with Amnesty International und then with China Labour Bulletin and I was a correspondent in China. Whenever we journalists called to ask about his work, or to have some new development explained - be it about black jails or disappearances, new repressive regulations or labour issues - he patiently took the time to explain what was happening. I remember how he would answer calmly and precisely - never exaggerating, never generalizing where it was not warranted, but pointing us to look at things that we had not considered before.

To have someone like Robin to talk to is very precious. How sad to lose him.



### *Liu Xiaodi 劉曉笛*

宝莲

黄女士芳鉴：

悼罗斌

平生有奇志，公推当代英雄汉；

盖棺不论定，我拾芳草赋招魂。

惊闻罗斌先生仙逝，拭泪痛悼！我们曾经是朋友，那时，我固执的相信彼此是能够以身家性命相托付的至交。上帝掷骰子，我们被纳入两条平

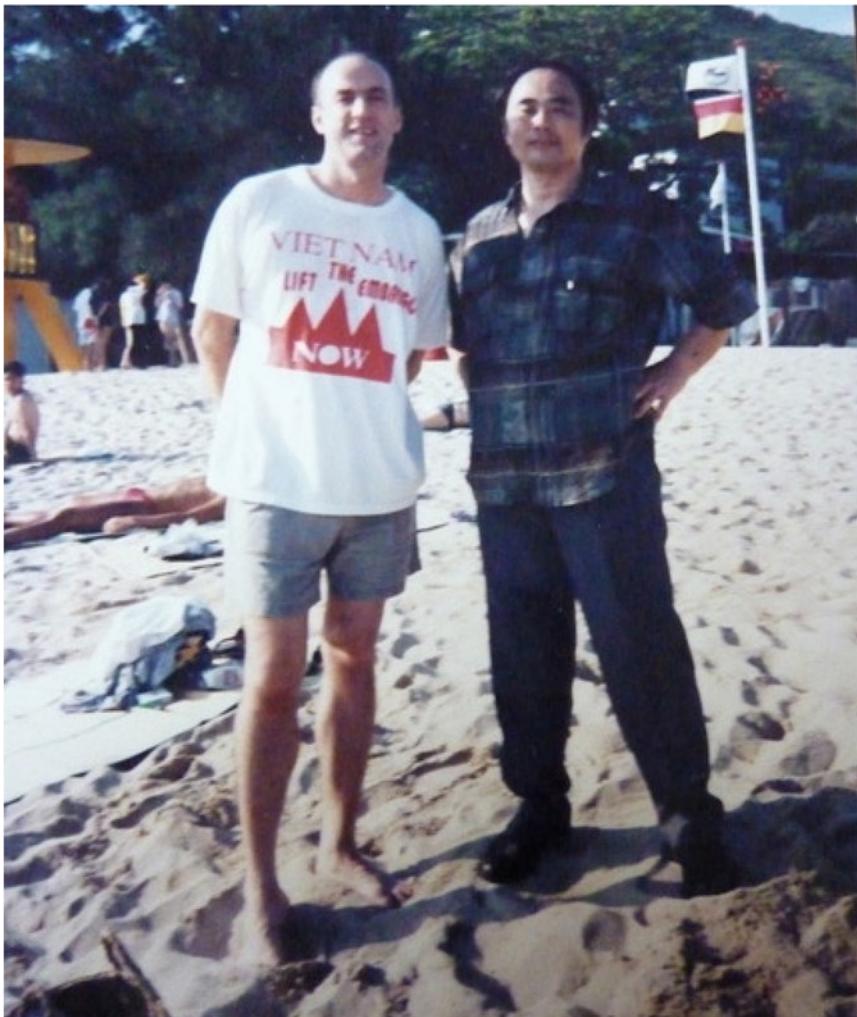
行的轨道。但是，先生生命的谢幕，我有痛彻心扉的哀伤。因为，这将预示着我们共同坚守的时代正在远去……

在此谨嘱宝莲女士节哀顺便。江湖秋水，所翼无他，惟愿珍重珍重！您题签的那册《流氓治国》，我藏珍专匣。一九九四年耶诞日，先生惠赐贺卡。其时，我避秦蛰居，孑然一身，囊中羞涩，四壁萧然，无以桃李之报。特意执管手书旧作《问春长歌》一阙回赠罗大侠，今再录附后，以资纪念：

臨高臺		發浩歌
賦焚稿	不忍聽	俯天仰地
怨東風	瑟瑟風	丈夫立身
不思量	簌簌雨	狂劍怨簫
東風怨儂意頹頹	憐蕊寒香冷	書生本末
怎女郎	還須度	
嬌嗔嗔	韋孃曲	早看天
羞答答	引得那	待雞鳴
怯生生	蠶兒舞	彈鐵鋏
膽氣銷磨	蝶兒飛	醉新醅
悶懨懨		上紅樓再問春消息
閒懨懨	辨俠骨	正東瀛蹈浪
懶慵慵	說荊軻	風揚高旆
總蹙黛眉	望停雲	

右《問春長歌》一闕，此係甲子元夕夜，為和先父明堂賀歲之作，偶吟於開通巷舊宅揖水拜石齋。時蟄居困頓，獨處岑寂，室若漏甌，四顧蕭然，唯半壁書冊殘卷相擁。燈盞微茫下，冷酒孤傷，自斟自酌，頗擊節先路棘莽，風雨旦夕。思經年備受流言詆丑，病詬猥辣。又迭因書生立身，擇善固執，特立獨行。師法自由之思想，獨立之精神，不屑傍人門戶而尤嗜求異端，訪禁書，讀百家語。或沉潛磨濯於新學，以砥礪品行操守，涵養吾之浩然之氣。或為生命尊嚴計，而遍搜赤蠶圖騰普讎鏹錘北斗星紅太陽其所經略之冤抑戕害殘斫刑戮塗炭生靈舊案之未聞之聞。寒暑寤寐，不敢一日弛怠。曾撰室聯曰：「海水正橫飛，誰欲驚瀾試一搏，天風洗塵衣，我拾芳草賦招魂」自正其心。自勉其志，自壯其氣，

茲有鄉賢少默先生握管親以古隸法書之授我，用心大要在於鼓勵後來者。陋巷布衣，憂樂天下，功魁罪首，抑濁揚清。扞格時政，必追本逐源，鏡考得失，名實聚訟，訝詰所由，且皂黑絲白，魏紫姚黃，尺長寸短，槧圓矩方，沈病潘愁，燕瘦環肥，鷄鳴狗盜，文張武弛，順姑失嫂，天地人，儒釋道，法術勢，堯禪禹讓，桀暴紂虐，殷損周益，秦法漢隨，孔仁墨義，孟善荀惡，韓苛管酷，卯逆跖盜，咱家自有權重計較，並不以廟堂之是非為是非。亦牴牾衣冠之士仰承風旨，抱道心腸，幫閒嘴臉，天衡校一而定准的，毫釐失範，即匍匐車塵諛乞權柄懸置厲禁。相向形骸放浪骨髓狷介者，則訛指離經叛道，直以寇仇應對之。攻訐訾謾，鴉聒蟬噪，語多病狂無稽，其行狀之卑瑣疑甚於扒祖墳揭老底斷糧道也。凡涉口角交惡，輒言主義公理大同顛撲不破真理之祖宗家法，問敢有誰斗膽越此雷池哉，令道隅側目而不知恥，自不知此乃國之宿恥也。究其門牆冊籍，無非曲學阿世之途轍一路，偏精王霸道者諱，深諳神器壺中玄奧而已。至可切齒鄙恨者，鷙犬環伺，晝夜警惕。魑魅姻姪，朋比為奸。彼等狐鼠出沒，僕臣行走，左不過李斯貝裏亞輩嫡傳香火。竊自喻磚石器具齒輪螺絲釘，唯知俯首犬馬，為王先驅，效死擅專之政。雖肖小然以機謀詭詐論，智計殊絕君子不知凡幾。其身手之陰驚老辣，盡在設密柵，結網罟，佈陷阱，構羅織，操縱衣食，堤防思想，馴馭舌辯，鉗錮口鋒，壟斷傳媒，羈絆輿論，鼓掌民意，玩弄刑名，緣坐無辜，離間手足，折辱士子，潰畔師門，墮節歧見，誣控強項，讐制眾聚，鞠訊黨人，牢籠但開風氣之先者，虐殺黃道河、彭令昭人傑鬼雄拼凝血與山川共碧之一脈正氣。有集東廠閹黨之百毒于一身，莫此為甚。槌杵枷鉗，斧鉞鋒鏑，鬼蜮伎倆，鐵血手段，無所不用其極，無所不窺見其用惡之心，酷苛倍於虎狼秦。如此肝肺，屢譏余一市井屠沽村野耕氓販夫走卒升斗小民引車賣漿者流，不在其位，敢以鄭聲亂雅樂，心達而險，諸惡之冠，罔有攸赦。自此謗毀及身，橫離踵其後，幾被鼎鑊之劫。每至暗夜叩問，阮籍失路，涕泗滂沱，指天劃地，卻不知何處歸宿，頓覺愴然痛切，為苦而莫可名狀，陡生喟嘆矣，遂乃拍案發錐心之悲鳴。逾宿，塗鴉私韻長歌，籍此以勾勒懷抱也。近遇暇，復誦再三，略潤色。



双峰并峙，谁不期待拥抱和携手。



温馨时刻，令人怀念的日子



### *Francis Moriarty*

A truly great guy, an amazing linguist, serious scholar, lover of music and terrific lunch companion. Oh, and a serious audiophile. RIP



*Chinese classmates from Nanjing University, 1978-79*

给罗斌妻子悼词

惊闻罗宾辞世噩耗，心痛不已。

中国大陆高考恢复仅半年，我们因缘际会，共同居住在1幢三层楼中，那是南京大学鼓楼老校园中的九舍。

文化碰撞让我们打开眼界生诸多涟漪，朝夕相处各肤色欢声笑语添人生趣忆。

罗宾出色的勤奋好学与涵养礼貌，给我们留下了深刻的印象。

一朝握别，从此天涯。

有星星点点的消息传来。数年前知道罗宾病了，我们相信且祈祷他坚强的毅力与先进的医疗，特别是贤惠美丽妻子的陪伴照护，美丽宝岛台湾的环境滋养，诸多加持可使病魔怯退。

然上天爱才好德，过早过急的收回了罗宾，人间少了一位绅士，上天多了一位使者。

我们祈愿罗宾在天堂重生，在云朵中，在星光中……继续深爱着地球人类和他的亲朋好友。

罗宾安息！

亲人安心！

当年九舍部分陪住生：

管永星

徐大同

赵力华

张彩娟

许忆先

李晓晖

海蔚蓝



### *William Nee*

The human rights movement lost a true legend. Robin Munro was a meticulous researcher: a stickler about facts and the truth. His bombshell research reports reflected his degree of detail.

He also cared deeply about humans (and their messy, often complicated situations). His charisma and passionate care about individual human rights cases made his advocacy effective, and helped save countless lives.

It was really one of the great honors of my life to start working at China Labour Bulletin in 2008, and have the chance to work closely with Robin for two years.

He was a great mentor, and most importantly, he was really a great friend to me and so many others. When working with him, a quick question about some mundane aspect of a report would often lead into a three-hour meandering conversation about China in the 1980's, political trends in the US, harrowing and unpublished accounts at saving dissidents clandestinely in the 90s, famous novels, the finer points of classical music and many other topics. He had the best stories and a wonderful sense of humor.

He will be sorely missed.



### *Malin Oud*

I first met Robin twenty years ago when I was studying Chinese law and human rights at SOAS in 1999. Robin was a research fellow at SOAS and gave a lecture on Chinese criminal law to our class. He was hugely knowledgeable and impressive, but also unassuming and kind. Robin invited me over for dinner at his and Paolien's house in London, and we became friends. We stayed in touch over the years and crossed

paths at different points in Hong Kong, Beijing and Stockholm. I tagged along with Robin to the National Library in Beijing when he was going through Chinese psychiatric journals for his groundbreaking research on psychiatric detention. Robin stopped by Stockholm on his way to Oslo to attend the Liu Xiaobo Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in 2010.

Conversations with Robin were always engaging - serious but also a lot of fun. Robin had a wry sense of humor and enjoyed my complaining about Swedish smugness. I was so very proud and honored when Robin invited me to join the Friends of China Labour Bulletin board two years ago. My last conversation with Robin in March revolved around the Hong Kong National Security Law, but also around Swedish herring and schnapps. Robin, I clink a glass of cold Swedish akvavit against yours. I will miss you greatly.



***Michael Palmer***

*PhD supervisor for Robin at SOAS, whose 2005 doctoral dissertation was published under the title: China's Psychiatric Inquisition: Dissent, Psychiatry and the Law in Post-1949 China (London: Wildy, Simmonds & Hill, 2006).*

I deeply mourn the loss of Robin, and greatly admire his work in the struggle for human rights development in China. Robin was a perceptive and committed human rights scholar and practitioner, and kept in good spirits despite a long struggle with illness.



***Matthew P. Robertson***

It has taken me a couple of weeks to process Robin's death. I recently read some emails from him and was heartbroken. Robin has been a central inspiration for me for the last eight years. He's actually half-

responsible for my current research focus and life trajectory—it was a day we and our wives spent together in 2016 that led me to eventually enroll in a PhD programme and attempt to do what he would have done, if he had the opportunity, on the issue of organ harvesting in China. In fact, I consciously titled my 2019 Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation report after his own 1994 report for Human Rights Watch, “Organ Procurement and Judicial Execution in China” (changing ‘judicial’ to ‘extrajudicial’, per its focus).

I had known about Robin's work on psychiatric abuses for a long time, and carefully read nearly all of it. The only work of his on the subject I hadn't got to was his dissertation-cum-doorstop, “Psychiatric Inquisition.” The copy I have on my bookshelf now came with me from his rambling home on the outskirts of Taipei first to New York, and now Canberra.

When I emailed him while in Taipei, he responded the same day, and we arranged to visit the following day. We had lunch and dinner, listened to records together on his sound system, and in between spoke about everything. Despite his flagging health, I counted six hours of intense conversation, much of it about the human rights game and organ harvesting. I was fascinated by his range of knowledge and interests, his humor, and his humanism. Incredibly, he even made a passing reference to so obscure a figure as the Armenian mystic Gurdjieff! Truly a first for me in such company.

Before I took up the task of studying China's organ transplantation system as a full-time occupation, I bought and downloaded everything of Robin's I could find. I was, and remain, completely impressed and humbled. It is clear that when reading his words one is encountering his mind. His writing is clear and sharp. His moral commitment to his subject never gets in the way of the raw evidence he marshals, or the

careful inferences he draws from that evidence. I will never do what he could and should have done on the topic of organ harvesting, but his example will remain an ideal for me to emulate.



### *Scott Savitt*

獨一無二 *dúyīwú'èr* {E} f.e. ①*unique* ②*unparalleled*

One of my biggest regrets about being imprisoned/deported was seeing less of Robin and Pao-lien. I only saw them twice post-2000. but during the previous two decades I spent as much time as possible with them. Robin and I played as much guitar together as talked politics. Many of his China colleagues don't know that Robin was a professional-level fingerstyle guitar player and singer. He loved this joke: Human Rights Watch sent me to Hunan on assignment, and a local official said to me regarding 江澤民: “這光是主席個人的意見!” [for those who can't read Chinese: a local official said to me regarding Jiang Zemin: “That's just the Chairman's personal opinion!” — illustrating 上有政策, 下有對策/central leaders have policies, local officials have counter-policies. Robin couldn't relate this story without bursting into a belly laugh, complete with a convincing Hunan accent. I already miss my 蘇克蘭大哥/Scottish big brother.

Another Robin memory from an exchange with a close friend of Robin's/his wife's:

Friend: Everyone talks about his encyclopaedic knowledge of human rights. What about his encyclopaedic knowledge of old revolution (or Cultural Revolution-era) slogans and songs? Dissidents who had just escaped would stare at him with their jaws dropped.

Me: Re: dissidents' jaws dropping, the problem is that can happen when white people use chopsticks. Robin next to e.g. Perry Link or

Geremie Barmé wasn't extraordinary. Us 老外 lifers exist in the same milieu, there are quite a few of us out here. What Robin was 獨一無二/unparalleled at was applying his encyclopedic/diverse/esoteric knowledge to helping flesh-and-blood human beings. You know he and Han Dongfang set up China Labour Bulletin from scratch? How many ivory tower scholars do that?! Another funny story: watching Robin write those Human Rights Watch reports [let's call them what they were: meticulously-researched books] in their pied-à-terre on Lamma Island 1989-1998, I once remarked: "Dude, why don't you have a Ph.D., you're the foremost expert in the world on this subject?!" He took a rare break from his work, got pensive, then said: "You're probably right, Scotty, I need a credential to be taken seriously." It was after that he returned to SOAS to finish his terminal academic degree. He'd been working on the front lines/in the field so long, and felt that there was so much critical work left to be done, that he never put career promotion first. In this sense Robin was 獨一無二.



### *Betsy Shieh*

I only met Robin a few years ago but quickly fell in love with him and Pao-lien. Robin's battle with his illness, his approach to life, and his dedication to his work, his music, and the love of his life were an inspiration to Shawn and me. When Robin told us he wanted to get Pao-lien situated in her dream house knowing he would pass before her, we bought their home in Taipei in the hopes that a bit of their lives and loves would rub off on us. It is not surprising that whatever was brewing in Robin's body waited until he could get through the transition. We will feel Robin around us every day and he will continue to inspire.

Sending love and condolences.



### ***Shawn Shieh***

I haven't known Robin as long as some people but I got to know him well over the last few years. Robin left China Labour Bulletin rather suddenly in the early 2010s after he was diagnosed with cancer, and I was invited by Han Dongfang to join CLB as its Deputy Director to fill Robin's very large shoes. In my work at CLB, I found myself helping to carry out the groundbreaking but very low profile work that Dongfang, Robin and others had started on labor organizing and collective bargaining with our partners in China. Ironically, I got to know Robin even better after leaving CLB in early 2018. My wife and I traveled to Taiwan several times and we stayed at Robin and Pao-lien's house and came to love them and their home. In October 2019, we went on a road trip with Robin and Pao-lien to Taiwan's stunning east coast. We arrived at our bed and breakfast south of Hualien just as a typhoon was making its way up the coast. We woke up the next morning to a clear windy day and went up to the rocks on the beach where I took this picture of Robin at peace with himself.



The year after, Robin and Pao-lien were looking to downsize and move into a smaller home nearby with a bigger yard. Robin wasn't sure how many years he had left and wanted Pao-lien to be comfortable and happy doing the gardening that she loved. They asked us if we wanted

to buy their place and we gladly took them up on their offer. Not only did we love their house as a place to retire, but we thought we'd be neighbors. We talked about taking long bike rides with Robin, going to the hot springs and taking walks in Yangmingshan national park just behind our home.

The last time I saw Robin was in January of this year when I took a trip to Taipei to take care of our new home. Robin and Pao-lien generously stocked the fridge with food for my two-week quarantine and Robin spent hours driving me in his Jeep to the bank, tax office, and stores. The more time you spent with Robin, the more you realized what a decent, generous and open human being he was. He cared about you more than he cared about himself and he made you feel that he was your best friend. We talked during that time about how his health had improved, despite some scary bike accidents, and how he seemed to have beat the cancer. He knew that the doctors had originally only given him months to live, and he had cheated death by extending those months to years and years. We looked forward to the time we would have as neighbors and all the things we would do together.

The news of his death came as such a shock because my memory of him so alive and well was so fresh in my mind.

In their old house, the top floor is my favorite. It's one large room with a view of the Taiwan Straits. It was Robin's man cave where he put all his audio equipment, records, CDs and reel-to-reel tapes. It was where we spent hours listening to Cat Stevens and Verdi operas and everything in between. I'm truly grateful that we bought the house from them because I can't think of any more fitting memorial to the man and his generosity of spirit than to stand in that room looking out to the sea and listening to music that we loved.



*Francesco Sisci*

To me a book he edited and translated in 1986 was very important, and very relevant today “China: Crossroads Socialism” a manifesto for a proletariat democracy by Chen Erjin.

It detailed to me for the first time that during the Cultural Revolution many young people supported Mao believing that he would push for freedom and democracy. This has been a constant undercurrent, as Robin Munro pointed, in the CCP. As now the former young Red Guards are in power this might be important again. As young men they wanted freedom, liberty, democracy in a confused and confusing drive.

I do believe this drive still exists and still has some appeal in the mind of Chinese Officials. Munro’s calm and cold manner to push for human rights and freedom of some people, as Donald Clarke noted, perhaps could work also because it presented rational arguments for human rights that his counterparts had to take seriously possibly because the issue of individual freedom was real and gnawing at them and at the system.

Sidney Rittenberg also wrote beautifully about this drive during the Cultural Revolution: he thought really that Mao was going to push for some kind of democracy and freedom. The fact that the Party betrayed them and their hopes doesn’t mean that that flame is extinguished within the party.

We are at terrible Crossroads again and he is just too sad that he passed away now.



### ***Harold Tanner***

I first met Robin in London, fall of 1984 or spring 1985, when I was in the MA program at SOAS. Our paths crossed again in, I think, 1991-92, when I was doing Ph.D. research at the Universities Service Centre in Hong Kong. Robin invited me, my wife and our one-year-old daughter Sophia over to Lamma Island one day. On the boat ride over to Lamma, Robin made hilarious faces and noises, successfully keeping Sophia entertained throughout the boat ride. The day passed so pleasantly—hanging out, swimming, dinner. Han Dongfang, recently out of prison and carrying around a large plastic bag of TB medication, was there. We wound up spending the night, sleeping on quilts on Robin & Pao-lien's apartment floor. Dim-sum breakfast at a sidewalk restaurant down in the village the next morning—and Robin suddenly appeared, having missed his ferry to work that morning! Robin also asked me to do a bit of research for him, looking for material on psychiatric abuse of political prisoners. I found some material for him—not sure how useful it was. I wasn't satisfied with it myself, but he kindly said that it was very helpful, thanked me, and paid me for my efforts. And then, of course, I finished my Ph.D., got a job in Texas, and life changed—from international travel, and crossing paths with the likes of Robin, Liu Xiaobo, Chen Kaige, and Perry Link, to a rather isolated provincial life in the American heartland. But, like an echo across the decades, the treasured memory of the kindness and hospitality of Robin and Pao-lien, the simple pleasures of a swim, a good meal, and pleasant company on a small island on the other side of the world.



*Laurence Vandewalle*

Robin was a beautiful soul, committed to make the world a better place. He personally did a lot to help whom he could. He has deeply changed my apprehension of human rights in China when he spoke in a conference I was organising in the European Parliament in the late 90's, and when I was in Hong Kong – I keep fond memories of long discussions on China, on human rights, on labour rights, June 4th ... in his charming house, with his wife too. I am very grateful.



*Wang Lingling 王玲玲*

得知罗宾芒罗先生去世的消息，深感遗憾、惋惜痛心。虽然不曾谋面，但得知他是一个值得敬仰的国际人士。做为一个外国人，他能够关心体恤平民百姓的疾苦，为政治受迫害者实地调察发声，声张正义。他值得人民永远怀念他。罗宾永远活在我们的心里。

Hearing the news of Mr. Robin Munro's passing, I feel deeply sorry and sad. Although I have never met him before, I learned that he was an international figure worthy of admiration. As a foreigner, he cared for ordinary people's suffering, stood up for political dissents, and fought for justice. He will be missed by the people forever. He will always live in our hearts.



*Clare A.P. Willsdon*

Robin was one of my "Scottish cousins", the son of my mother Dorothy's older sister Ailie. Living far away in England and then Wales, I didn't have much opportunity as a child to get to know him, and as adults our paths diverged still further, though my late parents were truly delighted to meet him again at Ailie's funeral. I sadly

couldn't attend myself on that occasion, but I remember them speaking most warmly of his generous welcome.

However, when my mother died in 2017, after my father in 2014, the magic of email enabled me to contact Robin, and we had the most wonderful exchange in writing. Whilst I knew of his brave and principled work for human rights, here was someone who also had time for a far-away relative. He recalled having been with his own mother as she approached death, and how "the long vigil felt like one was holding faith, somehow, and the moment of death was like bearing witness to a deep mystery". That description resonated so perfectly with what I had just experienced, that I could hardly believe it when he went on to say that he'd recently bought a set of LPs of Kathleen Ferrier singing Bach's St. Matthew Passion, and himself loved her biography that I'd been reading to my mother—a great Ferrier fan—in her last days.

He wrote so perceptively of what Ferrier's singing must have meant to my mother's generation in the post-war period, that, through music and the memories of it, the space that separated us seemed as nothing; it was though he had reached out a strong hand to support me in my loss. Reading more, as I then did, about his extraordinary achievements, I realised I had been privileged to experience the empathy and insight that must have been so critical also in his human rights work. Alongside reflecting on that "mystery" of death, and the power of music, he was warm and funny, sharing my enthusiasm for gardening, and recalling his childhood affection for Glasgow, where I now live; a city he mischievously contrasted with its "glum counterpart, Auld Reekie" (Edinburgh). He spoke of hoping to visit Glasgow again one day and generously invited me to visit him and Paolien in Taiwan. It's a tremendous regret to me that none of that can now be, and, as well as adding my voice to the many tributes to his

public achievements, I would like to record the debt I personally owe him: thank you, Robin, for your understanding and encouragement at that difficult time in my own life. I hope this recollection may in turn comfort others, especially Paolien and Sandra, who mourn his passing.



*Xu Datong* 徐大同

Hello, old boy! 這是我兩在南京大學時的互稱，當然是你教的。

當年你教我欣賞The Beatles, Bob Dylan, ..... 我讓你體會中國書法，你的一幅草書唐詩作品被學校送刊於大陸《書法》雜志（見下圖）。

有人說我1989年後在思想上變化很大，我告訴他們，再往前推十年，79年時，我已在南京大學同學室友那裏閱讀西單民主牆資料了。

難忘1989年6月4日白天，我兩在天安門廣場邊不期而遇，一同蹲在花圃躲避坦克射出的子彈， .....

老來常懷舊，懷舊總思友。不久，6月1日是你的生日， happy birthday to you!

Miss you, old boy!



*Rainbow Yang*

Robin is a courageous man who gives his life for other, especially for Chinese people. He is our hero.

As a British scholar, Robin could have an easy, successful career, a safe and comfortable life, yet he lived in Hong Kong, a sensitive and dangerous place, for the freedom of Chinese people. He presented his love, kindness, generosity, wisdom, humor and knowledge. His courage amazed all who knows him, including the Chinese government officers. I remember when I was visiting Robin in Hong

Kong, he told me in smile that Chinese secret agents may come to knock his door at any minute. I remember he reassured me in an extreme hard situation: "It is so difficult. But I will not give up."

Another interesting thing is Robin Munro and John Kamm's "good dog, bad dog" team. Together, they saved thousands of Chinese people's lives—from active political prisoners, to innocent civilians; from adults to children. Together they turned tear to joy, separation to reunion, desperation to hope, and death to life. Together they bring light and strength to people in the darkness.

Please join me to give thanks to Robin, the man who lives incarnationally and gives his life for the freedom of Chinese people. We thank him for inspiring us to continue living in love, faith, and courage. He will be remembered and loved forever!



*Yueyue Wenren*

—For Paolien & Robin and all other friends nearby and far away

煙火嘉年

--悅閱

希望上昇時如同煙花  
劃亮夜空下  
心中的角落  
你我只有一瞬的年華  
彼此打量  
他眼角彷彿有點光影  
折射出世間旖旎  
我們已經到達山頂

煙花上升  
綻放的位置比我們還高  
然後墜入山谷  
下山的路極其沉寂也無燈照  
叢林在我們身畔蔓延  
延伸處又見燈火綿連  
我們已經下山  
回到人間

我們與人群擦肩  
聽到下一場煙火的預言  
然後回首仰望  
尋找曾經站立的山巔  
也許將別無選擇  
在那樣的時刻  
再次上山  
看煙花上昇冉冉如歌

此刻人潮洶湧如浪席捲  
然後潮退好像流川  
寂靜後 我們在原地  
還在人間

*Our Moment of Fireworks*

(Translated by GiGi Chen)

When hope rises it does so like fireworks  
under the light-painted night sky  
and in the corners of our illuminated hearts  
we have but an ephemeral stroke of time to stand—high

and take each other in—  
the corners of his eyes spark with light and mystique  
reflecting the brilliance of the world therein—  
we have already reached the peak

The fireworks rise  
and burst higher than even us  
then cascade into the valleys below—  
the road down the mountain is exceedingly quiet and without lamps'  
glow  
the jungle sprawls out beside us  
but extending out of the endless dark we again see the unbroken line  
of lights—  
we are already down from the hills  
returning to where our world lies

We meet and brush past the crowd  
hearing murmurs of the next fireworks round  
then turn and look up  
seeking the once-standing mountain cusp—  
perhaps there will be no choice  
when the moment comes  
but to go uphill yet again in rejoice  
to watch the swell and rise of the fireworks' melodies

The sea of people now rages with the turbulent sweep of ocean waves  
then ebbs with the flow of fleeing rivers  
after the silence we still stand in place—  
still in this realm's space





# **TWITTER TRIBUTES**





**Jim Mullinax** @jiminjava · May 20

Such sad news. I met Robin in HK - he was a dedicated scholar and activist, dedicated to doing good for the right reasons. Our conversations ranged from his work to music to food and were always lively. Condolences to his lovely wife, family and friends. RIP

...



**Malin Oud** @MalinOud · May 20

This obituary by [@donaldclarke](#) describes Robin so well. A passionate and committed human rights activist, but also a meticulous and gifted scholar. "His life was gentle, and the elements mixed so well in him that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, 'This was a man.'"

...



**Philip P. Pan** ✅ @panphil · May 19

Normal 0%

Very sorry to hear this. Robin was a remarkably astute researcher and analyst, and a committed activist. And he was always so generous with his time. As a young reporter, I learned a lot from our conversations, and from his writing.

...



**李进进** @li\_jinjin · 22h

It shocked me, the sad news that my friend Robin gone. He met me after I was released from Qincheng Jail in Beijing in or about 1991. He helped me come to the United States in or about 1993. He wrote (with George Black) Black Hands of Beijing, a book about our stories in 1989.

...



**Joshua Rosenzweig** @siweiluozi · May 20

...

Robin was a real hero of mine: a researcher's researcher, an activist and an all-around swell guy. I'm very sorry that I will no longer be able to share a beer and learn from him. My condolences to all his family, friends and colleagues.



**Malin Oud** @MalinOud · May 20

Unknown

Robin was a hero and a legend, and also a generous and kind teacher, mentor, and friend. I met him first when I was a student studying Chinese law and human rights at SOAS in 1999, and learnt from him over more than 20 years. Rest in power Robin.

...



**elisabeth wickeri** @ewickeri · May 20

Unknown

A big loss. Robin was one of the first to help me understand the limits—and possibilities—of human rights activism. Farewell, friend.



**Renee Xia** ✅ @ReneeXiaCHRD · May 19

Unknown

To pay tribute to Robin, I want to re-read this report he did 20 years ago, to remind myself how brilliant and what an incredible and tremendously talented researcher he was: [hrw.org/report/2002/08...](http://hrw.org/report/2002/08...) His big heart and sense of humor will continue to light our way in this world.



**Helen Hockx-Yu** @hhockx · May 19

Unknown

So sad to hear this. All the wonderful time we spent with Robin and 宝莲 in London is surfacing my memory. RIP.



**Michel Hockx** @mhockx · May 19

Unknown

Rest In Peace, Robin. Thank you for the many happy times and fierce discussions during our London days.



**Caroline Quinn** @Luo\_Qing · May 19

Unknown

Incredibly sad news. I never met Robin Munro but he had a towering and well-deserved reputation in China human rights circles. His account of events in Beijing on the night of 4 June 1989 remains incredibly powerful and indispensable reading: [tinyurl.com/nu3wv2jy](http://tinyurl.com/nu3wv2jy). 安息吧 🙏



**Nicola Macbean** @NMacbean · May 19

Unknown

This is very sad news. Robin's work was inspirational. Truly important work on the deprivation of liberty in China.



**China Law Translate** ✅ @ChinaLawTransl8 · May 19

Normal 3%

This is a terrible loss. An outstanding researcher and person by all measures.



**Benjamin Robertson** @BMMRobertson · May 19

Unknown

...

My condolences to Robin's family and friends. His work on China human rights issues was hugely important. That included a seminal book on mental health hospitals and the abuses inside them. RIP



**China Law & Policy** @chinalawpolicy · May 19

...

There are at least 2 people in the US who owe their lives to Robin Munro & his work on the terrible conditions in China's psychiatric hospitals. Robin's research provided the basis for my expert testimony to keep two Chinese people w/ mental health issues from being deported.



**Patrick Poon** 潘嘉偉 🤍 🙏 @patrickpoon · May 19

Unknown

...

Oh no! Robin was my former supervisor. Shocked and sad to learn about this 😢



**Paul Mooney** 慕亦仁 @pjmooney · May 19

...

😢😢 So sorry to hear this. We were friends since 1990. He helped me a lot in my reporting.



**N\_Jayaram** @N\_Jayaram · May 19

...

Deeply saddened to learn of Robin Munro's passing.



**William Nee** ✅ @williamnee · May 19

...

The human rights movement lost a true legend.

Robin was a meticulous researcher: a stickler about facts & the truth. He also cared deeply about humans (& their messy, complicated situations). His charisma & passionate care about individual cases made his advocacy effective.

1/2



**William Nee**  @williamnee · May 19

Unknown

Replies to @williamnee

It was really one of the great honors of my life to start working at China Labour Bulletin in 2008, and have the chance to work closely with Robin for two years.

He was a great mentor, and most importantly, he was really a great friend to me and so many others 🙏



**William Nee**  @williamnee · May 19

Unknown

I was around in 2009 (at 20th anniversary of Tiananmen Massacre) when Robin did many interviews, coming away really exhausted & drained

As a witness, he really poured his heart into relating what he saw for posterity's sake & the historical record.



**Dr. Sara (Meg) Davis** @saralmdavis · May 19

Unknown

You know when you start a new job & everyone keeps talking to you about the guy who did it before you & how great he was? That was my experience being China researcher [@hrw](#) 5 years after Robin Munro left. Immense impact as a researcher, activist & kind human being. 🕯



**Bhuchung Tsering** @bhuchungtsering · May 19

Unknown

#RIP #RobinMunro He worked for then Asia Watch before the regional groups became [#HumanRightsWatch](#) and reported on developments in [#Tibet](#) too



**Kenneth Roth**  @KenRoth · May 19

Normal 0%

Very sad to learn of the death of **Robin Munro**. He was [@HRW](#)'s first researcher on China. He was the last known Westerner to leave Tiananmen Square. He did pathbreaking work on China's horrible orphanages and on labor rights. His reports were meticulous and nuanced. We'll miss him.

 **Eric Goldstein**  @goldsteinricky · May 20

Robin was a pal and superstar from the early @HRW days when the MENA and Asia programs were young. You've left us too early, Robin, but your legacy is there forever.

 **SoloTad** @solomech · May 19

Rip great man. The world needs real humans like you.

 **Kelley Currie** @KelleyCurrie · May 20

Unknown

The China human rights community has lost one of our first, brightest & most steady lights. I only had the honor of meeting **Robin Munro** a few times over the years but he set the gold standard—as a scholar, advocate & human being—that we all aspire to.

 **Ian Johnson** @iandenisjohnson · May 20

Unknown

One of China's most respected and meticulous human rights documentarians, **Robin Munro**, has recently passed away. h/t @donaldcclarke for the excellent obituary. [thechinacollection.org/robin-munro-19...](http://thechinacollection.org/robin-munro-19...)

 **Paul Mooney 慕亦仁** @pjmooney · May 20

Unknown

A tribute to **Robin Munro** (China Labour Bulletin) [clb.org.hk/content/tribut...](http://clb.org.hk/content/tribut...)  
Sorry to hear this sad news about Robin's passing. He was a good friend and a fighter for human rights in China.

 **Dr. Leta Hong Fincher 洪理达**  @LetaHong · May 20

Normal 1%

Very sad news. RIP **Robin Munro**.



**Malin Oud**  
@MalinOud  
Unknown

"Robin helped many Chinese dissidents, who might otherwise have died in prison, to gain their freedom. I was one of them." [@handongfang](#) tribute to Robin Munro (China Labour Bulletin) [@chinalabour](#)



**Jonathan Stivers** @jonstivers · May 20  
Unknown

A beautiful tribute to **Robin Munro** by Han Dongfang [clb.org.hk/content/tribut...](http://clb.org.hk/content/tribut...)

His life's work for human rights in China will forever be an inspiration. I am just so sad he is gone so soon



**Dinah Lee Kung** @DinahLeeKung · May 19  
Unknown

This makes me very sad. A big loss. **Robin Munro** was my source for a mystery novel re China's illegal organ sales, as well as an exposé I did for BusinessWeek on Chinese prison labor in 1991. We timed our releases for HRW and BW together. A great expert. A real gentleman.



**Caroline Quinn** @Luo\_Qing · May 19  
Unknown

Incredibly sad news. I never met **Robin Munro** but he had a towering and well-deserved reputation in China human rights circles. His account of events in Beijing on the night of 4 June 1989 remains incredibly powerful and indispensable reading: [tinyurl.com/nu3wv2jy](http://tinyurl.com/nu3wv2jy). 安息吧 🙏



**CLB** @chinalabour · May 20  
Unknown

中国劳工通讯突悉我们老朋友、前副主任罗宾·芒罗辞世的消息。罗宾先生是中国人权问题的研究权威，他本人更身体力行协助过无数中国的政治犯。在中国劳工通讯的工作中，他不仅完成了大量工人权益方面高质量的报告，更指导我们在支援工运人士和工人运动方面做出更持久的发展。

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# **FAREWELL**



## **HERACLITUS**

*William Johnson Cory*

They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead,  
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed.

I wept, as I remembered, how often you and I  
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky.

And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,  
A handful of grey ashes, long long ago at rest,  
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake;  
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.





