

Abducted Chinese dissident home

'Sad for my country,' writer says after being foiled in bid to meet Baker

BY JAN WONG
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BEIJING — Dissident writer Dai Qing returned home late last night with a dramatic tale of how Chinese authorities had abducted and held her for more than four days to prevent her from meeting U.S. Secretary of State James Baker.

"I'm very sad for my country, not for myself," Ms. Dai, 50, told foreign reporters jammed into her tiny apartment. Eloquent and unbowed by her ordeal, she said that her abduction had only lost face for China. "It was such a stupid thing to do."

Ms. Dai's seizure shows the elaborate ruses to which Chinese authorities resort to stop someone with a very gentle, patriotic message. It also shows that harsh measures do not always suppress Chinese dissidents.

Ms. Dai, perhaps modern China's best-known woman writer, opposes noisy street demonstrations and thinks the United States should not impose sanctions against her country.

Until now, she had been reluctant to give interviews about human rights.

Last night, however, she sat down and described a Kafkaesque tale of deceit, terror and courage.

She said her newspaper initially tried to lure her out of town on a bogus reporting assignment, and, when she refused, two burly men seized her. She said she was driven for six

hours to a seaside hotel where she was put under house arrest. She finally went on a hunger strike to demand that she be allowed to call her husband, she said.

Ms. Dai disappeared last Saturday, even as Mr. Baker was sitting down with Chinese officials to discuss human rights. On Sunday night, just before he left Beijing, Mr. Baker expressed "distress" over her disappearance. On Monday, both the U.S. embassy and the Chinese government announced that she was free, saying she had "never been arrested."

Concern grew when Ms. Dai failed to arrive home that night. Her husband, Wang Deji, who already had weathered his wife's 10-month imprisonment after the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations, tried to put on a brave face.

Last night, Ms. Dai barely had time to greet him before she was swamped by television cameras.

She said a U.S. diplomat invited her to lunch last week, ostensibly to tell her about a mutual friend. Instead, he asked her to join other dissidents in meeting Mr. Baker. A group meeting would be too provocative, she said, but she could see Mr. Baker or his aide alone.

Chinese authorities got wind of the plans. On Friday, as Mr. Baker arrived in Beijing, Ms. Dai's newspaper, the Guangming Daily, sent a car to pick her up. An editor gave her an unusual, out-of-town assignment: a glass factory. She was to

leave that night.

Ms. Dai demurred. She usually covered culture. What did she know about factories? Her editor said an economist would travel with her.

"I was so naive and happy. I thanked them for the assignment," she recalled. Ever since she got out of prison, Ms. Dai had longed to report again. In typical treatment for dissidents, her newspaper barred her from working and confiscated her press card. It even denigrated her publicly as a "so-called" journalist and prevented her from accepting a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University.

Never before had the Guangming Daily sent a chauffeured car to fetch her. Relaxing in the back seat on the way home, Ms. Dai grew suspicious. She learned from neighbours that Peking University was under tight security because of Mr. Baker's visit. Then it clicked.

"They wanted me out of here," she said. Angered by the ruse, Ms. Dai made up her mind; she would see Mr. Baker no matter what. And smarting over the way she had been tricked, she decided to give her newspaper a taste of its own medicine.

That night, when her colleagues arrived to pick her up, Ms. Dai hid in her study. Her daughter, a 24-year-old college graduate, answered the door and told them her mother had changed her mind.

"She's not a journalist, so how can you give her an assignment?" her

daughter told them. "And besides, you're too late. The U.S. embassy has already picked her up."

That night, the diplomat called to fix a Saturday appointment for Ms. Dai. She told the diplomat of her newspaper's plans.

"You must decide for yourself what to do because we come and go but you must continue to live here," Simon Schuchat, second secretary of the political section, told her. She replied that she could never bow to pressure. "It is because I live here that I must see him," she said.

On Saturday morning, while Ms. Dai was out, three people from her newspaper showed up. Her husband warned her as she arrived home. She fled to a downtown hotel.

She got word to the embassy that she was ready to meet Mr. Baker. And to show authorities that she was not sneaking around, she also telephoned the ministry of public security to tell them exactly where she was and what she was planning to do.

As she was making more calls, the two men pinned her arms behind her, bundled her down the hotel fire escape and stuffed her into a car. After interrogating her for three hours at a police station, they drove her to the seaside resort of Beidaihe and held her there. On Tuesday, she went on a hunger strike to protest against her detention. Yesterday morning, her captors allowed her to call her husband. At 10:07 last night, she arrived home.