

# THE DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT

On an October day in 1978 a group of young Chinese appeared in the center of Peking in an alley next to the building housing the offices of the party newspaper, the *People's Daily*. They unrolled a series of large posters and pasted them to a wall. White-uniformed public security officers looked on as a crowd gathered, knowing that recent government policy allowed citizens to post personal complaints and suggestions.

The posters contained a suite of poems dedicated to the "God of Fire" and written in a sentimental, Whitmanesque style long popular in China. They described a monstrous idol forcing himself on the Chinese people:

*I lie among people.  
I separate these people from the others  
So that they are constantly guarding against others. . . .  
They want to push me down, destroy me  
Because my body blocks their view,  
Blocks them from the world outside their own little yards.*

And they spoke of a long "war of spiritual enslavement."

*The war goes on in everyone's facial expression.  
The war is waged by numerous high-pitched loudspeakers.  
The war is waged in every pair of fearful, shifting eyes.*

This was a war of political surveillance and mutual propaganda that every Chinese had had to endure in the late years of Mao's rule. But now the poet was optimistic. He saw torches

*Moving at the edge of the sky far, far away,  
Swinging on the expansiveness of the sky of dark blue.  
A shining troop, a silently flowing river of fire.*

The torches heralded “a world ruled by light and warmth.” They would thaw the frozen world of the past, open hearts, melt suspicions, and reconcile enemies. “O torch,” said the poet,

*You extend a thousand shining hands,  
Open up ten thousand shining throats.  
Awaken the great road, awaken the square,  
Awaken all members of this whole generation.*

This “Song of the Torch” was annotated: “13 August 1969, 10:00 A.M., Thinking in doubt; 15 August 1969, Written in streaming tears.” The author, Huang Xiang, was a worker at a knitting mill in a southwestern provincial capital, Guiyang, about 1,500 miles from Peking by train. Like millions of other educated young Chinese he had been “sent down” from school to the factory after the army broke up the Red Guards in 1968. There he started to write poems and recite them at meetings of the group of friends who later called themselves the “Enlightenment Society.” After the police raided his home to search for manuscripts, he started to wrap his works in sheets of plastic and seal them inside homemade candles.

The Enlightenment group’s discussions dwelled on the question that has obsessed Chinese political thinkers for the last hundred years: “What are the basic reasons our nation has made progress so slowly?” For centuries the Chinese believed that theirs was the world’s most advanced civilization. But the Opium War and later humiliations forced a change of perception. Chinese came to see their country as the poverty-stricken, militarily vulnerable, despised “sick man of Asia.” In 1949 Mao declared that the Chinese people had finally “stood up.” And China was indeed richer and stronger in 1978 than in the nineteenth century. But the pace of progress had been disappointing. Housing averaged less than four square meters per person in the cities; cotton cloth, grain, cooking oil, and other goods were still rationed after thirty years of “socialist construction.” Radios, watches, and cameras were luxury items, and those produced in China were prone to break down. TV sets were a rarity. It was unusual for an ordinary person to make a telephone call. Peasants still did most of their hauling by human-drawn cart.

Like their question, the Enlightenment group’s answer to the riddle of backwardness was of nearly a century’s standing:

The history of China seems very complex but in fact is very simple. . . .  
Our history has been dominated mainly by Qin Shi Huang’s totalitari-

anism. [Qin Shi Huang was the dynastic founder who unified China in 221 B.C. and cemented his rule by “burning the books and burying the scholars.”] After he translated the theory of extreme autocracy into absolute administrative orders and laws, the broad masses lost all their freedom of action and their right to express their ideas. . . . From the day of their birth they had to submit to restrictions by the emperor or the gods and devils and thus became slaves without human dignity or human rights.

Being slaves, the people were ignorant and passive. “Autocracy refuses to give people the right to think, while fetishes forbid people to advance any scientific hypothesis.” The emperors preferred to keep the masses stupid rather than to mobilize their productive energies. The 1911 republican revolution “overthrew the emperor as a person only, but the concept of emperors remained in people’s minds.”

This is the reason why China is behind other countries today. In order that it may become strong, it must first of all give up autocracy and fetishes; secondly, it must have a stable democratic government; and thirdly, it must fully mobilize the enthusiasm and wisdom of every member of the society. This is the recipe for curing the Chinese nation of its age-old sickness.

What the Enlightenment group understood by “democracy” was shaped by descriptions of the Paris Commune in Marx’s *The Civil War in France* and Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, pamphlets Mao had required all Chinese to study during the Cultural Revolution. Marx described how revolutionary Paris was governed from March to May 1871 by a working council, “executive and legislative at the same time,” whose members were elected by universal suffrage, bound by the formal instructions of constituents, and subject to recall at any time. In this way, Marx said, government’s “legitimate functions were wrested from an authority [officialdom] usurping pre-eminence over society itself and restored to the responsible agents of society [elected delegates],” so that “public functions ceased to be private property” of bureaucrats. By contrast, in China in 1978 all officials were appointed from above—including those in ostensibly elected positions, since only one candidate was put forward for each post. They enjoyed lifetime tenure and privileges of office, and acted like masters rather than servants of society. The Enlightenment group believed that the persistence of such “feudal” and “autocratic” practices and “backward ideology” was the root of China’s weakness.

The example of the United States proved to them that a true democratic system “is always linked with a high degree of development of material and

spiritual civilization.” Democracy, symbolized by the fire in Huang Xiang’s poems, was the key to development because it would melt down the idol that imposed alienation on the people.

The fire will enable people completely to shake off brutality and hatred, and there will be no quarrel among them. They will share the same views and principles and have identical ideals. In lofty and harmonious unity they will produce, live, think, invent, pioneer, and explore together. With these dynamic forces they will enrich their social life and cultivate their big earth.

By the fall of 1978, the course of events in Peking seemed to have brought near the day of the democratic torch. The twice-purged “revisionist” and “capitalist-roader” Deng Xiaoping had returned to office in July 1977 as vice-premier and party vice-chairman. A month later the Eleventh Central Committee convened. More than half of its 201 members were people who, like Deng, had been purged in the Cultural Revolution and later restored to office, in contrast to the preceding Central Committee, dominated by persons like Party Chairman Hua Guofeng who had risen to prominence in the Cultural Revolution. The same preponderance of “veteran cadres” over “cultural revolutionaries” was discernible in the new Politburo and its Standing Committee, the party’s real ruling bodies. Deng’s consolidation of power was to continue over the next several years. In December 1978 the Eleventh Central Committee’s Third Plenum elected additional Deng followers to the Politburo; at the Fifth Plenum in February 1980 four of Deng’s opponents resigned from the Politburo and two of his allies were raised to the Standing Committee; and in 1980 and 1981 Deng’s two chief allies, Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang, replaced Hua Guofeng in his twin posts of premier and party chairman, respectively.

Deng’s ascendancy was reflected in the actions of government and in propaganda in the official press. In February 1978 a new constitution was adopted which spoke of popular supervision of government and guaranteed

freedom of speech, correspondence, the press, demonstration and the freedom to strike, and . . . the right to “speak out freely, air their views fully, hold great debates and write big-character posters.”

The party newspapers revived their pre-Cultural Revolution letters to the editor columns and used them, together with investigative reports, to expose lower- and middle-level bureaucrats who abused their powers. The papers said such “bureaucratism” could be corrected only by protecting people’s democratic rights to criticize cadres (the Chinese term for officials at all levels). In May, the two major party papers published a commentary entitled

“Practice Is the Sole Criterion of Truth” that called into question the ideological standard of strict adherence to Mao’s words. In June, Deng told a conference of armed forces political officers that the correct way to apply ideology was not to “copy straight from Marx, Lenin and Chairman Mao” but to “seek truth from facts.” He thus applied an ancient philosophical phrase referring to painstaking textual analysis to argue that as conditions changed one could try new policies, even if they were not described in the works of Mao. Mao was even brought in to testify posthumously against himself: the party newspaper printed for the first time a 1962 speech in which he had stressed his own fallibility.

The challenge facing the Deng group was to repudiate all that had been done in Mao’s name during the Cultural Revolution without discrediting the monopolistic structure of power that had enabled him to do these things. They had to separate the party from twenty years’ deeds of the man who had led it, while leaving the party dictatorship intact. The new head of the party Organization Department, Deng’s follower Hu Yaobang, launched a massive rehabilitation campaign, which was to continue for more than five years, to review and correct the cases of those who had been persecuted, convicted, labeled, or otherwise penalized since the beginning of the regime. This included more than twenty million who had been labeled “landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, or bad elements” in the early 1950s; another half-million or more persons labeled “rightists” in 1957, together with several million rural residents labeled “anti-socialist elements” in the early 1960s; three million cadres who had been implicated in “unjust and erroneous cases” in the Cultural Revolution; and over 300,000 who had been wrongly convicted of crimes, mostly counterrevolutionary, during the Cultural Revolution. Together with their families, the affected numbered one hundred million, or one-tenth of China’s population, Hu later told a group of Yugoslav journalists.

For the reformers, the danger was that they might lose control of the rehabilitation process. The public signals of change notified millions of desperate people that their grievances were ripe for resolution. Beginning shortly after Mao’s death and increasing in number throughout 1977 and 1978, personal written appeals began to appear in Peking’s Tiananmen Square, at the base of the cenotaph to the revolutionary martyrs and on the wooden fences around the construction site of the Mao Zedong mausoleum. As the political atmosphere signaled in the press grew increasingly permissive, the wall posters turned to more general though still safe subjects, such as praise of the deceased Premier Zhou Enlai on the anniversary of his birth.

Peking has always been a political city. In the old, central part of town, life takes place in courtyards screened from the lanes by gray walls. Families sharing a courtyard watch one another jealously, quarrel, or endure. At Pe-

king's center is the Forbidden City, walled in red. Its eastern portion consists of formal halls and palaces which are open to the public as a museum, but the section to the west is the retreat of the nation's political leaders. This Zhongnanhai (Central and Southern Lakes) is a vast park built by various dynasties for boating and feasting. Now it houses the top Politburo officials and the offices of the party Central Committee and the State Council. No building affords a view of its interior. Rumors say its residents have sometimes poisoned one another's food and put microphones in one another's walls. The petitioner for justice can get only as far as the outer gate.

Running from west to east in front of Zhongnanhai's gate and through Tiananmen Square is the six-lane Changan Avenue (Avenue of Perpetual Peace). Peking was laid out by the Mongols and developed by the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) on a north-south axis so that the emperor's authority could radiate from the Three Great Halls of the Forbidden City through the Gate of Heavenly Peace to the nation beyond. In front of this gate the communists cleared a square of nearly a hundred acres. They built the Great Hall of the People on one side, two history museums on the other, and a memorial stele to the heroes of the revolution at its center. In 1977 the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall was erected in the square's southern half.

A few blocks east of Tiananmen Square, Changan Avenue intersects Wangfujing, the street of Peking's main department store and (in 1978) the offices of the *People's Daily*. In the other direction Changan Avenue runs past a series of government offices, including the telegraph administration with its clock tower, and then about a mile from the square intersects with Xidan Road, another busy shopping street.

This rectangle two miles from east to west and half a mile deep is the heart of public Peking. It encompasses the old and new centers of national and municipal power, large open spaces of ceremonial and symbolic import, tourist attractions for Chinese and foreigners alike, and two busy shopping districts. The whole central area is served by bus lines from the outer districts, satellite towns, and agricultural suburbs beyond.

In modern times the high gates and public squares became gathering points for mass demonstrations that might cow or celebrate a government, depending on who controlled them, or serve one political faction against another. In 1895 thousands of scholars met at a building on the site that would later become Tiananmen Square to present a petition protesting the terms of the peace agreement with Japan. Their act launched China's democratic era, for they followed it by establishing study societies and newspapers that aimed to exert a continuous influence on government policy. The famous May Fourth demonstration in 1919 assembled here before the Gate of Heavenly Peace; Chinese communist historians call this incident the beginning of the "new democratic revolution"—the era which brought their party to power.

In 1935 the December 9 demonstration against Japanese aggression paraded past the gate. Many of the participants were to be among the rulers of China after 1949. On October 1, 1949, Mao climbed the gate to declare the founding of the People's Republic. In August 1966 he reviewed a million-strong rally of Red Guards there before turning them loose on his party colleagues throughout the capital and across the country.

In 1978, as for hundreds of years in the past, Peking was the company town of a huge bureaucratic empire. Perhaps as many as half of its residents were government employees or their family members, all vitally concerned with the political fortunes of the top leaders and well connected to the rumor network. Another large group were factory workers, a well-educated and politically conscious stratum—and particularly so in Peking, where many younger workers are the middle-school-educated offspring of factory workers or government employees, who took factory jobs in the 1960s and 1970s because there were no universities to attend or technical jobs to move into. Peking's population also includes tens of thousands of middle-school and college students, among them those of the elite Peking and Qinghua universities. And, as the post of most of the foreign correspondents and diplomats admitted to the country, Peking was the best place in China for demonstrators to catch the world's eye.

In November 1978, a series of events spurred the poster-writers and petitioners gathered in Peking to more daring. Secretly, but perhaps known to many who had connections in the party, a central work conference convened on November 10 to prepare for the upcoming Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee. Crucial policy and personnel decisions would be made at this meeting, establishing the predominance of Deng Xiaoping in the party. In the eyes of victims of the Cultural Revolution like the poet Huang Xiang, Deng's victory in the internal political struggle was crucial both to their personal hopes and to the prospects of the nation. Wrote one of Huang's group:

Putting heaven and earth in order, opening the doors, establishing order, discipline, and great democracy, Vice Premier Deng is open-minded, humble, and honored by the entire world. His greatness, beauty, and success in seizing the seat of government are hailed in the north and the south. . . . [Under him] the nation will be rich and strong, and the economy will be pushed ahead.

Huang and people like him had thus come to Peking not only to appeal their personal cases but to support Deng at a crucial moment in his fight to reform and democratize the communist system. "If anyone interferes with and harasses our aboveboard and legitimate actions and obstructs the pace of

great socialist democracy,” wrote Huang’s group, “we will criticize, expose, and bring accusations against him in accordance with the party and government constitutions.”

The spark that ignited the democracy movement was the reversal of the official condemnation of the Tiananmen Square incident of April 5, 1976. That incident had been the climax of several days when tens of thousands of Peking’s citizens turned out in the square carrying wreaths, memorial photographs, and posters to mourn the recently deceased Premier Zhou Enlai. In speeches and poems, the demonstrators criticized Mao and his closest collaborators in much the same terms that Huang was simultaneously using in his poems in Guiyang. On the fifth, the demonstration was violently broken up by police and militia under the authority of the mayor of Peking, Wu De. The Politburo promptly blamed Deng Xiaoping for the disturbances and dropped him from all his party and government posts. Now that Deng was back in office, the history of the incident was rewritten. From May 1978 onwards, without public announcement, the Peking Public Security Bureau “rechecked” the cases of 388 people it had arrested at the time of the incident, and reversed their convictions as counterrevolutionaries. The “reversal of verdict” on the Tiananmen Square incident was formally announced on November 15.

Extending a hundred yards or so along the north side of Changan Avenue, between the telegraph tower and the Xidan intersection, is a gray wall seven or eight feet high, set well back from the street, that belongs to no government office. It fronts on an athletic field and a bus stop. Because it was the closest large wall to Tiananmen Square, people had been pasting posters there for some time and by late 1978 had started calling it “Democracy Wall.” On the first weekend after the Peking municipal government vindicated those convicted in the Tiananmen Square incident, hundreds of factory workers, students, junior officials, and out-of-town visitors gathered at the wall to post, read, copy, and discuss political posters. The crowds grew during the week.

On the following Saturday, November 25, the discussions assumed an organized form. According to a participant, the organizers (whose identities are unknown) announced three purposes of the discussions:

- 1 To put into practice the “freedom of assembly and expression” which the Constitution confers on the citizenry.
- 2 To ascertain the cause and origin of the “Gang of Four’s” accession to power, to demand socialist mass democracy, and gradually to realize the principles of the Paris Commune under conditions of stability and unity.



- 3 To eliminate superstition and emancipate people's thinking, so as to sweep away ideological obstacles to the realization of the Four Modernizations [of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense] and thus to play the role of pioneers in science and democracy.

Many gave speeches while the crowd shouted its comments. One speaker complained of the rising price of dumplings. Another advocated independent legislative, executive, and judicial organs and a system of checks and balances, and objected to the Maoist anthem, "The East Is Red," because it referred to a "deliverer." A third commented that the Cultural Revolution had been "like a hurricane which swept away all dirty mud patches, but the pity was that the dirtiest things happened to be right at the center of it!" This "Democracy Forum" was the first in a series that lasted several nights.

Two days later, when the crowd of about ten thousand grew too large for the sidewalk of Changan Avenue, the organizers decided to move to Tiananmen Square. The participants formed ranks of ten to fifteen people each. One marcher recalled:

Some in the ranks . . . linked their hands, and some took the lead in shouting the slogans "We demand democracy!" and "We demand freedom!" Thus they proceeded through Changan Avenue to meet one another before the monument [to the heroes of the revolution, in the center of the square]. Several hundred of them sat in the center of the square. Another several hundred stood around them in an outer circle or climbed to sit on the rails of the monument. Those who were even farther stood on their bicycles.

The speakers shouted into microphones against the chilly wind:

"I came here after eight hours of work and after I finished washing my baby's diapers [laughter], and I am going to return to the office and work hard too! We must do well with our Four Modernizations."

"We have no particular ambitions. We are common people. . . . But we want to be common people who are free and happy!" [Cheers.]

"We are not afraid of death! The blood of the martyrs of April 5 has already been shed here!" [Pointing to the platform of the monument.]

"We must uphold the party! But we must also supervise the party! And make it the public servant of the people!"

The crowd at Democracy Wall was young, educated, and well informed about political conflicts in the party. When an American journalist who was going to see Deng Xiaoping dropped by, he was told to ask Deng, "When will the new policy on Liu Shaoqi (Liu Shao-ch'i) be put into effect? When is the new policy on Peng Dehuai (P'eng Te-huai) going to be put into effect?" Liu was the head of state who had been toppled during the Cultural Revolution; Peng was the minister of defense purged in 1959 for criticizing Mao. The crowd seemed to know that at the secret central work conference Deng Xiaoping was recommending the posthumous rehabilitation of these two men. But in the event, some leaders opposed the move as too dangerous to Mao's prestige, and the plan was tabled for the time being.

Inside information was also reflected in the crowd's selection of political villains and the way it exposed them. They most hated Wu De, who had been mayor of Peking when the Tiananmen Square incident occurred. Peking is a special municipality, administratively on the same level as a province, and because it is the national capital its mayor outranks most provincial governors and often sits on the Politburo. One measure of Wu De's unusual status had been that he controlled the city's public security forces and militia without interference from the Ministry of Public Security. His tape-recorded voice, ordering the Tiananmen demonstrators to disperse, had been broadcast on April 5, 1976, just before the police and militia moved on the crowd. Many now blamed Wu for scars borne since then. Although Wu had been replaced as mayor in October, he was still in the Politburo.

A satiric wall poster in the form of a soliloquy punned on Wu's name, which is homophonous with "no morals" (*wu de*):

I have lived in Peking for more than ten years, but I have "no morals" nor good conduct. . . . Some people say I am a "laughing tiger, ruthless and inhuman." . . . Nothing but vicious slander! . . . I have always been merciful. . . . Why, when Tiananmen was washed in blood on April 5, I did not touch one gun or one cannon.

The demonstrators exposed Wu's past. A subordinate of his who headed the Peking Public Security Bureau in 1976 had committed suicide in 1977, "for his guilty conscience," the demonstrators alleged. Still earlier, Wu had been a protégé of Kang Sheng, the hated secret police chief and *éminence grise* of the Cultural Revolution. Wu was also linked to Wang Dongxing, sinister commander of Mao's palace guard and leader of the orthodox Maoist faction, himself criticized by the crowd for building an expensive mansion within the walls of Zhongnanhai.

Party Chairman Hua Guofeng was vulnerable to many of the same charges, yet he remained almost untouched in the posters and speeches of 1978. He too was a beneficiary of the Cultural Revolution and of Kang

Sheng's sponsorship, and he had been minister of public security at the time of the Tiananmen Square incident. Yet his name came up mostly in favorable and ritual contexts, such as the "correct decisions of the Central Committee headed by Chairman Hua." The demonstrators' restraint matched Deng Xiaoping's in inner party councils; Hua was not to be demoted until 1981.

But Mao could be discussed. "Did Chairman Mao commit any error? Can the masses of people discuss his merits and shortcomings?" a poster asked. The writer pointed out that neither Lin Biao nor Jiang Qing (Chiang Ch'ing, of the "Gang of Four") could have risen to power without Mao's backing. Unless Mao's last years are scientifically reevaluated, another writer proposed, his "mistakes will become a mental burden on our minds . . . and an excuse for enemies to attack us." A third writer called up the image of the feeble Mao in his book-lined study familiar to Americans from photographs of his meetings with Nixon and Kissinger:

With the personal background of a small producer, an inward-looking gaze, too many ancient books, and plenty of flattering voices in his ears, he was now unable to see the rapid development of science abroad and unable to hear the people's urgent appeals.

The question of Mao in turn implied the even larger question of reform of China's political system.

However great and wise a leader might be, he certainly cannot be immune from making mistakes. Several thousand years of feudal history and over a hundred years of the people's dauntless struggles have taught us one truth: we must place our hope in a healthy, effective, scientific and democratic system, so that both the common people and the public servants they elect are bound by this system and strive for the well-being of the people in accordance with this system.

"Comrades," said another writer, "the proletariat has to safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, or in other words, people have to safeguard themselves against their leaders. Do you feel surprised when you hear this? But this was how Engels summed up the experiences of the Paris Commune" (in his preface to *The Civil War in France*). This echoed Huang Xiang's views about the political roots of China's backwardness: "if the mind is fettered by the 'Gang of Four's' taboos, obsessed with idolatry and full of worries, such a spiritual state cannot be conducive to the accomplishment of the Four Modernizations."

Statements like "Chairman Mao was no god!" made front pages around the world, yet in this and many other views the demonstrators were only a

step ahead of the Central Committee. It was not long before Peng Dehuai, Liu Shaoqi, and others were rehabilitated. Wu De and Wang Dongxing fell from the Politburo in February 1980. Kang Sheng was denounced in a series of secret speeches and finally condemned as a criminal in the “Gang of Four” trial and posthumously expelled from the Communist Party. That the Cultural Revolution had been a disaster became official doctrine on the thirtieth anniversary of the People’s Republic of China in 1979. The implications of that position for Mao’s historical role were openly accepted in 1981. (Deng had already said in 1978 that Mao was 70 percent good and 30 percent bad, a position not substantially altered later.) On the question of the democratic system, a series of reforms was introduced in 1979 and afterwards that I will discuss in Chapter 4.

But not all the posters of late 1978 and early 1979 stayed within bounds that would later be validated by the party. One called for premarital sex, saying that repression had increased the rate of sex crimes and worked against the development of socialism. There were two open letters to President Carter; one warmly praised American democracy, while the other actually asked Carter to intervene on behalf of any Chinese citizen arrested for exercising the right of free speech. (The notion of any sort of foreign intervention is offensive to most Chinese.) An organization called the China Human Rights League issued a “Nineteen-Point Declaration” that among other startling suggestions called for the removal of Mao’s sarcophagus from Tiananmen Square and détente between China and the Soviet Union. After China launched its “defensive counterattack” on Vietnam in February 1979, a poster went up ridiculing “a big country like China” for “striking a little childlike Vietnam.”

More deeply offensive to the party leaders was a broad attack on the government that was posted on December 5. Its sarcasm did not spare even Deng Xiaoping, the hero of most of the demonstrators.

After the arrest of the “Gang of Four,” people hoped eagerly for the reestablishment of the great banner of Vice-Premier Deng who might “restore capitalism” [as he was accused during the Cultural Revolution of wanting to do]. Finally Vice Premier Deng returned to his leading post in the Central Committee. How excited people were, how inspired, how . . . But regrettably the old political system so hated by the people was not changed, the democracy and freedom they hoped for could not even be mentioned, there was no improvement in people’s living conditions, and the wage “hike” [of some 15 percent in urban wages, announced in 1977] was far from matching the soaring inflation.

These were among the opening lines of “The Fifth Modernization” by Wei Jingsheng, who was to become the most famous victim of the government’s

crackdown on dissent. After Wei, other democrats would also challenge the legitimacy of party dictatorship, although they did so, unlike him, on Marxist grounds. I will describe in Chapter 5 the ideas of these Marxist pluralists and explain why their writings finally made the democracy movement intolerable to the regime.

In December and January mimeographed publications began to be displayed on the wall; copies of them were sold at times posted in advance. (One journal published an apology after its representatives failed to show up at the announced time, leaving several hundred people standing in the cold for nearly an hour.) Prices were usually five to twenty cents (Chinese) per copy. Some magazines charged special prices of fifty cents or one yuan (Chinese dollar) per issue for foreigners. Some offered mail subscriptions.

Several magazines had approached printing shops, only to be told that outside jobs could not be accepted without the permission of the authorities. At least one editor tried to borrow a Chinese typewriter from a foreign journalist. Such typewriters are not widely available in China, and among the unofficial periodicals I have seen, only one had typewriter-cut stencils. All the others were cut by hand with steel styluses in long hours of tedious labor, with neat characters placed as close together as possible to save space.

Chinese mimeograph machines are not the rotary type familiar in America. They are hinged devices, consisting of an upper frame in which the wax master is held and a lower frame into which a stack of paper is placed. The master is lowered and pressed with an inked roller, which is re-inked after every tenth or so impression. After each pressing the frame is lifted to retrieve the printed sheet. Such machines were available in state-run stationery shops for under a hundred Chinese dollars, but in principle they could be sold only to offices and schools. To buy large quantities of stencils, ink, and paper a citizen was supposed to show a requisition from his or her unit. Otherwise, quantities had to be assembled from a number of small purchases made at different shops. Even then, materials were often unavailable. One journal printed an issue with red ink because it could not get black.

Considering the inconvenience of obtaining materials and the tedium of copying, printing, and collating the magazines (typically ten to forty pages), the small staffs who devoted long evening and weekend hours in their own or their parents' crowded apartments were fortunate to be able to publish five hundred or so copies of a single issue per month. The Chinese government later implied that publishing magazines was a nice way to make money. It is true that *April Fifth Forum* reported a 370-yuan profit (somewhat over U.S. \$200) on sales after nearly a year of operation, and tried to pay taxes on it, but this included no recompense for hundreds of hours of labor and barely matched the 364 yuan in start-up capital originally contributed by the founders to buy materials.

The periodicals called themselves "people's publications," implying that

they were not official like all the other publications in China, and yet not “dissident” or “underground.” They saw themselves as analogous to legitimate “people’s” organizations encouraged by the government in some years past, such as locally financed schools. (Of course the government had had particular reasons for promoting such schools: they removed an item of expense from the state budget in stringent times. There was no similar advantage in the people’s periodicals.) Each journal published its editor’s name and address, not only to allow subscribers and writers to get in touch but to demonstrate its aboveboard nature to the authorities. *April Fifth Forum* sent copies of each issue to Chairman Hua, Vice Premier Deng, Mayor Lin Hujia of Peking, and various libraries. Several journals even asked the government to provide financial support, printing facilities, and access to news events.

The journals wanted to register with the authorities, but no one knew how. Several magazines published appeals asking how to register and pay taxes, but received no answer. It was not until November 1979 that the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress announced that laws and decrees adopted since 1949 remained valid until replaced by new laws and decrees. This meant that regulations for printing and publishing enterprises that had been promulgated in 1952 were still in effect. But their requirements could not be met in 1978. The regulations said that each publication must have the guarantee of two private shops, entities that had disappeared in 1956. They ruled out private mimeographing, requiring printing to be done at “fixed premises and installations,” which were now all government-controlled and had already denied their services to the unofficial magazines. And they required registration with the local industrial and commercial federation, an organ that no longer existed. None of the people’s publications was able to register despite persistent attempts, and this fact was eventually used to close them down.

Huang Xiang’s group seems to have been the first to come out with a mimeographed publication. *Enlightenment* No. 1 was dated October 11, 1978, with a second printing dated October 24. Thirty-nine pages long, it carried the complete texts of the “God of Fire” poems together with a foreword and epilogue. No. 2 came out as the Democracy Wall events were reaching their height, on November 24. It enthusiastically welcomed “the great ideological revolutionary movement to distinguish truth from falsehood now sweeping the country” and announced the formal founding of the Enlightenment Society by eight persons in Peking. Most of its fifty-one pages were devoted to an exegesis of the “God of Fire” poems by Huang Xiang’s close friend Li Jiahua. Issue No. 3 of January 1, 1979, carried the organization’s provisional draft program of twelve articles and contained a long essay, “On Human Rights,” by Lu Mang, which was issued as a separate pamphlet a week later.

The opportunity to publish brought disagreements in the group to the

surface. On February 27 a number of Enlightenment Society members back home in Guiyang announced that they were splitting to form the Thaw Society, charging Huang Xiang with being too “conservative.”

The Thaw Society is a newborn organization that has outgrown the Enlightenment Society. It will shoulder the historic task which the Enlightenment Society is unwilling or unable to shoulder.

The group distributed in Guiyang and Peking a mimeographed “Manifesto” that hailed Rousseau’s ideas on human rights, Sun Yat-sen’s on democracy, the Christian spirit of peace, forbearance, and universal love, and two-party competition between the Chinese Communists and their civil war enemy, the Nationalist Party.

The second periodical to appear was *April Fifth Paper*, dated November 26, 1978. The founders felt it was “inconvenient for the people to spend a lot of time before that cold Democracy Wall conducting discussions and pasting up and reading big-character posters.” A newspaper could serve the democratic movement more effectively than posters. The two staff members soon joined with two others who ran a journal called *Democratic Forum* to form *April Fifth Forum*. The leading figure was Xu Wenli, a thirty-six-year-old army veteran, son of a Red Army doctor and great-grandson of an official of the imperial regime, now working in Peking as an electrician. The magazine’s office was a space some five yards square in Xu’s two-room apartment, which he shared with his wife and seven-year-old daughter. “The equipment was simple,” a Western visitor wrote:

a desk, a pair of easy-chairs, a reading alcove with the latest papers, a cupboard with books and study materials, a bed, and—under the bed packed in boxes—the printing plant [a mimeograph machine]. Everywhere were piles of the most disparate papers and periodicals as well as bundles of freshly-printed copies of *April Fifth Forum*.

The staff eventually grew to about twenty, mostly factory workers and teachers ranging in age from twenty-two to thirty-six, and including Communist Party and Communist Youth League members. In the early months each staff member had to donate one yuan or 1 percent of his or her monthly salary (i.e., about sixty U.S. cents) to cover expenses, as well as work evenings until midnight or later putting each issue together.

Unlike *Enlightenment*, *April Fifth Forum* emphasized loyalty to Marxism and the party but believed the party was split between “reformers” (Deng and his faction) and “conservatives” (rigid Maoists), a political situation that they said had repeated itself over and over in China since the late nineteenth century, when the reformers Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao

tried to modernize the country during the Hundred Days of Reform. In backing the "Practice Group," as it called Deng's faction, *April Fifth* tried to make constructive suggestions, such as that measures be taken to ameliorate Peking's industrial smog and that Democracy Walls be set up in front of the offices of provincial governments throughout China. Its pages occasionally reflected access to inside information about the reform faction's thinking, as when it pointed to the need for a public trial of the Gang of Four before this had become official policy, or advocated the posthumous rehabilitation of a victim of the Cultural Revolution, Yu Luoke, whose public exoneration did not come until more than a year later.

While denying that Western democracy and culture were desirable models, *April Fifth* ridiculed the conservatives' xenophobia. Long hair and tight-hipped, broad-ankled trousers are enduring fashions in Hong Kong, and for some reason these are among the cultural imports most deeply irritating to conservative Chinese. *April Fifth's* solution was "Anti-Bell-Bottom Trousers," which they touted with sly humor as completely shapeless:

They are suitable for fat and skinny people of either sex and any age with any physical shape. There is no difference between the front and the back. They are dark in color, dignified in appearance, and can be used in all four seasons by all members of the family.

The item contained puns on several twentieth-century reactionary slogans, such as "national essence," "restoration of the past," and "revival."

With its issue No. 10 (June 1979), *April Fifth Forum* entered a new phase. This book-length volume of 121 closely copied pages sold for the relatively high price of 1.20 yuan. It consisted of a provocative theoretical essay entitled "On the Proletarian Democratic Revolution" which argued that a "bureaucratic monopoly privileged class" wielding economic and coercive power might block China's progress to communism. Only a "proletarian democratic revolution" could prevent this, and such a revolution would install, among other things, a two-party system. While *April Fifth Forum* had previously argued that the people should supervise the party to prevent its becoming corrupted by power, such a comprehensive argument showing such deep mistrust of the party and suggesting such a radical solution was new to its pages. The author, Chen Erjin, was a newcomer too: a coal mine statistician from Yunnan, he had written the book in 1974-76 and had come to Peking in late 1978 or early 1979. Not only did the *Forum* editors find his essay a step in the right direction, as they stated in their preface to issue No. 10, but they were sufficiently persuaded to repeat its key points in many articles in succeeding issues of the journal.

On January 8, 1979, *Peking Spring* made its appearance. It stood for the



same goals as the other journals—democracy and science, political reform, economic modernization. The first issue stated:

To be rich and powerful, China must be built into a modern socialist power. This is the ideal long dreamed of by the Chinese people. However, to stride toward this great ideal, we must break down modern feudalism and modern superstition, and gradually acquire socialist democracy and modern science.

Like *April Fifth Forum*, *Peking Spring* saw itself on the side of the reformist faction. In its third issue it announced that it sought the following kinds of material:

- 1 Propaganda for and discussions of the communiqué of the Third Plenum [the crucial December 1978 meeting where Deng's line was adopted].
- 2 Criticism of "superstitious worship of an individual" and of the "whatever faction" [leaders who believed that whatever Mao said must be followed]. . . .

The flavor of insiderism was even stronger in *Peking Spring's* pages than in those of *April Fifth*. The articles were full of current and historical information about political figures the editors supported or opposed, which must have been drawn from intraparty documents and reminiscences of older cadres. The journal called for the rehabilitation of "Comrade Shaoqi" (Liu Shaoqi) and reported the whereabouts of his widow before word of her appeared in the official press. It reviewed Peng Dehuai's career as "conscience of the Chinese revolution" and reprinted his 1959 letter of criticism that had caused Mao to purge him. There was an eyewitness account of the return of former mayor Peng Zhen to Peking and a call for him to be assigned to work in the legal field, where in fact he soon turned up in a leading role. The magazine published a supportive biography of the elderly economic planner Chen Yun, who soon reemerged in power, and puffed Deng Xiaoping's rising follower Hu Yaobang as a "hero in destroying 'modern superstition.'" On the negative side, *Peking Spring* exposed the late secret police chief, Kang Sheng, providing information not previously known in the West and at that time not publicly revealed in China, and criticized Wang Dongxing for allegedly building himself a mansion in Zhongnanhai.

Aside from the top leaders, the magazine defended a number of dissidents. "Li Yizhe" was a writing group, three of whose members had been imprisoned for putting up a critical poster in Canton in 1974. *Peking Spring*

published the article “Li Yizhe Is Innocent” shortly before the three authors were released and exonerated. The journal advocated official recognition for an “underground” novel (circulated only in handwritten copies) called *The Second Handshake*, which was later officially approved and published. It exposed new details about the case of Zhang Zhixin, a party member who had been tortured and executed in 1975 for refusing to recant her criticisms of Chairman Mao.

Many of *Peking Spring*'s editors had participated in the April Fifth demonstration. Two, Han Zhixiong and Wang Juntao, were imprisoned in 1976 but just before the reversal of verdict on the April Fifth incident, were elevated to membership and alternateship respectively in the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, along with a third *Spring* editor. A fourth was a party member. It must have been through them that the journal got some of its political information. Such respectability also helped persuade printers at the Foreign Languages Press to print one issue in a run of ten thousand. All the others, however, were mimeographed in small runs.

*Peking Spring* apparently believed that the municipal party committee and public security departments were still strongholds of Wu De's followers, although he was no longer mayor. Reporting the 1977 arrest and beatings of some “honest and righteous comrades” by the police, the journal stated:

People of good will may perhaps not believe that in Peking where Chairman Hua and the CCP Central Committee are located, atrocities of this kind are rampant. Now that Wu De has been transferred away, will these conditions continue to exist?

They printed several hair-raising articles about the police, including one called “Trampled” that described the torture of a Peking worker who had participated in the April Fifth incident. The police officer who had interrogated Han Zhixiong in 1976 was quoted as threatening to “clear up accounts” with him now for the way Han had blackened his name after the reversal of verdict. (This officer, Ma Danian, was still in charge of suppressing dissidents as late as 1979. Another people's journal reported in September 1979 that Ma had led a search of a staff member's house.) *Peking Spring* also published pointed news items (e.g., “Destitute Petitioner Forced to Sell Cotton Padded Quilt”), fables (Western and Chinese), articles of political theory, literary criticism, poetry, and fiction.

*Spring*'s most thought-provoking item, which I will discuss further in Chapter 5, was a short story, “A Tragedy That Might Happen in the Year 2000.” It imagined a coup d'état in which followers of the Gang of Four seize back power from Deng Xiaoping and reverse all his policies. The point was that Deng's line could never be firmly established so long as political power remained centralized rather than democratically based. Just as Chen

Erjin's booklet on "proletarian democratic revolution" brought the thinking of the *April Fifth Forum* group into a more radical phase, so "Tragedy" seemed to sharpen the focus of *Peking Spring's* political writings. Thereafter the magazine concentrated on the problem of how to give the people more power in Chinese democracy. Its chief proposals included election instead of appointment of cadres, and greater leeway for free criticism of the party.

*Enlightenment*, *April Fifth Forum*, and *Peking Spring* were comprehensive magazines, publishing both literary works and political essays. Many other people-managed journals were strictly literary; they exploited literature's advantage of ambiguity to expose the horrors of the late years of Mao's rule. In a culturally managed society, it is hard to give clear definition to official standards of acceptability. When the line changes, the boundaries blur, to become clear again only as the authorities praise or ban specific works. In 1978–79 the test of acceptability was not how terrible a story of personal suffering was but that it held the communist system and the Great Helmsman blameless and attributed the horrors to the Gang of Four, local bureaucrats, or China's "feudal cultural tradition." But when a poem or piece of fiction concentrates on a victim's sufferings, it often remains unclear where the blame lies. A score of mimeographed literary magazines sprang up to operate in this dangerous territory. The most famous was *Today*, which proclaimed:

History has finally given us an opportunity to sing aloud the song that has been buried in our hearts for ten years without encountering thundering punishment. . . . The difficult task of reflecting the spirit of the new era has fallen onto the shoulders of this generation. . . . What is past is already past, the future is still far distant. To our generation only today is today!

*Today's* editors were able to cut some of their stencils on a Chinese typewriter in an office to which one of their members had access, but like the staffs of the other people's journals they had to print and collate each issue themselves.

Campus literary magazines, which had just been restored in most universities, published similar kinds of material. Some were even sold at Democracy Wall despite the fact that they were supposed to be restricted to campus distribution. In August 1979, representatives of thirteen college literary magazines met and decided to publish an unofficial national literary magazine, *This Generation*. Since the campus literary clubs and their magazines were legal, they may have felt that a cooperative publication would be permitted. Printers in Wuhan accepted the job, but suddenly stopped work while the first issue was in press, apparently after receiving a warning from local party authorities. The sections already printed were distributed in November, but no second issue was ever published.

The boldest of the people's journals was Wei Jingsheng's *Explorations*. Like other people's magazines, it tried to stay within the law; it cited constitutional freedom of the press, published a liaison address, and sought to register and pay taxes. But it did not join the others in protesting its loyalty to the party or to Deng's reformist faction. Instead the January 1979 first issue stated, "We do not recognize the absolute correctness of any theory or any person." It contained the text of Wei Jingsheng's "Fifth Modernization" and a list of ten sarcastic questions about a January 5 Deng interview with American reporters—for example, "What would be the dangers to the interests of Chinese citizens if they were granted the same individual rights now enjoyed by U.S. citizens?"

Wei was employed as an electrician by the Peking municipal parks administration. According to one report, his father was deputy director of the cabinet-level State Capital Construction Commission. His mother was buried in Babaoshan, the elite cemetery of revolutionary martyrs. Wei had traveled widely in the 1960s and 1970s as a Red Guard and, later, an army man. In the northwest, he saw naked beggars and labor camps; in the south, mud villages emptied by famine. Like the Enlightenment group, he traced poverty to politics. Because he criticized Mao's dictatorship he quarreled with his superiors and was disapproved for party membership and suspended as a youth league member. At age twenty-eight, like many of his generation, Wei still lived with his father in a small apartment where one room had been set aside for him and a future wife. The father was dismayed at his son's unorthodox turn of mind, and told some of Wei's friends, "He is a counterrevolutionary. You better keep away from him." Wei calmly told his friends, "He made such a scene because he is a father and a decadent official"—a reference to the "feudal" faults of "patriarchalism" and "bureaucratism."

"The Fifth Modernization" appeared on Democracy Wall on December 5, 1978. "The hated old political system has not changed," it read. "When people ask for democracy they are only asking for something they rightfully own. . . . Are not the people justified in seizing power from those overlords?" Many readers were shocked and wrote disapproving comments. One recalled being attracted by such "refreshing" ideas, yet fearing the government's reaction and feeling unable to break with Marxism "after so many years of orthodox Marxist education." But a small group of readers went to the address given at the end of the poster and met the author. Although members of the group differed in their degree of skepticism about Marxism, they agreed on the need for unfettered theoretical investigation "to ascertain the real reason for the backwardness of Chinese society." They decided to found a magazine to carry out these "explorations." Among others, they included a college student (who was also a youth league member) and two factory workers. The first issue was mimeographed at the home of Wei Jingsheng's girlfriend, a

woman of Tibetan origin whose parents, like Wei's, were senior party members. Most subsequent issues were printed in the room Wei's father had set aside for his married life. The number of copies ranged from 150 to 1,500 per issue, and the editors sold them on the street in Peking and, on one occasion, Tianjin.

The first three issues were dominated by Wei's writings, including "The Fifth Modernization" and two sequels and "Human Rights, Equality, and Democracy." They also carried material Wei garnered from foreign reporters who cultivated him, such as extracts from Amnesty International's 1978 report *Political Imprisonment in the People's Republic of China*. In the third issue Wei published a sensational exposé of Qincheng, the political prison for high-level cadres where his girlfriend's father had been incarcerated from 1960 to 1978.

Altogether, at least fifty-five people's periodicals were published in Peking, ranging from a single issue of some items to forty-three numbers of a journal called *Science, Democracy, and Law*. But the democracy movement was nationwide in scope. In Canton, a range of literary and comprehensive magazines was sold in the streets. The most famous was *People's Voice*, the organ of a part-time study group called the Scientific Socialism Study Society. *Voice* declared its loyalty to Marxism and Deng Xiaoping and discussed ways to combat bureaucracy and promote democracy. In Shanghai, lecturers from Peking appeared in late November 1978, and filled the huge blacktop People's Square until two or three in the morning with crowds estimated to be as large as 150,000. A French eyewitness reported a speech that opened with sarcasm:

This evening I want to speak to you about our great socialist system and Comrade [Mao] Zedong. . . . [Mao] told us that our forces of production are backward but our relations of production and social system are the most advanced in the world—so advanced that even the capitalists envy us.

At this the crowd roared with laughter. The speaker continued with a play on words, based on the character *dong* in Mao's name, which means "east."

Criticism of Comrade Mao is one of our most urgent tasks, for the party contains many small Mao-easts. It is also full of Mao-west, Mao-south, and Mao-north.

According to one native, most Shanghai residents kept aloof from the square, fearing police action. Those who attended were mostly young men who enjoyed bantering with the speakers. When police appeared, the crowds

mounted their bicycles and pedaled away, with the police copying as many license plate numbers as they could. But the police took no other steps and the discussions continued nightly for several weeks.

Besides those in Shanghai and Canton, there were Democracy Walls or people's periodicals in at least twenty-six other cities, and at least 127 titles were published outside Peking. The tally does not include campus periodicals, of which there were at least forty-five. There were doubtless still other cities and towns where Democracy Walls sprang up and people's periodicals were published that were never reported to the outside world. Nor will the total number of the participants in the movement ever be known. The publications' editorial boards ranged from one person to a score or more; each had its larger circle of contributors, anonymous advisers, and occasional helpers, as well as those who helped only by passing the periodicals from hand to hand.

Uniquely among democratic movements in socialist countries, the Chinese activists almost all saw themselves not as challenging the regime but as enlisting on the side of a faction within it. Unlike many people in the Soviet human rights movement, the democrats were not members of oppressed ethnic or religious minorities and they did not seek to emigrate. Unlike the Eastern European dissenters, they were not motivated by patriotic revulsion against foreign domination. Nor, with few exceptions, did they challenge socialism or Marxism. They angrily rejected the label of "dissidents" as implying antagonism to the state. Instead, they saw themselves in a traditional role—as remonstrators, not only loyal to the state but forming an integral part of it. Here lay the special source of their moral appeal to other Chinese, but also, because they had no grounds to resist the state's repression, the source of their movement's comparative fragility as well.

The tradition of remonstrance in China is ancient. Qu Yuan in the fourth century B.C. exposed to his king the errors of his policies and was in return angrily exiled to the primitive south. Yet he remained so loyal that when his predictions of disaster came true, he threw himself into the river in grief for his king and drowned. In the judgment of posterity, "he took loyalty as the highest good and valued the maintenance of integrity. He used bold words to preserve his state; he killed himself to achieve righteousness."

Although in later times the duty of remonstrance was concentrated in a special agency, the Censorate, honest advice to the sovereign remained the duty of every official. Over the centuries thousands of officials were flogged, demoted, banished, or exiled for having complained when the emperor neglected his ritual duties, tolerated corrupt officials, tampered with the line of succession, or disregarded the popular welfare. Tradition insists that the remonstrators were always unselfish. They never spoke to protect their personal rights; on the contrary, they put life and property at risk to awaken the ruler

to his own interests and those of the state. When remonstrance failed, the act of self-sacrifice affirmed the moral character of the state and set an example for later generations of the minister's duty to guide the sovereign. "He who restrains his prince," wrote Mencius, "loves his prince."

Under Mao the duty of remonstrance remained, but its exercise became more dangerous than under even the most despotic of the emperors. According to Mao's "five fear-nots," a party member should speak the truth fearing neither removal from his post, expulsion from the party, imprisonment, divorce, nor "the guillotine." Mao chided his colleagues for treating him too timidly, inviting them to "criticize me day and night" in one speech and insisting elsewhere, "It is right to rebel." Yet he also regarded anyone who disagreed with him as a traitor, and millions were accordingly punished as "rightists," "revisionists," and "counterrevolutionaries" in the last twenty years of his rule.

To help restore people's willingness to speak up after Mao's death, the official press from 1977 on made heroes of those who had dared to remonstrate under Mao. For example, according to a 1980 newspaper story, in 1974 a factory worker in Changchun wrote fourteen anti-Jiang Qing, pro-Liu Shaoqi leaflets and sent them to fourteen offices in the city. He was arrested and during his interrogation tried to educate his jailers. He was executed by shooting in 1976, unrepentant, "head high, eyes blazing." In Shanxi a repairman in a broadcast station wrote twelve letters between 1974 and 1976 to Chairman Mao and other high officials, exposing bad behavior in the supposedly model agricultural brigade at Dazhai. "For the sake of pursuing truth, I have risked punishment and death to report this," he wrote. He was arrested, denounced in a mass meeting, tortured, and sentenced to eighteen years; his relatives were also punished. He refused to admit any crime and was cleared in 1979. In Jiangxi in 1966-67 a husband and wife, both medical-school teachers, sent the central authorities twenty-seven articles and letters expressing what were later deemed "correct opinions on a whole series of important issues" such as the errors of the Cultural Revolution, the faults of Lin Biao and Jiang Qing, and the injustices done to Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. The husband was executed in 1970; the wife died the following year in a labor camp. "We do not fear plunging into boiling water, walking on fire, or having our bodies and bones broken," they were later quoted as saying, "so long as the great Chinese Communist Party can continue to exist and the great socialist fatherland can develop." The Jiangxi provincial party committee cleared their names in 1980. The most famous in this class of martyrs was Zhang Zhixin, "a good daughter of the party," who was tried in 1969 for expressing open criticism of the Cultural Revolution, Lin Biao, and Jiang Qing and defending the reputations of Liu Shaoqi and Peng Dehuai. (She had also criticized Mao, but the official press did not say so at the time of her rehabilitation because the party had not yet decided its

own position on Mao.) She was sentenced to life imprisonment, but her unrepentant attitude in prison so unnerved the provincial party committee that they changed the sentence to death. Her throat was cut before execution so she could not shout her loyalty to the party. "At 10:12, the red flag flashed downward, the gun sounded, and Zhang Zhixin the woman communist fell. She had fallen, but her eyes were still wide open, staring angrily at the gray sky." There was even a "living Zhang Zhixin," a comrade named Guo Weinbin who managed to survive eleven years in prison after speaking against Lin Biao and Jiang Qing at a meeting. In 1980 she served as a delegate to the National People's Congress and was warmly received by Zhang Zhixin's mother and Liu Shaoqi's widow. "Rather a broken jade," Guo said in prison, "than a tile intact."

All the officially published remonstrance cases had several features in common. First, the opinions for which the victims had been punished were judged correct at the time of rehabilitation; nobody was rehabilitated for using the rights of speech and correspondence to voice opinions still considered incorrect. In particular, none of the rehabilitated persons was reported to have criticized Mao himself, only his lieutenants. Second, the victims had obeyed the party rule "Be open and aboveboard, don't intrigue and conspire." Although in a few cases their letters or handbills were unsigned, none of them had made any attempt to protect himself or herself from arrest. Third, they took their punishment without resentment, although holding tenaciously to their "correct political stand." They underwent torture with composure and faced execution free of personal concerns, firm in the confidence that the cause of the party would win out and that the party itself would vindicate them. The moral of their stories was that the party was right in the end. Because they remonstrated rather than rebelled, the party's authority was strengthened. This was a model the democratic activists largely accepted. The difference between the twentieth-century remonstrators and their precursors from the fourth century B.C. on was one of social class. What used to be the responsibility only of the official elite was now a concern of every man and woman, and especially of the most politically conscious groups—students, workers, party members.

In many cities the democracy movement became intertwined with the activities of petitioners seeking redress in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. In Hangzhou, Xi'an, and Shanghai, local young people demonstrated to demand the right to return from their assigned posts in the countryside. The Shanghai demonstrations were the most serious. As China's largest city, Shanghai had produced over the years an estimated one million "sent-down youth"—middle-school graduates posted to distant corners of the nation for permanent service as farmers and frontiersmen. All of them looked to Deng Xiaoping's regime to liberate them from what they considered a kind of



bondage. A National Work Conference on Educated Youth Sent Down to the Countryside met in Peking from October 31 to December 10, 1978. The policy it announced in mid-December was ambiguous—youth should be willing to stay happily in the countryside, but as many jobs as possible should be found for them in the cities. In January, thousands of sent-down youths returned to Shanghai on annual home leave for the lunar New Year. They joined hundreds of thousands of other youths (600,000, according to one estimate) already legally or illegally in Shanghai seeking permanent jobs. A series of irate demonstrations pressed the city government for assignments. On the night of February 5–6 the demonstrations culminated in a twelve-hour sit-in on the tracks of the Shanghai railway station that disrupted the travel of 80,000 passengers, according to the official press, and affected long-distance trains throughout the country for a week.

In Peking the petitioners' concerns were more diverse. Under the party's rehabilitation program, millions who had been arbitrarily demoted, transferred, fired, jailed, or had relatives executed during the previous thirty years were now to be politically rehabilitated, reemployed, given back their old houses, and reintegrated into society. Inevitably, many were not satisfied with the way their cases were handled locally. Tens of thousands came to the center of national power to seek redress. They posted their stories on Democracy Wall or told them to passersby at the front gate of Zhongnanhai:

Seeking to redress years of grievances, Comrade Liu, an air force political officer at Lanzhou, visited Lanzhou and Peking many times to air his grievances, and was placed in detention centers sixty-five times in Lanzhou and fifty-five times in Peking. . . .

Wang Dayuan of Datong Commune, Tianqingxian, Anhui province, and his whole family lost their residence registration as his father had been convicted on false charges. They had been petitioning for more than ten years, but were still unable to regain their residence registration. He and his sister were teenagers when their father was killed. Now his sister is twenty-nine years old and cannot find anyone to marry her because she does not have residence registration. . . .

Falsely accused of speculation and profiteering, Comrade Li Erli . . . was expelled from the party. His property was confiscated and he himself has become paralyzed owing to repeated struggles [interrogations]. His father, mother, and wife were hounded to death in four days. Li made several attempts to commit suicide. The case has dragged on for so long, over ten years, that his whole family is ruined and his children had to quit school. It is ascertained now that the charges were false. He got back his property, but nobody is adjudged responsible for the fiasco. . . .

A cadre who had accepted assignment to the countryside to lighten the burden on the official payroll during the famine of the early 1960s explained his case in a poem entitled "Where Is the Blue Sky of Shanxi?" (blue sky is a symbol of justice):

*Eighteen years ago I went to help at the agricultural front,  
Responding to the call of the provincial party committee.  
I remembered the hard days of our revolution,  
And had the guts to take on the country's difficulties.*

*Eighteen years ago I went to help at the agricultural front,  
With the guarantee of return after two years.  
But the provincial party committee went back on its word,  
And cut off my salary so I had no way to live. . . .*

*These were eighteen years of tempests and storms.  
We sold our two children for three packs of corn. . . .  
My daughter died, my wife went mad.  
I lay deranged and half-paralyzed in my bed. . . .*

*Eighteen years ago I went to help at the agricultural front,  
Sent on my way with the sound of gongs and drums.  
Eighteen years later I come back to appeal for justice,  
But they keep me locked outside the gate.*

The petitioners lived in desperate conditions in the city. They had often reached Peking on foot or by hobo rides on trains and trucks, dragging children and carrying their possessions in bundles. They clustered in the political center of town, some camping at the front gate of Zhongnanhai, perhaps hoping vainly to catch Chairman Hua or Vice Premier Deng going in or out. Others slept in the railway station or in doorways, cooking on fires kindled in the gutters or begging food from restaurants. Some peddled flowers, plastic tumbler holders, or handmade key rings in the streets. At least one woman put up a sign advertising her two children for sale. Several reportedly committed suicide. Later, many were housed in huts provided by the authorities, where several died from the cold. "Straight out of a Goya painting," French correspondent Georges Biannic called them, "sick, on crutches, dressed in rags and tatters, wretchedly poverty-stricken."

On January 8, 1979, the third anniversary of Zhou Enlai's death, the petitioners conducted a ceremony at Tiananmen Square. Contingents of factory workers and schoolchildren had arrived one by one to present wreaths at the Monument to the Revolutionary Martyrs. As reported by the people's journal *Reference News for the Masses*:

Their chests wearing white flowers [a sign of mourning], their eyes flowing with tears, wearing thin clothes and carrying small pieces of luggage on their backs, some carrying baskets in their hands containing items of everyday use, with solemn emotions they slowly entered the square. . . . After the column had paraded once around the square, the whole crowd gathered before the monument for a memorial ceremony. . . . When the crowd was in a very agitated state of emotion, a petitioner . . . made a speech: "Among those of us who have come to petition to Peking, already two have died of hunger. Now some have been driven away, some have been detained. We want human rights! We want democracy! . . . We want work, we want food, we want a place to live! We cannot drink the northwest wind." . . . At this time the audience numbered several tens of thousands. Some people in the back shouted, "Let's get rid of the remaining poison of the Gang of Four!" "We demand real resolution of our problems!" At the end they shouted slogans, sang "The Internationale," and left the square in an orderly manner in groups.

For the next several weeks a large group of petitioners sat at the front gate of Zhongnanhai. "We will not leave Peking until we have seen Chairman Hua to give him a letter containing our demands or until a good decision has been taken concerning us," one of them told a foreign reporter.

It was later revealed that the Central Committee and State Council had received over one million letters of appeal during 1979, an all-time high, and that during the busiest months of the petitioning movement, August and September, an average of seven hundred petitioners a day had come to the capital. Two hundred thousand cadres were eventually assigned to deal with these grievances, which the official press claimed were almost all redressed by the end of two years.

In the early part of 1979, however, the government was not prepared to handle the flood of cases, many of them impossibly intricate. In a wall poster, one petitioner complained that the government cadres' first step was "coaxing": the interviewer would write down the complaints, then draft a noncommittal letter of introduction to the authorities at home asking them to work out a solution. Since the original grievance was against these same authorities, the petitioner who was naive enough to go home with the letter was soon back in Peking with a new grievance arising from his treatment at home.

At first our petitions covered mostly a single issue. Then as our complaints multiplied, some petitions actually expanded to the size of a book, containing over 100,000 characters. . . . If we quit and went home, we would be judged counterrevolutionaries, and our relatives are still in prison. . . . Our only option is to remain in Peking.

But if they stayed they were subject to the second step, “suppression.” The *Peking Daily* explained in an editorial:

We must adopt a positive attitude in solving the problems raised in the masses’ letters and visits. . . . But this certainly does not mean that any problem can be solved right away. . . . Some of the masses put forward excessive and even unreasonable demands. . . . When these demands cannot be met, they feel dissatisfied, pester people endlessly, and create an unreasonable uproar.

Persistent petitioners were sometimes detained in a prison called “Virtue Forest,” whose existence was revealed in *Explorations*.

Some fourteen people live in small, low-ceilinged, cold, wet, and dank rooms about eighteen meters wide. . . . Each person is given two steamed, half-steamed, or rotten dumplings, to be eaten with a bowl of dirty vegetable soup. Two people share a very dirty and louse-infested torn bedsheet. . . . They sleep on a bare and rough floor. . . .

According to this report, one of the police officers there told a group of detainees: “Because you made trouble, you have been asked to come here to be suppressed.” (In Chinese Marxist terminology, “suppress” is a term for the function of the police vis-à-vis enemies of the state.) When one of the detainees protested, “Our papers have all publicized the constitution and the legal system,” a policeman answered:

We have five squadrons of a thousand policemen. We live by arresting people. Acting on orders of upper levels, we must carry out our duties. Papers are propaganda media that live on propaganda. They and we are like two cars running on separate tracks.

The petitioners had encountered the official limits of Deng’s democracy.