

VOICES FROM THE LAOGAI

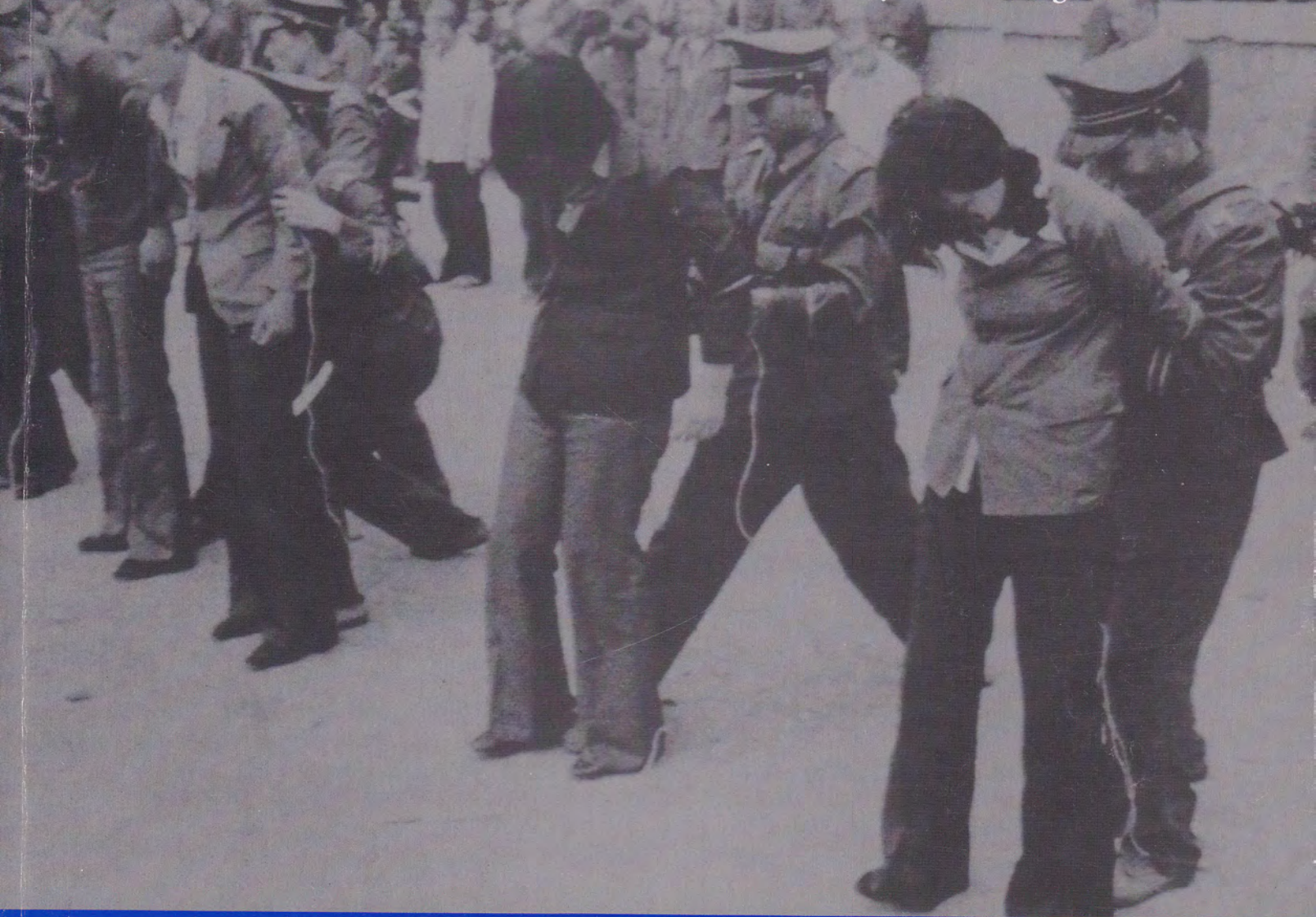
勞改研討會

50 YEARS OF SURVIVING CHINA'S FORCED LABOR CAMPS

September 17 — 19, 1999

American University

Washington, DC



Presented by the Laogai Research Foundation

Co-Sponsored by the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial

PREFACE

Welcome Speech by Harry Wu
Friday, September 17, 1999

My Fellow Laogai Survivors;

It is an honor to welcome you to “Voices from the Laogai,” and it will be a privilege to hear your voices during the next three days.

Once, the Chinese Communist Party called us “scum,” called us “stinking latrine pebbles that must be reformed.” But we are human beings, survivors of an inferno, witnesses to a system of unprecedented brutality. We have endured unthinkable violence and profound brutality and managed to come out with our humanity and our dignity intact. We should be proud to have beaten such impossible odds. We should be proud to be Laogai survivors.

It is human nature to pursue happiness and wealth, to love children, to wish for respect from others, to seek to be good husbands, good wives, and good friends. It is also human nature to cower in the face of violence, to avoid discomfort, and to allow ourselves to forget our most painful memories. Now that the hardships of our lives are behind us, and who wants to recall our bitter and humiliating pasts? Who would not want to forget and enjoy a new life?

But to forget is to betray.

We are the Laogai survivors. Who is to speak out, if not we?

To expose brutality is to discredit the system and the ideology that gave birth to it. To choose to remain silent is to become an accomplice to its perpetrators.

All mortals are bound to die one day. We, who have faced death, have the responsibility to make our lives worthwhile to humankind before we face death again.

We can pardon those who violently abused us, but we cannot tolerate further violence against innocent victims.

Let us join together, crystallize all our blood and tears and carve the word Laogai on the monument of history.

We are crying out for all those who perished in the Laogai, for millions upon millions of voiceless, faceless, nameless prisoners. And we are crying out for our children, and for our children's children.

Dear Guests and Friends,

Thank you for coming here today to listen to the voices of Laogai survivors.

If you pursue freedom, please acknowledge: in China's mainland, the Laogai, where its victims are tortured and murdered, is one of the primary means for stripping people of freedom.

If you value democracy, please remember: in China's mainland, one of the obstacles to democracy is Laogai, where dissenters are banished and the only rule is arbitrary power. Its very existence is shameful.

If you cherish human rights, please be vigilant: in China's mainland, human rights are utterly crushed in the Laogai, China's darkest corner.

Let us inscribe the word Laogai into dictionaries of all languages of the world, and grant it its rightful place in the human struggle.

Harry Wu

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CONFERENCE AGENDA

Friday, September 17

- 8:30-9:30 Reception in Senate, Russell 385
Hosted by the offices of Senator Paul Wellstone, Senator Tim Hutchinson, Congressman Frank Wolf, Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, Congressional Human Rights Caucus
- 10:00-12:30 Holocaust Memorial Museum Reception and Tour
- 1:00-2:30 Lunch at Chinatown
- 2:00-3:30 Conference Registration for Other Attendees
Ward Circle Building, American University
- 3:30-4:30 Welcoming Addresses, Ward 2 Room
Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, Robert F. Kennedy Memorial
Oscar Arias Sanchez, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate
Harry Wu, Executive Director, Laogai Research Foundation
Carl Gershman, President, National Endowment for Democracy
- Conference Overview
Jeff Fiedler, Director LRF, President Food and Allied Service Trades
- 4:30-6:00 Selected Survivor Testimonies
Moderator: Kerry Kennedy Cuomo
1. Huang Xiang
 2. Liu Xinghu
 3. Zhang Guoting
 4. Tong Yi
 5. Reting Tenpa Tsering

Saturday, September 18

- 8:00-9:00 Registration
Ward Circle Building, American University

- 9:00 Morning Session, Ward 1 Room
Address: Robert Bernstein, founding chair, Human Rights Watch
- 9:15-10:45 Panel 1: The Laogai as an Institution
Moderator: Perry Link, Princeton University
Philip F. Williams, Arizona State University
Melissa Frugé, University of Santa Clara
Yu Haocheng, University of Wisconsin
T. Kumar, Amnesty International
Qi Jiazhen, Laogai survivor
- 10:45-11:00 Coffee Break
- 11:00-12:30 Selected Survivor Testimonies
Moderator: Jeff Fiedler
1. Feng Guojiang
2. Wu Fan
3. Wang Xizhe
4. Xi Wen
5. Chen Siyi
6. Zhang Heci
- 12:30-2:00 Lunch
- 2:00-3:45 Panel 2: Imprisonment under Totalitarian Systems
Opening Speaker: Semyon Vilenski, Soviet Gulag Survivor
Moderator: Greg Carr, Harvard Human Rights Initiative
Senator Zbigniew Romaszewski, Polish Senate
Doan Viet Hoat, Catholic University
Albert Leong, University of Oregon
Steven Marshall, Researcher
George Bien, Soviet Gulag survivor
- 3:45-4:00 Coffee Break
- 4:00-5:30 Selected Survivor Testimonies
Moderator: Betty Sitka, American University Center for Global Peace
1. Liu Danhong
2. Peng Jipan
3. Liu Jingqing
4. Lin Muchen
5. Tashi Paldon
- 5:30 Keynote by Richard Gere, Ward 1 Room

Sunday, September 19

- 9:00-11:00 Selected Survivor Testimonies
 Opening speaker: Zhang Bing
 Moderator: Harry Wu
 1. Wu Xuecan
 2. Balati Kazi
 3. Chen Ziliang
 4. Zhang Jie
 5. Ye Guorong
 6. Gao Han
- 11-11:15 Break
- 11:15-noon Conference Final Session
 Commentary by: Zhang Xianliang
 Liu Guokai
 Ni Yuxian
 Chen Jinsong
 Jing Yaoru
 Zhang Weiming

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Robert F. Kennedy Memorial - Co-Sponsor

National Endowment for Democracy

Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Washington College of Law

Center for Global Peace, American University

Kennedy Political Union, American University

China Human Rights Association in Taiwan

Olof Palme International Center

Mr. Gregory C. Carr, Advisory Board Chair for the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Food and Allied Service Trades, AFL-CIO

Freedom House

International Campaign for Tibet

Vietnam Helsinki Committee

Ms. Kerry Kennedy Cuomo

Mrs. Betty Bao Lord

Mr. Joseph Eldridge, American University Chaplain

Dr. Perry Link, Princeton University

Mr. Robert Bernstein, Human Rights Watch

Additionally we would like to express our deepest gratitude to the very dedicated people responsible for the day-to-day planning of the conference as well as this publication. Thank you to the staff of the Laogai Research Foundation and the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial. Special thanks go to conference organizer and publication editor Yael Fuchs as well as Faith Lynn, Van Ly, Kristen Brook, and Kimberly Novick of the Laogai Research Foundation, and Lynn Delaney, David Kim, Andrew Glasow, and David Long of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial.

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INTRODUCTION

What is the Laogai?

History dictates that all authoritarian regimes must maintain a mechanism to suppress political dissent and consolidate authoritarian control. In China today there persists a widely feared tool of repression known as the Laogai. The Laogai, which translates literally from the Mandarin to mean “reform through labor,” is a system of forced labor camps and farms that spans China’s territory—from the highly industrialized prison-factories of the eastern coastal cities, to the isolated, fenceless farms of the west.

The Laogai, modeled after its Soviet counterpart—the Gulag, was established under Mao Zedong to serve as an instrument of political control for the newly empowered Chinese Communist Party. A combination of forced labor and regimented thought reform were to be the methods of reforming “counterrevolutionaries” and “reactionaries” into “new socialist beings.”

In the almost fifty years since the creation of the Laogai, little of its organizational structure has changed. Despite minor modifications in regulations, the Laogai is still governed by the same directives that were issued under Mao. These policies have led to three distinct categories of incarceration: Convict Labor-Reform (Laogai), Reeducation through Labor (Laojiao), and Forced Job Placement (Jiuye).

Today, long after Mao’s death, the Laogai system still thrives, and an untold number of prisoners continue to suffer behind the barbed wire walls of more than 1,000 Laogai camps. A majority of the inmates currently in the Laogai are incarcerated for reasons that have little to do with politics or class background; however the Laogai still serves its political purpose. Individuals deemed to be threats to the one-Party system may be held for “crimes against state security” or “revealing state secrets,” or for offenses that have the ring of more common crimes, such as hooliganism or arson, that actually mask politically motivated incarceration. Additionally, the general lack of due process in the Chinese legal system victimizes countless individuals incarcerated for “common” crimes but convicted without trial, a suitable defense, or using illegally gathered evidence.

The grueling, punitive forced labor component of the Laogai, aside from presenting a cruel means of physical punishment for prisoners, also provides a number of financial benefits for the Chinese government. Since the establishment of Deng Xiaoping’s “open” China and formation of the “socialist market economy,” the Chinese government has sought to operate the Laogai at a profit. Goods made in the Laogai have become a part of China’s domestic economy, and to an extent, Laogai-made goods are also filtering into foreign markets, including the United States.

When Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978, the world hailed his reform policies and steps toward “openness.” The Laogai, however, remains shrouded in secrecy. Chinese officials do not provide reliable statistics on the conditions, population, location and production activity of camps, nor do they allow independent inspections by organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross. Instead, the discussion of the Laogai has been continually clouded by numbers and statements that are over-simplified or confusing at best, and intentionally falsified pieces of propaganda at worst. Outsiders are allowed to visit either selected “model” prisons, or other prisons under closely monitored and choreographed conditions.

The best source of information on the Laogai remains its survivors, as well as a limited number of public documents that must be interpreted with discretion, and the few internal documents that have been gathered by researchers and activists.

Voices from the Laogai

The Voices from the Laogai conference, co-sponsored by the Laogai Research Foundation and the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, was convened with a twofold purpose. First, the conference provided a forum for documentation and discussion of the Laogai and its development, both through the survivor testimony and through panel presentations. Second, the conference offered an opportunity for the survivors of the Laogai to bear witness to their experiences in the camps and to commemorate the suffering of those who—because they are still imprisoned, or remain in China where they are not free to speak, or they never exited the Laogai—cannot speak for themselves.

This does not presume to be a comprehensive study of China's judicial and penal system. The testimonies in this volume provide anecdotal evidence of the brutality of China's forced labor camp system, but through the common threads running through these accounts, a picture forms of a continuous system of repression used to intimidate, silence, and sometimes destroy those who the Chinese Communist Party perceives as "enemies."

From the testimonies of those imprisoned during the early years of Chinese Communist Party rule, the reader will recognize the pervasive arbitrariness and vengeance wrought against perceived threats to the fledgling yet ruthless leadership. Former Nationalist (Kuomintang) officials and their children, and others deemed to have "reactionary" backgrounds were persecuted and imprisoned. Many of those imprisoned during the early fifties experienced the dual tortures of cruel and overzealous Laogai officials, as well as the deadly starvation of the Great Leap Forward, Mao's disastrous experiment in communal agriculture. Later, there are stories of faith betrayed—those who actually believed that the Chinese Communist Party could offer solutions for China and who took at face value opportunities to share their opinions. As the political winds in the upper echelons of the Party constantly shifted, these individuals became victims of the numerous campaigns waged by the Communist Party to root out counterrevolutionary elements.

When Deng Xiaoping came to power following Mao's death and hundreds of thousands of supposed counterrevolutionaries were rehabilitated, many thought that the years of horror were past. The era heralded by Deng the pragmatist brought an end to mass purges, but the Party, to this day, has proven no less tolerant of dissent. Beginning with the brutal crackdown on those who participated in the Democracy Wall Movement of 1979, Deng set the rules for Chinese political life in the post-Mao era. Eventually, under Deng's leadership, Chinese authorities amended the Chinese Constitution to abolish earlier guarantees of the right to speak out freely, hold debates and put up wall posters. The Criminal Procedure Law of 1979, along with the Revised Criminal Procedure Law of 1997 have proven inadequate both in content and implementation. As the testimonies of those imprisoned in most recent years demonstrate, authorities often do not think twice about suspending the legal guarantees that do remain enshrined in the nation's constitution and laws. Against a backdrop of modernization and reform in Chinese corporate law, dissidents are still detained illegally, deprived of legal representation, tortured, forced to labor, and have their sentences extended for political reasons. In short, they remain the victims of a regime that does not respect the rule of law.

This affects not only prisoners of conscience, but common criminals as well. Many of these testimo-

nies provide important glimpses into the treatment of ordinary criminals in the Chinese penal system. Both China and the West have sayings about “Not seeing the forest for the trees,” and these testimonies prove that while we may rightfully celebrate the release of individual prisoners of conscience, the Laogai as a system persists.

The Voices from the Laogai conference was a landmark event in bringing together all of these Laogai survivors towards a common end: revealing the truths of the Laogai, and condemning its continued existence. Outside of official conference events, many survivors gathered to discuss possible next steps: holding future conferences, establishing a Laogai Memorial museum, and convening a compensation committee to discuss the possibility of legal action against the Chinese regime and companies that benefited from forced labor. We hope that this collection of testimonies and presentations may act as a catalyst for future discussion and action to end the abuses of the Laogai.

Opening Speeches

September 17, 1999

Kerry Kennedy Cuomo

“Ending the Silence”

It is an honor and a pleasure to welcome all of you on behalf of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Human Rights to the Voices from the Laogai Conference. I would like to begin by acknowledging the Executive Director of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, Lynn Delaney, who along with Harry Wu put this whole conference together. The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial was established thirty-five years ago to carry on my father's unfinished work. Robert Kennedy devoted his life to the pursuit of justice and the eradication of injustice, both at home and around the world.

During the civil rights movement, when a group of protestors marched through town, making demands, Attorney General Robert Kennedy recognized a threat to our national security. When the protestors appeared to be seriously threatened, he called up the National Guard and ordered them to protect the innocent protestors from law enforcement officials who were throwing tear gas, setting police dogs and fire hoses on innocent civilians. There was no group of people he admired more than those willing to risk their lives demanding justice. I am so very proud to convene the first group of survivors of the Laogai in his name.

Today you visited the Holocaust Memorial. Elie Wiesel, an author and survivor of the Holocaust once said that “the opposite of love is not hate, the opposite of love is indifference.” That is at the heart of this conference. In the aftermath of the Nazi slaughter, and as the brutality of the Holocaust was revealed, the world was shocked. Over and over again, people said, “if only we had known.” Your testimonies today will serve to reveal the atrocities of the Chinese system of justice, and give a human face to the horrors inherent in a system where the Chinese government maintains a 57 billion dollar trade surplus, in part on the backs of innocent civilians it condemns to forced labor gulags, where millions of people slave away in prison-like conditions. The Chinese government requires that women obtain a permit to give birth and performs forced abortions and sterilizes women against their will. The Chinese government attempts to control all forms of organized religion. The Roman Catholic Church is illegal. The Chinese government cages thousands of prisoners in inhumane cells. Workers are not allowed to form free-trade unions. The Chinese government has murdered, massacred, tortured or starved to death 1,200,000 Tibetans, one-fifth of the population, since their invasion of that country half a century ago. And monks and nuns who peacefully protest that genocide are routinely beaten with sticks, shocked with cattle prods, attacked by trained dogs, raped and then thrown into jail with no lawyer, no judge, no charges and no hope of release.

“As of today, we can no longer claim ignorance. We cannot say, ‘we did not know.’ And those of us who strive to be decent can no longer be indifferent.”

Members of the newly founded China Democracy Party have disappeared, been detained without charges, bulldozed through a Kafka-like nightmare they call a trial, and been found guilty of catch-all charges like “incitement to overthrow state power” and then sentenced to more than a decade in the Laogai, one of

the most cruel prison systems anywhere, ever. And that is just the beginning of the mouth of hell they call the Laogai. For many, that hell ends when they are carted through onlookers and summarily executed. And as Harry Wu has revealed, their organs are then harvested and sold to wealthy westerners at a profit.

Over the next three days we will hear the testimonies of you, who have come back through the jaws of death. Back through the mouth of hell, as painful as it must be to relive those fears, you will tell us those experiences so others can be spared. As of today, we can no longer claim ignorance. We cannot say, "we did not know." And those of us who strive to be decent can no longer be indifferent.

Friends, Robert Kennedy believed in the capacity of an individual to make a difference. He said, "each time a man stands up for an ideal or strikes out against injustice, or strives to improve the lot of others, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

It is my belief that the testimonies you give today will build a current over the next three days that will sweep down the great wall of China's Laogai. Thank you.

Kerry Kennedy Cuomo is the founder of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Human Rights.

Carl Gershman

"The Contradictions of Chinese Communism"

When Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1974, shortly after the publication in the West of *The Gulag Archipelago*, his monumental and internationally acclaimed account of the Soviet system of forced labor camps, Harry Wu was entering his fifteenth year of imprisonment in the Laogai, the Chinese version of that system. At the time, the Laogai remained hidden behind a veil of secrecy. China's totalitarian regime was not only romanticized by the international left, but also courted by the major Western powers, which sought to play the China card against Moscow. In addition, China escaped attention from the growing human rights movement in the West, which tended to focus on abuses within the Soviet Bloc and in authoritarian dictatorships allied to the West in the Cold War. The veil of secrecy, it seemed, might never be lifted.

All of this has changed. The Cold War is now over and the Soviet Union no longer exists. Many of the countries that were targets of human rights protests in the 1970s and 1980s are now emerging democracies or in transition to democracy. And China is no longer immune to criticism, especially since the massacre at Tiananmen Square. Not least, through the indefatigable and heroic efforts of Harry Wu, the veil of secrecy concealing the Laogai system has been lifted.

Nonetheless, the criticism of China's human rights record, such as it is, has been blunted by the widely held view that China has already changed in some fundamental way for the better—that it is no longer communist and, like so many other countries, is undergoing a gradual democratic transition. This view is based largely on the assumption that China has embraced capitalism, which will lead over time to democracy.

There is an irony here that should not be overlooked. China developed its system of labor camps to deal with what Mao called "the problem of internal contradictions among the people." It was assumed that so-called anti-socialist elements would be transformed or eliminated through forced labor and thought-reform. As we know, the result was not the creation of a new socialist man but utter devastation of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

The Chinese leadership is still trying to overcome contradictions, but their harsh utopianism has now given way to sheer opportunism. They want to have their cake and eat it, too.

This is certainly the case with their effort simultaneously to preserve communism and embrace capitalism. But the contradictions of the Chinese Communist system cannot be wished away. The Chinese

"It was assumed that so-called anti-socialist elements would be transformed or eliminated through forced labor and thought reform. As we know, the result was not the creation of a new socialist man, but utter devastation of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution."

leaders claim to want a market system, but they fear that allowing the state monopolies to collapse under the impact of market forces would threaten vested interests and introduce social instability. They know that corruption is their Achilles' heel, but in the absence of a free press and an independent judiciary, they're helpless to do anything about it. They want access to the West but try to block out any influences from that direction.

As these contradictions sharpen, the Communist leaders are forced to rely increasingly on their prison camp system to contain the growing numbers of political dissenters and dislocated workers. But here they face the ultimate contradiction, which is the Laogai itself. It does not contain opposition but hardens the will and determination of the Communist system's most devoted opponents.

It is the Laogai, after all, which produced Harry Wu and the other survivors in this room. Harry Wu's account of his nineteen years in the Laogai, recorded in his powerful book, *Bitter Winds*, tells of suffering, starvation, and cruelty, but it is also a story of human triumph over evil. The system was designed to destroy Harry's life, or at least his will. It ended up defining for him the purpose of his life, which is to expose and end this system, and strengthening his will to prevail.

And I know he is not alone. Many have died in the Laogai, some of whom are memorialized in a moving way in Harry's book. But others have survived to tell the tale and to fight for a different kind of China, a more open and tolerant country that will not feel the need to repress innocent people. China is not yet that kind of country, nor will it become so without people who are prepared to fight for their rights.

The Laogai is not a matter of history but of current event. A recent article in *The New York Times Magazine* described the dilemma of facing Deng Xiaoping as he tried to reform the Chinese economy in the aftermath of Mao's death: "...he knew he could not afford to repudiate a Communist legacy that was, after all, his own foundation for power."

This is the same dilemma that confronts the current Chinese leadership on the eve of the 50th anniversary of Communist rule. They want to move forward economically, but the system they control is the one that Mao created and consolidated. It is still a Communist system, ruled by a single party that will tolerate no challenge to its hegemonic power. And at the foundation of this system is the Laogai, which the Communist leaders hope will enable them to overcome their contradictions. It won't.

In his Nobel lecture, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn urged us not to "forget that violence does not and cannot exist by itself: it is invariably intertwined with the lie... violence cannot conceal itself behind anything except lies, and lies have nothing to maintain them save violence." The first step, therefore, is to defeat the lie.

That is what you are doing with this conference and in your work. May your efforts succeed, and may you thereby help redeem the sacrifice of those who have perished and suffered in the Laogai system.

Carl Gershman is the President of the National Endowment for Democracy.

Oscar Arias Sanchez

“On Freedom”

It is a great pleasure and a great honor for me to be with you today. Gathered in this room are extraordinary people who understand the true meaning and the true value of freedom.

In this nation as in many other nations, freedom is often taken for granted. Americans and citizens of other democracies enjoy freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of movement, but they rarely consider how fortunate they are to live in a country in which they are allowed to exercise these fundamental human rights.

However, the greatest Americans have always understood the importance of freedom. Martin Luther King once said:

There is nothing in the world greater than freedom. It is worth paying for. It is worth losing a job. It is worth going to jail for. I would rather be a free pauper than a rich slave. I would rather die in abject poverty with my convictions than live in inordinate riches with a lack of self-respect.

As survivors of the Laogai, I am sure that you understand the truth of these words.

The struggle for democracy and human rights is one that we all share whether we live in the United States, in Costa Rica, or in China. As John F. Kennedy told the people of West Berlin: “Freedom is indivisible and when one man is enslaved, all men are not free.” Therefore, it is up to all of us to continue fighting for the rights of those in the Laogai and for the rights of oppressed peoples throughout the world.

I would like to urge all of you to think of freedom in an even broader sense. During the struggle to make all people free, we must guarantee freedom from want and freedom from poverty as well as freedom from tyranny. As the American statesman Adlai Stevenson once observed: “A hungry man is not a free man.”

I would like to urge all of you to think of freedom in an even broader sense. During the struggle to make all people free, we must guarantee freedom from want and freedom from poverty as well as freedom from tyranny.

One of the greatest obstacles in the drive to free the world from poverty is military spending, which diverts precious resources from the people who need them most. As you are all aware, many governments spend more on their armed forces than they spend on education and healthcare combined. China, as you all know, keeps almost three million people under arms and spends more than \$34 billion dollars on its military. Meanwhile, nearly 30% of the country’s 1.2 billion people live on an income of less than \$1 a day.

To eliminate irresponsible military spending, I have proposed an international code of conduct on arms transfers that would regulate weapons sales across borders. It is my hope that this initiative will help to free the world from the scourge of militarism.

The redirection of military spending to anti-poverty programs will be an important first step toward the realization of political freedom around the globe.

For when people are free from hunger, they will be free to become active participants in the political life of their countries. Only then will we see a world in which all people will be able to enjoy the liberty that is our birthright.

Still, many people say that such a code is impractical; impractical because it puts concern for human life before a free market drive for profits; impractical because it listens to the poor who are crying out for schools and doctors, rather than the dictators who demand guns and fighters.

Yes, in an age of cynicism and greed, all just ideas are considered impractical. You are discredited if you say that we can live in peace. You are mocked for insisting that we can be more humane.

But I am not alone in denouncing the status quo and in supporting an international code of conduct on arms transfers. Nobel Peace Laureates Elie Wiesel, Betty Williams, and the Dalai Lama have stood with me in presenting this code in 1997. So did José Ramos-Horta, Amnesty International, the American Friends Service Committee, and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. Since then, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Rigoberta Menchú have joined this impractical group. As have Lech Walesa, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Marguerite Maguire, Norman Borlaug, Joseph Rotblat, Jody Williams and one of last year's laureates, John Hume.

“In an age of cynicism and greed, all just ideas are considered impractical. You are discredited if you say that we can live in peace. You are mocked for insisting that we can be more humane.”

In all, my friends, seventeen winners of the Nobel Peace Prize have endorsed the code, but more importantly, thousands of people like you, individuals, groups, and community leaders have expressed their belief that a code of conduct is not only a morally sound ideal but also a politically necessary agreement. It is these people and the force of their convictions that turn possibility into progress and turn impractical ideas into reality.

At the height of the Cold War, President Dwight Eisenhower famously warned the American people to be weary of the rise in power of the military industrial complex. A war hero himself, Eisenhower recognized that generals and arms manufacturers would push for ever higher levels of military spending. He also recognized that such a spending represented a lost opportunity to improve people's lives. He once said:

Every gun that is fired, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense a death from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists and the hopes of its children.

Unfortunately, President Eisenhower failed in his efforts to contain the arms race, but he believed that ultimately individual civilians could do more than politicians to counteract the influence of the military

industrial complex and to build a peaceful world. In those dark days when the threat of nuclear war loomed large in the popular consciousness, Eisenhower said, "I'd like to believe that people in the long run are going to do more to promote peace than our governments. Indeed I think that people want peace so much that one of these days governments had better get out of the way and let them have it."

In our age, my friends, the Cold War has ended. Today, the likes of Stalin and Pol Pot, Suharto and Pinochet, Milosevic and Saddam Hussein, cannot be defended by any government. What is more, the new global era offers unique potential for human unity. Thinking globally, we are able to draw from the best of the world's secular and religious insights to emerge with a vigorous defense of the importance of human rights, the sacredness of the Earth's ecosystems, and the dignity of meaningful work.

A program for human development must recognize the opportunity that globalization brings. It must draw its strength and expedition from the ethical victories of the day. The last decade has witnessed distressing levels of poverty, inequality, and repression. It has also provided us with some exemplary scenes of human integrity. We have seen a new era of peace come to Central America. We have seen the collapse of brutal dictatorships in Eastern Europe. And we have seen Nelson Mandela lead the South African people away from the horror of apartheid.

Human advances do not come when we wait to see if others will act. Human rights will not be guaranteed if we always hope that someone else will step forward. Instead, freedom begins when each of us contributes to the end of oppression and tyranny.

My dear Chinese friends, this is no time for apathy. This is a time for action. You have shown us that the struggle can only begin with a personal commitment from each of us. But it will not end there. The whispered song of the individual becomes the roar of collective action. This righteous sound reverberates in the structures and institutions of a new society. The voice is sustained, and its message is clear. Only when we can all enjoy democracy and freedom will we be able to live in peace.

Oscar Arias Sanchez is the former President of Costa Rica and a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate for initiating peace negotiations in Central America.

Robert Bernstein

I am honored to speak today at a meeting to remind the world of the existence of Laogai. Most people have never heard of the word, and know nothing of what it conceals.

I want to touch on a few major subjects today, but before I do, I want to tell you a little about my own life and career so you will see where my beliefs come from. I was a teenager in late 1930. My grandfather, who had no money, had come from Germany. He understood what was happening as the Nazis came to power, and determined to help his Jewish friends from his small hometown get out. He signed papers to support eighty Jews who came here, got jobs and became part of the fabric of American life. I met them all, as the only support he could really offer them was dinner every night until they were in a position to feed themselves. These guests at our family table enriched America, even as they insisted that the Holocaust that swept the Jews of Europe into the crematorium never be forgotten. Their children send that same message today.

After the army I spent my life as a book publisher. There I learned first hand about the importance of freedom of expression. It was then that I understood that some ideas, and the appetite that human beings have for consuming ideas, are even more potent than any threats that governments can make, stronger than any censorship they can employ.

However it was in 1976 when the Helsinki Accords were signed that my publishing life really led me into human rights. Random House had signed many great European thinkers: among them André Sakharov and Vaclav Havel. The Helsinki Accords embraced most of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and when the Soviet government signed on, some brave Moscow citizens started a Helsinki Monitoring Group. We in the United States started a similar organization, Helsinki Watch, to monitor our own country and support other monitors everywhere. Most of the Soviet group was quickly put in the Gulag for many years, just like many Chinese who have tried to hold their government accountable. Helsinki Watch eventually grew into Human Rights Watch, which most of you are familiar with. Over the years we have worked closely with activists within their own countries, and also with those in exile, who cannot pursue free expression and democratic principles at home.

As we enter a new century, the United States is being enriched by a new group of wonderful, diverse, energetic minds: Harry Wu, Wei Jingsheng, Liu Qing, Fang Lizhi, Wang Dan, Tong Yi, Li Lu, and Wang Juntao to name just a few. It is China's greatest loss that these extraordinary men and women cannot use their talents at home. I often think about the 40,000 elite Chinese students studying in the U.S. every year. They will all be exposed to the cacophony of democracy. They will hear about the activities of the exile community, they will read in our free press about the politics of their leadership at home. And then they will go back, changed from the experience, in ways we cannot predict, to make their future in China.

Today I speak to you as a board member of Human Rights in China, the Chinese human rights organization which started right after Tiananmen Square and now stands firmly on its own, with offices in the Empire State Building in New York and an office in Hong Kong. Every time I go into their offices, I think about Liu Qing, who spent four of his ten years in prison being forced to sit up to twelve hours a day

on a low stool, facing a blank wall. Now he sits facing the Statue of Liberty. Of course, while this is an improvement, his office should be facing Tiananmen Square. The Chinese government will not be fulfilling its obligations under the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights until he is.

Human Rights in China is a Chinese organization. The majority of its board are Chinese people who are living in exile because they tried peacefully to express their opinions inside their country. Most of them were imprisoned for long terms and then expelled. We Americans who serve on the board are citizens who share the values with our Chinese friends that are expressed in the International Declaration of Human Rights. We welcome the chance to help Chinese of similar beliefs, but our aim is not to interfere in any internal affairs in China. We seek to help the Chinese silenced by their own government through prison or exile to remain involved in the future of their own country. Our role will end when Human Rights in China is able to open its office in Beijing.

Human Rights in China is an organization that wants peace and stability in China, but it also wants change. We do not believe that stability is accomplished when seven members of the Politburo, backed by their ruthless police and relentless propaganda, can silence one billion Chinese citizens. We believe that the government must continually find ways to include, not exclude. And we wish to help. The Chinese staff and board of Human Rights in China, through their work with international lawyers, with the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, and with the UN are experts on the question of rule of law, and are convinced that those principles must lay the foundation for a stable and peaceful future in China.

I speak to the Chinese here today. You have many different opinions. You should certainly retain those and speak out any way you wish. I believe you should also support Human Rights in China as the most active and well organized of the groups trying to bring the rule of law to China. This chance alone would allow you to return and express your opinions in your own country. Harry Wu's Laogai Research Foundation is a worthy cause and a vital part of the transformation that is needed. Human Rights in China should support it. The press likes to show division among you, and the Chinese government must be delighted to get word of it. Division undercuts your capacity to raise a unified voice for freedom. You may be divided on how to bring change but you are certainly not divided in the specific freedoms that must be obtained. I urge you all to work together toward those common goals.

As we are all aware, the leaders of governments and business have lavished a great deal of attention on China throughout the decade, perceiving it as a major trading partner into the next century. While some commentators have urged caution in creating partnerships with a system where the rule of law does not yet prevail, big business and leaders everywhere assert that China must be engaged now as a global partner for the future.

That brings me to my last point. For those who accept the status quo, doing business with a government no matter how badly it mistreats its own citizens, I have two questions: First, are you complicit in the abuses when you make common cause for business with the abusers? And second, if your partners are well known for a lack of transparency in all things, is that the sort of business partner you really want?

“For those who accept the status quo, doing business with a government no matter how badly it mistreats its own citizens, I have a question: Are you complicit in the abuses when you make common cause for business with the abusers?”

There is no better example than the contrast between the conference we are all attending here today and the Fortune magazine global conference of major corporations in Shanghai ten days from now. This will include over 250 American CEOs of virtually every global corporation including most of those controlling world media conglomerates like Michael Eisner of Walt Disney, John Welch of General Electric, Sumner Redstone of Viacom and Gerald Levin of Time-Warner. Jiang Zemin will address the assembly.

In contrast, this small meeting here brings together people who have suffered terribly and are still being punished through involuntary exile. We have gathered to discuss again how we can make the ugly story of the Laogai better known to the world. We will debate openly and honestly, with varying opinions expressed and the facts vigorously debated. The budget for this meeting is approximately \$50,000 dollars.

Meanwhile next week in Shanghai the Fortune Forum meeting will occur. Its budget, we know, is in the millions. Its agenda appeared on the Internet a few weeks ago and to the best of my knowledge, there is not one meeting that will discuss the human rights issues that should influence so many of the business decisions.

I doubt the Fortune editors formally agreed not to schedule any human rights matters on their agenda. My guess is that it was implicit that their hosts would not be confronted by these hard questions. It is beyond ironic that the same institutions that publicized information about China's savagery towards its own dissidents – Time Magazine, NBC News, CBS and ABC News, among others – can sit so comfortably with China's leadership. It is beyond ironic that the leadership of organizations that insists on their right to the protections of the First Amendment feel no compunction about sitting down with those who deny that freedom to their own people.

So we have this weird situation: the Chinese speak openly in Washington when they should be at liberty to speak at home, and America's media leaders come together in a closed meeting, and in all likelihood, self-censored, in Shanghai.

Human rights advocates do not believe these matters are simple and most believe that doing business with China is a worthy and serious endeavor. However, human rights advocates also know that the Chinese government carefully studies business and government reactions to gauge how much they must change to remain a player in a world they know they can no longer withdraw from. When the leadership of the American business community, including the major press, consents to a meeting in Shanghai without any mention of human rights on the agenda, they effectively ensure that those Chinese unjustly imprisoned will remain locked up for a long time and will be joined by more victims.

I commend Harry Wu and all of you for doing your best to gain justice for yourselves and your countrymen. You have all made tremendous sacrifices to that end. I urge you once more to speak with a united voice, so that Beijing and the American leadership understand both the power of your ideas and the strength of your numbers. I myself will do all that I can to help you, and look forward to the day when no help will be required from the outside, and China's human rights movement is free to flourish at home.

Robert Bernstein is a founding chair of Human Rights Watch and currently serves as co-chair of Human Rights in China.

Survivors of the Laogai

Testimonies from 50 Years of China's
Forced Labor Camps

GUO JIMIN

Guo Jimin was sentenced to forced labor in 1953 on charges of "counterrevolutionary behavior." As one of the millions of prisoners used to help develop China's hinterlands in the early years of the Chinese Communist regime, he survived thirteen years of back-breaking work and near starvation.

In 1952, I joined a Sino-U.S. intelligence organization in Hong Kong. In October of that year, I went to Shanghai in an attempt to establish a long-term liaison station. Soon after, I contacted a Mr. Chou Yingching, who came to Shanghai from Jiangsu Province. He had been a guard platoon leader of the Shanghai branch of a Kuomintang (KMT) military-statistics bureau. We began to organize activities together until Communist agents infiltrated our Hong Kong organization. The two of us were arrested on the same day. Mr. Chou Yingching was sentenced to death at a public trial and rally in Shanghai's People's Square, and was then executed.

In 1953, I was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment. I had just turned eighteen. Less than half a month after the verdict, I was sent to Shanghai Farm located in Dafeng County in Northern Jiangsu Province for labor-reform. Our backs bent, we tended cotton shrubs. We were not allowed to raise our heads and straighten ourselves up. On the very first day, somebody died on a cotton field ridge. Some, unable to endure such sufferings, began thinking of fleeing. Mr. Yuan Mingching, who had been an interpreter at the U.S. Consulate in Shanghai, was sentenced to death for attempting to escape, and was executed right away. Mr. Kuo Chongho, owner of Antong Woolen Mill in Shanghai, was given another five years because his attempt to flee was discovered. My attempt was also discovered. I was shut up in a small cell. The interrogator put a pistol on his desk. When I denied my attempt, he pointed the pistol at my face and said, "If you deny, I will kill you right away." I replied, "I've had enough with my ten years. I don't want to live. You better shoot me right away." Instead, I was given another three years for "hoping for U.S.-Chiang restoration" and for "ruining cotton seedlings."

During the long thirteen years I spent in the Laogai camp system, there were several times where I survived near-death experiences. The first time was at the Shanghai Farm in Northern Jiangsu Province. For several days straight, I was digging riverbeds and building dams for flood-prevention projects. I slept outside in wet fields, washed by pouring rain. But, I survived.

In Xinjiang, I transformed wasteland into farmland, built bridges and roads, felled trees, and made steel. On tall mountains, I cleared snow that was up to one meter thick off a two-square-meter piece of land. I slept under the open sky. For a number of months, I lived in such conditions. At night, I opened my eyes, saw the starry sky, stretched my arms and touched snow. Usually, we were so exhausted from the labor that we slept like dead men.

On three separate occasions, while felling trees, I was almost crushed. Four of my fellow prisoners were buried there. Even today, when I think of fallen fellow prisoners, tears trickle down my cheeks.

My first experience of extreme hunger was from November 1954 to July 1955. In the winter of 1954, we were digging riverbeds and building dams on the seashore in Dongtai County, Northern Jiangsu Province. The riverbed was covered with ice. Many prisoners' feet froze. We could no longer work there and had to be sent back to the farm. Afterwards, we were rationed only thirty-eight ounces of grain a day. With each passing day, we became hungrier and hungrier. In March 1955, we returned to the seashore to complete the project. That first morning, I ate porridge. I was so hungry I devoured my porridge. At once, my stomach spasmed and bled. I was dizzy and could not stand. I asked for sick leave, but the administrator denied my request. He said I was resisting reform and threatened to extend my term. He ordered me to tow rafts. The prisoners had to load all the tools and materials on rafts and transport them to Dongtai County by river.

We started that afternoon. I worked with all my might. It was spring time, and was raining heavily. The riverbanks were so slippery that we could hardly move. We had to start early every morning. Whenever we failed to get to a given destination on time, we were not given rations and had to go hungry. The hunger aggravated my stomach problems. At night, we slept under civilians' eaves. Our quilts were soaked by rain, and we often woke up cold. Once, a bamboo raft fell apart about two kilometers before we reached Huanggang Sluice Gate. All of our clothing, quilts and foodstuffs fell into the river. Everything had to be picked up from the river at night, and the raft had to be reassembled.

We started off without sleep and rest. Eight days later, when we got to our destination, my legs refused to move. Nevertheless, on the next day, I was forced to carry heavy bags of dirt onto the dam through a slope. Instead of ramming dirt, prisoners had to carry heavy burdens and walk on wet dirt on the dam. Even with such intense labor, we were rationed only the usual thirty-eight ounces of grain a day. Hunger and exhaustive labor nearly sent all of us to hell. For lunch, we were rationed about 400 grams of watery rice, and for breakfast and supper, we were rationed 800 grams of porridge. We were given very few vegetables. Gradually, all prisoners could no longer endure the physical suffering. I realized what it meant to be a walking corpse. My legs buoyant, my eyes seeing stars ahead, my heart palpitating, and my shoulders bearing the weight of heavy loads with a pole, I could not tell if I was moving. I had no strength even to speak, to say nothing of fleeing.

I began thinking that how slow time passed. It was only 1955, and my term would end in 1965. How could I survive those ten years? I seriously contemplated suicide, but in the end, I didn't go through with it. My suicide would end up fulfilling what the Communists desired. I would be considered a dead "counterrevolutionary," which was a label I never admitted to. In order to survive, I wrote to my mother. She brought two boxes of foodstuffs and saw me on the dam. I had barely consumed all the foodstuffs by the time I was sent to the Shanghai prison. Soon after that, I was abruptly sent to Xinjiang. That was the first time I survived a suicide crisis. Later, I learned that many prisoners who remained on the project died one by one of dropsy, a condition of swelling from famine, and dysentery caused by wild herbs they ate while hungry. They were buried in prison. However, the Communists still make claims that not a single prisoner died of hunger, only of diseases!

My second experience of hunger lasted even longer. It was during the period of the "three years of natural disasters." Everybody knows that the Communists were telling lies. The famine that took place during this period was mainly due to the failure of the Great Leap Forward. There were no natural disasters in Xinjiang. Rather, there was a bumper harvest that year. While harvesting wheat, I had to labor sixteen hours a day and slept eight hours in the field. Every night I had to spend at least two to three hours loading partially thrashed wheat onto trucks. The wheat was transported to Gansu, Henan, Shaanxi and other places.

Prisoners were rationed only forty-nine ounces daily. Thus, I was once again on the verge of dying from hunger.

To survive, the only thing to do was to steal. From spring to fall, we labored in the fields. At night, we stole corn, wheat, and green beans soaked in poisonous solutions that were intended to be used as seeds. The seeds had to be rinsed eight to nine times in canal water until all the odd odors were gone, and then boiled. We never cared whether they were carcinogenic. For us, what was most important was to survive the day. During the winter, on capital construction projects, we tried our best to steal flour, mixing it with boiling-hot porridge. Unfortunately, this thievery once almost caused my death. In the winter of 1959, about one kilometer away from the project site, we slept in an open, unheated tent in temperatures that were well under -40 degrees Celsius. Our quilts were icy on the inside and the outside. We had to dig dirt everyday, and my hands, feet and ears were frost-bitten. Driven by my survival instinct, I stole a mutton leg that was reserved for cadres from the kitchen. My act of theft was discovered, and I was handcuffed for three days at my back. I was unable to sleep at night. In the daytime, leg-ironed, I had to walk a dozen kilometers to the construction site to labor. Mentally, I was almost totally crushed. Once again, I contemplated suicide.

I began arranging for my funeral. First, I wrote a letter to my mother telling her that she might not see me again. While I was thinking of ways to kill myself, a new political commissar was sent to our labor-reform camp. He had been a KMT army soldier who had crossed over to the Communist army. He read the letter to my mother. My letter was dispatched, but he ordered somebody to keep an eye on me night and day. My mother replied quickly that she was coming from Shanghai to Xinjiang, and that everything I was planning should be put on hold until she arrived. In late 1960, she came carrying two big boxes of food-stuffs. Secretly, she put into my hands ration cards for dozens of pounds of grain. She bid me to go to Shanghai and see her after my term expired. She again saved me from the verge of death.

However, survival remained difficult. During the winter of 1960, I was not sent to capital construction sites. For each meal, I was rationed four black buns made of 95% ground bran of grains other than wheat and rice, mixed with 5% of ground sesame stalks, soy bean pods, and wheat bran. The buns shredded upon the slightest touch. If you ate them, your stomach ached. If you did not eat them, you went hungry. Stomach aches led to stomach hemorrhages, which aggravated my gastric disease.

It was that same winter that I witnessed the most unforgettable scene. A group of prisoners arrived from Gansu Province in a worse plight than we were in. Some were unable to get off of the trucks by themselves, and had to be taken down by other prisoners. Their buttocks were all bones, and they could not sit on benches, as that caused excruciating pain. The next morning, they were standing in line waiting for steamed buns. One of them was so hungry that he grabbed a bun and thrust it into his mouth. The administrator from Gansu Province slapped his face twice, took the remaining 3/4 of the bun from his mouth and threw it into a nearby nightsoil bucket, saying, "Let's see you eat it!" The prisoner picked up the bun from the bucket and, without saying a word, started eating it. The administrator was so exasperated that he started beating the prisoner with both his fists. The bun was eaten anyway. When it was supper time, the administrator did not give the prisoner the portion he deserved, saying he had already eaten his portion. I was familiar with "All Quiet On The West Front," in the movie form and in its Chinese translation. I also knew that Japanese aggressors used Chinese prisoners of war for hunger experiments, but never did I expect that what the Germans and Japanese did to prisoners of war, the Chinese could also do against their fellow Chinese.

After my term expired, I remained in the prison system in the form of "Forced Job Placement" (Jiuye). "Forced Job Placement" personnel, like prisoners, have no dignity. The following illustrates the lack of rights I had under Forced Job Placement:

In April 1970, I went through all the necessary procedures to attain my unmarried certificate, so that I could go to Guanxi Province to marry the woman I am currently married to. Because the authorities in Guanxi Province discriminated against me, I had to return to Xinjiang with her. The Xinjiang labor-reform unit also did not approve of our marriage. How outrageous that an ex-prisoner wanted to marry a young school teacher! They summoned her into the office three times and continuously told her that they would never approve such a marriage. A party committee member wanted to offer her another man, a tractor driver and "non-party-revolutionary," not a former criminal. He emphasized that they could get married immediately. My wife refused. The case was left unsettled until the eve of the Chinese New Year. I took my wife to my dormitory. According to the rules, my wife had to stay in another room because we did not have an approved marriage certificate. The administrator on duty summoned me to his office immediately after my wife came to stay with me, and accused me of violating the marriage law. As a form of punishment, he ordered me to clean cotton fruits. I worked until 8 o'clock the next morning. My wife became pregnant later on. As a result, my labor-reform unit took a disciplinary action against what they deemed a "serious mistake." Finally, on July 1, 1971, they approved our marriage. Our first child, a girl, was born on July 31st of the same year. Other forms of discrimination cannot be described in so few words.

Before I went to the U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou for my immigration visa, everybody in the labor-reform unit and Public Security Bureau asked me the same question: "Did you ever expect that one day you would be able to go to America?" I replied confidently: "If it were not for the belief that I could one day go to America, I would not have been able to survive!" Today, at this conference, I want to say what has been in my heart for decades: I volunteered in the intelligence organization under the pseudonym of Lu Chichien, which translated means "Hard Rock Spirit." While I was in the most adverse circumstances, I always told myself, "You must stay alive, you must survive!"

It is an honor for me to tell you about my past misfortunes. I am happy that what I had expected half a century ago has come true. I have become a U.S. citizen. I am grateful to the United States government for making it possible for me to live the second half of my life in the land of free. I am also grateful to the RFK Memorial and Mr. Harry Wu, Executive Director of the Laogai Research Foundation, for giving me this rare opportunity to tell you about my sufferings.

XI WEN

Xi Wen, a former actress, survived twenty-two years in detention and the Laogai on counterrevolutionary charges. Xi Wen recounts her experience as a woman in the Laogai, and the attempts that Laogai prisoners made to establish family lives in the camps. Her testimony also reveals the existence of little known prisoners' performance ensembles, in which incarcerated artists were made to perform propaganda theater.

From youthful innocence to wise old age—what a beautiful part of life that ought to be! But twenty-two years of my life, from the ages of twenty to forty-two, were spent in the Laogai, because I wanted real democracy and freedom, because I was opposed to the hypocritical Chinese media, because I defended my teacher who was branded an active counterrevolutionary. Thus I myself became a target. I was young. I refused to be “helped” by the authorities and left the site of the “struggle meeting” without permission. Added to all this was my reactionary family background—my father was a capitalist. I was termed an “active counterrevolutionary” and sentenced to a ten-year imprisonment on counterrevolutionary charges with a four-year suspension of political rights upon expiration of my term.

I spent ten long years in a Beijing district detention facility, a detention facility for political prisoners, and in prison proper. After I had served my time, I was taken to Qinghe Farm in Chadian for further reeducation. Two years later I was transferred to Guzhang Coal Mine, Yangquan City, Shanxi Province. For twenty-two years, I suffered in the abyss.

In the Laogai, people fit into a relatively rigid hierarchy: cadres, cadres' families, workers, workers' families, common criminals—who fall under the category of “contradictions between the people, historical counterrevolutionaries, and active counterrevolutionaries—the last two classes falling under the category of contradictions between the people and enemies. I remember how the Political Commissar Li of the coal mine's party committee said, “The government exercises ‘revolutionary humanism’ by treating you as humans.” But his words betrayed him. To them we were not humans.

I am not into politics, and I won't talk about abstruse theories. My line is art; I am an actress. My acting used to be led by my emotions. What I'm going to talk about is how severely I was injured over the decades as far as my emotions were concerned. Although all these horrors happened decades ago, to date, I often wake up with nightmares.

The second year of my prison term, the government gathered all of the criminals who were writers, musicians, actors, and directors in their former lives, and created a prisoners' ensemble. As a graduate of performing arts from the Central Academy of Drama, I could sing and dance, act and direct. It was a good thing to be a member of the prisoners' ensemble. First, most of the time you did not have to perform physical labor, and second, you could take some refuge in the relative freedom of the stage. But, an actor's performance must be based on his genuine sentiments. Going against all of my true feelings, I had to sing in praise of the “Great Party.” The first repertoire included my recital of “How to Repay the Government's Kindness.” While I was singing, tears began trickling down my cheeks. The commander thought I was showing repentance, but the tears were falling because I knew that my youth would be squandered in jail.

There was a well-known violin virtuoso in the ensemble who used to be conductor of the Beijing Film Studio's symphony orchestra. The song I sang was composed by him, and accompanied by him. In his melancholy eyes I saw a kind of latent love. But, could we fall in love in a Laogai camp? That would have meant a fresh crime! We could not talk to each other, could not have any private contact. We dared not even touch one another's hands, but, with a tender, at times passionate melody he was saying with his violin "I love you!" Later on he was transferred to cold, cold Beidahuang (The Great Northern Wilderness); a famous violin virtuoso turned herdsman.

After I was released, I received a letter from him, carried by someone to me. I loved him. I was willing to be with him, to share the harsh existence of the Laogai with him, even in a cowshed. We could have a piece of our own small world, we could play music... But that was not to be because of the Laogai. His music lives on in my heart. Only I still don't know "how to repay the government's kindness."

It was dangerous for me to work in the same coal mine and in the same fields in a Laogai camp populated by thousands of male prisoners and only dozens of female prisoners. For my own safety, I had to marry somebody. So I married an accused "counterrevolutionary," a graduate of Beijing University. Ours was a marriage without love, but we did share our sorrows, weeping silently, listening to each other's sufferings, and he did his best to protect me. A small room of eight square meters was our "cozy nest."

The second year of our marriage, we gave birth to a girl. Our days consisted of long hours of farm work followed by lengthy political study sessions. Sometimes we had to get up at two in the morning to pick up stalks of wheat that remained after the harvest until dawn, followed by breakfast and labor until dusk, and then, cooking supper with straw as fuel, and again political studies—all to cleanse our brains of bourgeois garbage. Often, we had to stay up late at night to rehearse plays that disseminated Mao Zedong Thought. I heard of a couple whose baby suffocated in her sleep because they, like us, had no time to care for her. I didn't want the same thing to happen to my daughter. At my request, my mother came from Shanghai to Beijing to take my daughter. I got three days leave to accompany my baby from Chadian to Beijing. On the second day, as I was about to leave, I said to my mother, "Let me breastfeed her just once more." My mother said, "No. That will only make leaving more painful." We cried, all three of us. Tears trickled down my face during the two-hour train ride back to Chadian. But when I got back to the farm, I had to put on a happy expression and pretend that I was doing my utmost to reform myself into a new person.

When my daughter was two, my husband and I were transferred to Guzhuang Coal Mine in Yangquang City, Shanxi Province. I got two weeks leave to go to Shanghai to see my daughter and mother. My girl was asleep when I arrived. Mother woke her, saying, "Mammie's back." But my baby only said, "Auntie," and fell back asleep. She knew no mother. So I decided to take her back to Shanxi to be with us. It took almost three days from Shanghai to Shanxi by train. All the way she cried, "I want Grandma!"

In Guzhuang Coal Mine, we had to labor in the daytime and go to political study sessions at night. There was nothing we could do but to lock her up in the room—a little prison. She was always crying. Once, she got on the windowsill, tore a hole in the screen and tried to get out through the hole. We had to spank her buttocks with a rolling pin. For two days she couldn't sit, but we had to give her a lesson. Otherwise, she risked being molested by men should she get outside. I was heartbroken. I talked and talked to my husband. Finally, we decided to send her back to Shanghai.

When my daughter was five, I got another two weeks leave to go to Shanghai to see her. She said, "I'm a big girl now. I can help you clean the table, sweep the floor." My darling girl, how I wished I could be with

her all the time! But I couldn't. I couldn't explain to her that in the coal mine, category-7 children were not on the same footing as category-1 children. There, her young soul would be injured even further. I said, "I'm leaving tomorrow. If you don't cry, I'll be back in two years." She promised. That night, she hugged me tight. Several times, she woke from her dreams crying, "Mammie, don't go!" The next day, she stood at the front door, eyes full of tears, but she didn't cry—she kept her promise. It was only when she was eight, after the Gang of Four was crushed that I was thoroughly rehabilitated and could be reunited with my darling daughter.

In the coal mine, with its male to female prisoner ratio of 7,000 to 40, there was an obscene saying: "She's not dead? Got a hole? I want to f—." I remember there was a prisoner in his fifties, a "historical counterrevolutionary," who was captured in 1949 as a young Nationalist army officer. He had never been with a woman. Then one day, he found a peasant woman from the mountains, took her to a pigsty, blocked the door with a plank, and started having sex with her. A police guard discovered him and tried to ram open the door, but the prisoner pushed back and wouldn't let the woman go. The guards yelled, "You'll be shot!" He yelled back, "Me, afraid to die? No way! I'm not even afraid to go on living here!" He was eventually caught and tied up, but the peasant woman got her money and went back to her village.

In those dark days, with no freedom in sight, death often seemed like an attractive alternative, and many took their own lives. I tried a few times as well, but I always failed. One day, my husband and I got carbon monoxide poisoning from a leaky stove, and we were really on the verge of passing away. Senseless, we were sent to the hospital for emergency treatment. When I came to, the first sound I heard was coal scuttles emptying coal. How I wished then that I were dead! Looking at the dark blue sky, I asked myself, "Why be saved?" Later, my husband asked me what I had felt then, on the edge between life and death. I replied, "Nice, quiet. No more being bullied. No more troubles."

In 1979, on the eve of a Carter administration official's visit to China (at first we didn't know why), the government suddenly urged us to "work voluntarily everyday after we finished our shift." We women had to carry bricks, and men had to do the bricklaying. Soon, a tall wall was erected. A rally was convened and the cadres said, "To ensure President Carter's safety, the male prisoners must stay inside the tall wall on the mountain top. Married men must also move from the foot of the hill to the new site, but can go home once a week. Act promptly! Roll call at 7:00 p.m. inside the wall! No hubbub! Commanders, to your posts!" So to help the men pack up, we women went downhill. Some families of four or five had no quilts to split, and some had to use padded coats instead. Beginning at 6:00 a.m., the men ascended. A woman cried out, "How can I take care of three kids alone?" Fortunately, my daughter was with my mother in Shanghai. Standing at the foot of the hill, I watched silently how the human masses moved upward, with my husband among them. He looked back at me with every step as if saying, "I'm sorry I can't take care of you."

Men were herded behind the wall, but the women still lived downhill. One night, a policeman went downhill to sleep with a woman. The act was discovered. The policeman was transferred, as was usual, but the woman, named Gao Jinling, was paraded through the streets with a pair of torn shoes (equivalent to branding her with a red letter "A") flung across her shoulders. She was accused of "trying to drag a cadre into the mire." A similar thing happened to another woman, Yang Yuhua, but in a quieter fashion to avoid defaming the cadres.

The American official stayed in China only one week, but those men were shut up for two months inside the wall on the hilltop. After two months, one of the women entered into labor, and asked for her husband. That single question went up the ranks. Finally, the matter reached the coal mine's Communist

Party boss, who reacted with surprise. "Why, they're still on the hilltop? Let them come down." Because of the cadres' amnesia, the men were confined for two months too long.

In 1978, I was thoroughly rehabilitated. I returned to the stage and was allowed to take part in performances (of course, as long as they were officially allowed performances).

In the 1990s, I went with my daughter to Guzhuang Coal Mine, where she had spent her early childhood, where her parents had spent ten long and hard years. She could hardly believe her eyes. The guys in Jiuye (Forced Job Placement) thought I was an alien, because fresh from Japan, I looked much younger than they did, even though I was older. Their living conditions seemed better than before. But the chasm between them and the guards remained, and so was the caste system between prisoners.

Mao Zedong passed away. The Gang of Four was smashed. With their demise, the appalling Laogai system is gradually diminishing. But the Laogai's specter still looms in China.

In August 1996, I came to the United States. I am authorized to live and work here. I can earn my own living. Many sincere American friends have helped me selflessly.

Once, because I violated traffic regulations, I was summoned to court. Smiling, I talked freely to the judge and to the police officer.

I live freely. I do what I want to do.

When I drive under the starry sky, my heart is serene.

It has been my long-cherished wish to speak here. Of course, I did have my apprehensions. I was afraid that I could be murdered were I to go back to China, or that my daughter could be hurt. Many friends advised me, "Don't go to the conference. Enjoy your life here," but if all Chinese were cowards, who would bear witness? How could we guarantee that the nightmares would not recur?

Time is advancing. The world trends are advancing. So are China's current leaders. I sincerely hope they may lead our nation to prosperity and happiness. I deeply love my motherland. I miss my family and friends. I wish them all the best.

CHEN SHEYI

Chen Sheyi was one of the many victims of the "Hundred Flowers Movement," in which Mao Zedong called for the people of China to express their views, and then proceeded to clamp down on those who took the Helmsman at his word. Labeled a "bourgeois rightist," Chen served five years of Reeducation through Labor during one of the most politically charged periods of the Laogai's existence.

When the so-called "Hundred Flowers Movement" emerged, I was a teaching assistant at the Chinese Department of Sun Yat-sen University in Guangdong (Canton). I called for freedom of speech for students, saying I'd like to help turn our campus into a Hyde Park, and criticized the school authorities for their discrimination against students with bad family backgrounds by Marxist standards. For this, in December 1957, at the age of twenty-four, I earned the label of "bourgeois rightist."

I was terribly infuriated at this label because it was none other than Mao Zedong who solemnly and repeatedly guaranteed the whole nation the right to freedom of speech just a few months earlier. Besides, the Constitution of the People's Republic of China also guaranteed, in black and white, not only the freedom of speech, but also many other freedoms for every Chinese citizen. I was fully convinced I had done nothing wrong, and that I didn't have to apologize, let alone plead guilty of any wrongdoing.

Because of my strong resistance to confession, I was classified a "die-hard rightist," fired, and at the end of April 1958, sentenced to Reeducation through Labor without even the most nominal legal procedure. The party committee just sent three guards to my room, gave me ten minutes to pack my things, put me into a jeep that was parked nearby, and drove me away to Guangdong Provincial Labor Correction Administration.

I came to know what the word 'slavery' really means after laboring in Sanshui State Farm for just a couple of months. Every inmate was subjected to hard labor, forced to fulfill a specified quota of work within a nine to eleven-hour workday. If one failed to fulfill the set quota, punishment, varying from reduction of the prisoner's daily food supply to solitary confinement or both, was sure to follow. No complaint or challenge to the camp authorities, let alone any criticism of the Communist rule was allowed. For two hours each evening after a long day's hard work, all inmates, no matter how exhausted, were made to "study" the ruling party's policies, the *People's Daily* editorials, or the camp director's instruction. The camp authorities encouraged, facilitated, and rewarded informants for their reports against other fellow inmates, thus spreading distrust and hostility among inmates. No more than a half-day off could be expected every two weeks, leaving little time for inmates to do their laundry or write letters.

Beginning October 1958, all inmates were forced to keep their heads totally shaved and paint every piece of clothing conspicuously with the two characters "labor correction." Soldiers with submachine guns were positioned to surround and watch over inmates working in the fields. Curfew was imposed every night from nightfall to daybreak. Any violator, intentional or not, could be shot on the spot. No excuses, no exceptions.

In December 1961, all bourgeois rightists were exempted from hard labor and put on a full-time

study program. It was rumored that rightists would be returned to their previous jobs, due to the sudden Sino-Soviet split and the withdrawal of all Soviet experts from China. However, after two weeks of study, more than 150 inmates including myself were taken off of the rightist list and subjected to hard labor once again.

Having served out my sentence for the crime of being a bourgeois rightist, I was suddenly told that I did not, in fact, meet that description. So while the “rightists” were relieved of their hard labor requirement, I would have to remain in the camp.

I never understood the nature of my supposed offense until I received my certificate of release from labor correction in February 1963, when I was freed. The certificate reads: “Chen Sheyi, male, aged 29, was subjected to labor correction for being a ‘bad element’ in May 1958, by the Guangzhou Police Department.” I was shocked. My behavior, even by Maoist standards, was so tame that I had never gotten into trouble with anyone, let alone the police. I had no idea where the Guangzhou Police Department was even located.

I knew very well that it was not only futile, but dangerous to complain or protest. I just kept my mouth shut, pocketed the certificate and left the farm without delay.

Though absurdly wrong, the certificate was indispensable to getting the local police department’s approval to reestablishing my residence in Canton (Guangdong). Since the whole country was ruled by the hostile party led by Mao – a crazy tyrant – no employer was willing to give me a job. I must point out that there was just one major employer throughout China at that time: Mao’s party. For more than two years after my release, I could not find a job at all. Without my brother’s financial support, I might have starved to death in the so-called “socialist paradise.”

Looking back, I still believe I should thank the Maoists for giving me a chance to experience their prejudice, blind hatred, and cruelty. Mao’s tyranny had turned the whole country into a huge labor camp. Except for Mao and a handful of his lackeys, every Chinese citizen became an inmate there. Even Mr. Liu Shaoqi, then President of the People’s Republic, received no better a fate.

In this sense, Mao, with his beautiful words, evil deeds and terrible apparatuses, including the labor reform system, remains the most negative teacher for all of us.

LIU JINGQING

Liu Jingqing was deemed to have a "reactionary family background" in accordance with the Maoist practice of categorizing individuals based on their parents' class affiliations. After serving his first sentence, Liu was again arrested during another political campaign, and served a total of twenty-four years in Reeducation through Labor, forced labor, and Forced Job Placement. Liu also recounts how he aided Harry Wu in secretly visiting Tangem Farm in Qinghai Province, where dissident Wei Jingsheng was being held.

In 1958, at the age of eighteen, I was arrested and escorted to the Laojiao Babao Farm in Qinghai by the Chinese Communist Party. My incarceration resulted primarily from my family affiliation. At the time of my arrest, both of my parents were in Taiwan and my mother's sister was arrested and sent to the Laogai for her employment with the Nationalist (Kuomintang) government. For the Chinese government, this situation predetermined that I had a reactionary family background. In conjunction with my family background, in 1956, I had been involved in a strike at secondary school, which was deemed by public security units as a "counterrevolutionary event."

In 1961, my three-year Laogai term expired, and I was forced to stay on the same Laogai farm. I began living a life that was virtually identical to the one I led while serving my term. I was still a counterrevolutionary, a target of the Chinese dictatorship. In 1969, availing myself of the chaotic situation during the Cultural Revolution, I left the Laogai unit and found a job in Xining City. But soon, in 1970, during the movement to "deal heavy blows to counterrevolutionary activities and three vices," I was arrested again on counterrevolutionary charges: I had listened to enemy broadcasting stations, spread reactionary opinions, and tried in vain to flee overseas (I was thinking of going to Taiwan to see my parents, whom I had not seen for twenty years). I was sentenced to four years of imprisonment. After that term expired, I was again forced to stay in the same Laogai unit as a Jiuye [Forced Job Placement employee]. I spent a total of twenty-four years in the Laogai system until 1982. In 1984, I was issued a "certificate of rehabilitation," asserting the wise and great nature of the Communist Party and the leniency I had been afforded.

In 1991, Harry Wu saw me in Xining City. He was referred to me by my aunt who had been exiled to Taiwan. Harry wanted to see Tangem Farm in Chadam Basin. He asked if I could get him a police uniform and accompany him, which I did because I thought what he did was right and just.

After Harry went back to America, I knew the police could come for me at any moment. And indeed, in 1992, Qinghai Province police units began interrogating and threatening me, trying to extort confessions from me. They even offered me a chance to go to the United States to stay by Harry's side and watch him, but I resolutely refused. In 1995, when Harry was arrested in Xinjiang, they came for me again. They urged me to confess and act as a witness, particularly on the issue of how I offered Harry a police uniform. However, since Harry and I had worked out my "confession" in advance, the police could not divide and crush either one of us. Finally, they had no choice but to resolve the issue by leaving me alone.

In 1997, I obtained the chance to go to Taiwan and see my parents. Shortly after I arrived in Taiwan, my wife, my daughter, and I were granted permission by the United States to enter with an advance parole. On behalf of my family, I am thankful for this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to the United States government and to all of those who extended their assistance to my family and myself.

LIU XINGHU

Liu Xinghu was sentenced to the Laogai for the crime of being the eldest son in a “counterrevolutionary family.” Liu was one of many sent to the Laogai without formal legal proceedings. He was summarily relocated to a camp for Reeducation through Labor. The same system that claimed Liu’s father’s life took twenty-five years of his own.

In 1959, at the age of fourteen, I was sent by Shanghai Municipality Public Security Bureau to the Laogai because I was the eldest son in a “counterrevolutionary” family. My father was an accountant employed by the Nationalist (Kuomintang) government. In 1958, he was sent to Laojiao, Reeducation through Labor, on fabricated charges of “embezzlement.” In 1973, my father was told that, although his Laojiao term had expired, he would not be allowed to go home. Rather, he would have to stay in the Laogai system as a Jiuye – a Forced Job Placement employee. In Jiuye, my father could not return home to his family or return to work as an accountant. Instead he had to remain in prison and cultivate land under police supervision. At the age of fifty-eight, he finally took his own life.

When my father killed himself, we were in the same camp but seldom allowed to see one another. The day he killed himself, the police showed me his cold body. He was cremated in Baimaoling Laogai camp. No reason was given as to why he killed himself, and the system treated his death without respect or dignity. He was just another dead dog. I did not hear my father’s last words. I was only allowed to retrieve his prison uniform that he had worn for more than ten years.

In 1980, the authorities declared that my father’s initial arrest in 1958 was unwarranted. This statement came seven years too late for my father.

As to my own case, I did not undergo any legal procedures, nor was I given any official government documents when I was sent to the Laogai. The government simply said I would be given a job in the Laogai camp where I would remain forever, like my father.

In 1964, I reached my breaking point. With a few fellow prisoners, I began talking about our lives and our futures. Shortly after these conversations, all of us young Laogai prisoners were arrested as a “counterrevolutionary clique.” This time, the Communist government issued me a verdict. I was sentenced to two years of Reeducation through Labor. It was not until I was close to forty that I found an opportunity to leave the Laogai camp.

Through June 1982, the Communist government was still re-affirming that my counterrevolutionary case had been handled correctly. My arrest and term of Reeducation through Labor was warranted because in my case, rehabilitation was out of the question. That meant, like my father, I was “correctly” subject to Forced Job Placement within the system and “correctly” termed a counterrevolutionary. Even among those in job placement, I was at the very bottom.

For twenty-five years, my youth and young adulthood were squandered in a perpetual state of hunger, disease, humiliation and torture. After my time in the Laogai, with my uncle’s assistance I came to the

United States via Africa. Today, I enjoy freedom and democracy in the United States and I am the father of two U.S. citizens.

Those twenty-five years of misery and agony are history now. It happened to my father's generation and extended to my generation. I believe that my children will be spared. I sincerely hope that the misery that I went through will not befall other Chinese children.

FENG GUOJIANG

Enamored by the teachings of Mao Zedong, Feng Guojiang came to China in 1949 from Singapore to participate in China's transformation to Communism. Along with many of Communism's most loyal adherents, Feng found himself victimized during the political campaigns of the 1950s by the Party in which he had placed so much faith. He served a total of twenty years in the Laogai.

For thirty-five years, I lived in mainland China. For twenty-three of those years, I was persecuted by the Chinese Communist authorities. Twenty years were spent performing slave labor in the prison system.

My parents and their six children were born in Indonesia. I was born in 1928 in Medan City, Sumatra. While at a Chinese-language school, I was influenced by a left-leaning teacher, and started reading the writings of Mao Zedong. While in Singapore, I joined new Democratic Youth League, a youth organization of the Malayan Communist Party. As head of leftist students, I was dubbed the "Mao Zedong of Medan."

In May of 1949, at the age of twenty-one, I went to Hong Kong. I came together with a group of other left-leaning Southeast Asian Chinese students, all of us with recommendations from the Chinese Communist Party in hand. I arrived in Beijing, where the department of the United Front, the Chinese Communist Party's central committee, established a special "Overseas Chinese Youth Training Course," its purpose being to mold us into cadres responsible for exporting revolution in the future.

In 1952, shortly before I graduated from high school, I was admitted to the Department of Architecture of Qinghua University. During the "movement to wipe out counterrevolutionaries" of the 1955-56, I became a target. Twice I was denounced and had to undergo mass criticism sessions in my classes and in the department. I was accused of "listening to an enemy broadcasting station, the Voice of America," of "blemishes in my past" and so on, and so on.

In 1957, another political movement started. This time, it was called the "rectification movement." We were encouraged to "voice our opinions to the Party." Many times at the "Free Tribune," I condemned the Communist Party's despotic rule. For this I was branded a "rightist student." At midnight on March 14, 1959, the Communist Party escorted me to Reeducation through Labor. For twenty long years, I was tormented in the mincing machine of the Communist dictatorship. The very first day I was escorted by policemen to the Beijing Reeducation through Labor detention facility, I started laboring—combing hemp, making cotton shoe soles. Comparatively, that was light labor, but the regimen was tight. We had to labor non-stop. Talking was prohibited. Those who violated the discipline were criticized during mass meetings in the evenings. What we ate was like cattle fodder. We slept like packed sardines. It was the first time that I experienced Communist slavery.

Later, I was escorted to Qinghe Farm in Hebei Province. When we exited the train at Chadian Railroad Station, the farm's political commissar gave us an admonitory speech. He said that we were welcome to labor and to reform our thought. Actually, what was welcoming us were squad automatic weapons mounted on top of the station, their muzzles aimed at us. Digging and diversion canal construction were the

heaviest labor on the farm. One of the guys fell sick. I saw that he was at his last gasp, but the commander said he was pretending to be sick and ordered two fellow inmates to prop him up, forcing him to go on with digging. The second day the guy never woke up. We labored from the moment the moon went down to the moment the moon came up. During the "three years of natural disasters," we were only fed cakes and porridge cooked from barnyard millet. The amount was pitiable. Many inmates simply died one after another from hunger and exhaustion.

There was no time limit to Reeducation through Labor, which meant it was tantamount to a life sentence. On July 6, 1960, at midnight, risking my life, I successfully made my way through an electrified wire netting. I thought I had made a successful escape from hell. I decided to flee to Burma. I slept more than twenty days in the wilderness, but I was apprehended by the police and thrown into Beijing's Caoluanzi detention facility, which doubled as a prison. There, I was totally cut off from the outside world. They starved me, trying to extort a confession from me. Other inmates and I had to sit motionless and study prison regulations and discipline night and day. I was found to be one who did not confess crimes and did not plead guilty. I was placed in handcuffs and leg irons, was denounced, and then was incarcerated in solitary confinement. I was handed a copy of my verdict—life imprisonment as a counterrevolutionary.

At its fullest, the No. 1 Detention Facility held forty-two inmates, incarcerated in a fifteen-square-meter cell. The inmates had to sleep on their side and everyone's nose was pressed between two fellow inmates' stinking feet. In spite of heavy labor in the daytime, we were fed only corn buns and vegetable soup. You had to search for traces of edible oil under a microscope. When the situation was at its worst, instead of corn buns, we were given only two bowls of steamed sweet potato. One guy couldn't bear it and tried to kill himself through a hunger strike. A few days later the commander ordered other inmates to force a tube down through his nostrils to feed him soup. In fact, inmates had to control each other, and it was virtually impossible to kill yourself in a ward.

One year after I appealed to the Supreme Court, my appeal was turned down. The nature of my "crime" remained counterrevolutionary, but my term was commuted to five years.

From No. 1 Detention Facility I was sent to Liangxiang Machinery Factory and Yanqing Brickyard. Both were labor-reform units under the Public Security Bureau. About three hundred male and female mentally disordered inmates were incarcerated in Yanqing Prison, alias Yanqing Brickyard. While in Yanqing Prison, my term expired. I was forced to take a job within the same prison. Thus, my second term of labor reform began, and I became a Forced Job Placement employee.

In 1966 I escaped to Dandong, successfully crossed the Yalu River and entered North Korea. I planned to go to the free world via North Korea, but the North Korean government expatriated me to China. In Liangxiang, in a solitary confinement cell, I was incarcerated for four months, given only a small corn bun and small piece of pickle, which was standard solitary confinement ration, enough only for the inmates to keep breathing. I was so hungry that I had to lie down all the time, although I could not fall asleep. I was tormented both physically and mentally. Then, I was "formally arrested" and escorted to No. 1 Detention Facility, where I was handcuffed at the back as a form of punishment. Later on, I was escorted to No. 1 Prison, which was separated from the detention facility by a wall. Attached to the prison was a factory for making nylon socks—the Gold Horse brand for exportation, and the Twin Deer and Twin Ram brands for domestic consumption. Only many years later when I reached Hong Kong did I know that the Chinese Communist authorities consistently denied exportation of labor-reform products.

At No. 1 Prison, I was handcuffed at the back and hung up, because I had asked a fellow prisoner to teach me what certain words were in Japanese, and then I had written these words on a piece of toilet paper in order to memorize them. The handcuff's teeth bit into my wrists, and the pain was excruciating.

During the Cultural Revolution, only Mao Zedong's works could be read. It was forbidden even to use a dictionary.

In March 1969, when China and the Soviet Union were at war in Zhengbao Island, the authorities secretly transferred all prisoners from Beijing to detention facilities in Hebei Province's counties and cities. The detention facilities doubled as prisons. I was transferred to Raoyang County, where food was the worst I had experienced yet. Prisoners could eat half a bowl of pork only once a year, during the Spring Festival. Because of the serious lack of protein, all inmates suffered from edema. In the fall, when it turned chilly, insects crept into the wards. Some inmates caught them and ate them. A student by the name of Zou ate poisonous insects and died.

I remember how a local old peasant was sentenced to a five-year imprisonment because he wrote five words with a tree branch on the ground. When asked what words he had written, he did not dare to repeat them, for fear he might be accused of a fresh crime which would only serve to aggravate his sentence. Actually, everybody knew what the five words were: Down With the Communist Party. This occurred during the period of "dealing blows at counterrevolutionary activities and struggling against three evils." Also at this time, the authorities needed to execute a group of prisoners. I, Zhang Langlang and Zhou Qiyue were on the list to be executed. I was on the list because they regarded me as "an unrepentant counterrevolutionary with unchanging granite brains." I never pled guilty, and they failed to find the words "I plead guilty" in my files. The authorities hated prisoners like me who did not plead guilty, because that meant that the authorities may have wrongly convicted an innocent person. How could the great, glorious and correct Communist Party wrongly convict people?!

Before the execution, I was asked whether I was "overseas Chinese." I replied that I was. Zhang and Zhou were sons of high-ranking officials. Only thus were the three of us spared from execution. But others, like Song Huimin, So Jialin, Wang Tao, and prisoners that I did not know by name—they were all executed.

Ten years after my term expired, I was still not allowed to return to normal life. I was escorted to Hulu County Cement Plant (also a labor-reform facility,) and finally to Tangjiazhuang Labor-Reform Farm for a second term of labor-reform. Many prisoners who endured all kind of hardships during their terms by putting their hopes on a normal, post-labor-reform life, finally killed themselves in their "second terms," feeling utterly despaired.

It was on March 14, 1959, I was taken from Qinghua University to the No. 583 Reeducation through Labor Farm. Twenty years later on March 13, 1979, I left China and arrived in Hong Kong. Thus I suffered through twenty long years in the mincing machine of the proletariat dictatorship, or rather, the Communist Party. As a convicted labor-reform prisoner, I struggled for fifteen years through seventeen different detention facilities, prisons, and labor-reform detachments. My youth was squandered in forced labor; in creating wealth for the Chinese Communist Party, or, in their words, in "transforming the Great Northern Wilderness into a bread basket!"

Before I left the mainland, Beijing's Qinghua University rehabilitated me as a "rightist element" and gave me 1,000 RMB in the form of living subsidies. The court issued me a copy of my "retrial sentence,"

declaring me innocent. All this was supposed to be "the Party's loving care for me." Some of my friends even asked me to express my gratitude to the Communist Party. I could express thanks to certain individuals, but the Laogai is not just the business of individuals, it is a problem of the entire Communist institution. This is an issue of the evil and totalitarian Communist Party. If this system is not eradicated, it will continue to bring suffering and injustice to countless more innocent people.

HUANG XIANG

Huang Xiang's family background seemed to destine him to a lifetime of persecution in China; his poetry and pro-democracy activities sealed the bargain. The son of a Kuomintang army officer, Huang Xiang was thrown in prison six times during his life for a total of twenty-one years in the Laogai.

I am a poet and writer. I am now nearly sixty years old. Many times I have suffered as a direct victim of the Laogai system. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you of the experiences of pain and destruction, both mental and physical, that I endured most of life. I have been in the United States for more than two years now. This is my first opportunity to speak publicly about my past. What I went through is a part of history that I hope will never be repeated in China.

I began publishing my works in 1958. I also joined the China Writers Association. I was probably one of the youngest association members. The next year, in 1959, I was taken into custody and lost my freedom. My works were banned. That was forty years ago. In recent years, as the result of reform and opening up on China's mainland, certain relative changes have taken place in Chinese ideology and culture allowing for publication of some of my works, such as my "Rebel" poems, but not my political essays. The rebel poems were written before and during the Cultural Revolution and had been published in the form of big-character posters and mimeographed civilian publications during the Democracy Wall movement of 1978-79.

Now, after reforms, they have again appeared in certain journals such as "Retrospect of Trends of Contemporary Poetry – Hazy Poetry" by Beijing Normal University, "Classics of Chinese Literature of the Century" by Beijing University, and "Series of Classics of Chinese Literature of the Twentieth Century" by the Haitian Press. This demonstrates that China's mainland is no longer a pond of stagnant water, that social consciousness does exist among the people, particularly among independent intellectuals who incline towards liberalism. Social democracy, identified universally among intellectuals, is pursued in China not only by a few dissidents, but by the people as a whole. Nevertheless, my personal selections and serial works are still banned in China's mainland. Quite recently, Chinese authorities illegally confiscated one of my manuscripts. It is a large novel of a million characters describing a man's true destiny and his cosmic existence, the dual orbits of his body and his spirit, within the context of half a century of Communism.

My father, a high-ranking army officer in the Kuomintang, was a bureaucrat and a landowner. In the Liaoning-Shenyang campaign he was taken prisoner by the Communists and then secretly executed in prison. After his execution, my mother received from the prison only a zipped American sleeping bag and the case of a gutted Rolex wristwatch, said to be expensive at that time. This was the last piece of information that I heard from my mother concerning this family background of "sin" that predetermined that I would be thrown into prison six times in my life.

I have never been a beneficiary of Mao Zedong's social system, nor am I a critic within the system. I was born a victim of the system, its rebel and its challenger. Since childhood, I have disliked Communism. I feel it has been shrouding me like a sinister shadow. For me, it is not sunshine, but darkness. Because of my family background and the discrimination and miseries I was subject to, from very early in life I have intuitively

distrusted the Communist myth. To me, it means only physical and spiritual violence. In the society of Communist China, I could only play certain roles: "dangerous element," "scum of society," "black sheep." I always felt I was inferior to others. It was a horrible feeling. Due to class prejudice, upon graduation from elementary school I was forbidden to go to secondary school. Like many wives and children of Kuomintang servicemen who remained in the People's Republic, for decades I was a victim of a system that encouraged class discrimination and hatred.

In 1959, in my late teens, I was thrown into prison for the first time. Actually, even before that, in 1950, while I was a child, I had also been persecuted. One day, I went to see my aunt (my father's sister) who was at Shangchun Village in Henan Province. I happened to find a dead fish glittering in a well under the bright sun. Out of childish curiosity I removed the fish from the well. A man named Chen, who was chairman of the peasants' association and commander of the militiamen, grabbed me by my collar. He tied me up, put a dunce cap on my head, and paraded me through the streets. He escorted me to the township office, where I was shut up for three days and three nights. They accused me of putting poison into the water in the "vain attempt to poison poor and lower middle-class peasants." However, repeated tests by the county's clinic showed that there were no traces of poison in the water. Only thus was I acquitted. It was the first tragedy in my life which left an indelible stamp on my heart. This injury was done to a child by an inhumane system that incites people to hate each other. Unfortunately, to date, mainland writers still avoid themes and realities like these. In my autobiography "Tumult And Loneliness: Huang Xiang's Autobiography and Oriental Ballade," and in my large novel "Escape: A Man's Sky or A Life As Long As An Instant," I focus on these themes of suffering and destruction.

In 1959, out of my free poetic nature, I was dreaming of seeking out the fairy mountain, lake, desert, and grassland of my imagination. Alone, I left my work unit and went to Dachadan, Chadam, Qinghai Province. But Zhang Guangzhi, personnel and security cadre of Guiyang Hardware Factory, concocted charges against me of "active counterrevolutionary plotting and deliberately avoiding punishment." He borrowed a pistol and handcuffs from Guiyang City's Nanming District Public Security Bureau, went to Chadam and arrested me. I was escorted to No. 1 Labor-Reform Prison in Chadam.

In Chadam, I was incarcerated in a mud hut the size of a bed, with a pit that served as my bed and a chained door. Everyday I was escorted at gun point into the Gobi Desert to make bricks. Everyday, we had to dig dirt, carry water, mix mud, and make hundreds of bricks. In the Gobi Desert, the sun rose early and set late. I had to work more than fourteen hours a day. As a punishment, prisoners had to carry a dozen bricks on their way to the work site at sunrise, and carry another dozen bricks on their way back at sunset. Those who failed to fulfill the quota endured physical and mental punishments. They were not given supper to eat and while standing on a shaking heap of bricks, they were denounced by fellow prisoners. While laboring, we could not stand up straight. I was almost driven mad.

One day out of desperation, I raised a rake intending to kill Pockmarked Bai, a prisoner who doubled as section leader, who was standing on the side and controlling other prisoners. Later on, authorities found a lack of evidence for the original charges against me and I was sent back from No. 1 Labor-Reform Prison in Chadam to Guiyang. My sentenced was commuted to Reeducation through Labor. I labored for four years. While at Reeducation through Labor in Chaigouwan I shied away from other prisoners and wrote poems, but somebody took notice and told the prison administration. I was thrown into the maximum-regimented company whose discipline would scare even prisoners in Qincheng Prison. Many prisoners died there. Even today, I find it unbearable to recall my life there in 1959. Also, due to limited time allotted to me, I am unable to expound it in detail at this conference.

In 1966, I was persecuted for the second time during the Cultural Revolution. This included the usual measures of persecution such as interrogation and monitoring, under labels such as “self-examination in isolation,” “supervision and control by masses,” or “control and training teams.” This persecution stemmed from the “rectify class ranks” campaign, which was part of the “four clean-ups” movement that started prior to the Cultural Revolution. I was then incarcerated at Meitan Tea Farm. It so happened that the “work team” sent down by the provincial department of agriculture had “uncovered a big counterrevolutionary organization” that involved several counties. Because of the Reeducation through Labor records in my files, they alleged that I was the political head of this “counterrevolutionary organization,” and they suggested judicial units to give me a ten-year sentence. So, when the Cultural Revolution began, my case became the biggest counterrevolutionary case in Meitan County. I was hung up on a beam, beaten, denounced and struggled against. One of my teeth was broken, my skin on my chest cracked, my arm was broken, a vein in my left leg ruptured. That case still remains unresolved. For a period of three years, I was placed under solitary confinement and forced to labor. Such painful experiences only served to strengthen my rebel consciousness. In 1968, during the climax of the Cultural Revolution, I wrote the following poem “Wild Beasts:”

Wild Beasts

I am a wild beast being pursued
 I am a wild beast just captured
 I am a wild beast trampled by wild beasts
 I am a wild beast trampling wild beasts

This age assaults me
 Its eyes squinting
 Its foot stomping on the bridge of my nose

Tearing
 Biting
 Gnawing,
 Gnawing until barely my bones remain

Even though barely a bone is left of me

I gag upon this detestable age. (1968)

This poem, featured in different anthologies, is widely known in China's mainland. “Beasts” describes how I, an opponent of the system, struggle desperately against this despotic system. In another poem written the same year, “Bones of the Dead,” I depict my spiritual rebellion:

Bones of the Dead

After billions of years
 Of billions of years in the ground
 Someone will probably
 Dig up my
 Bones

At that time
 Would he imagine
 A far-distant geological age

A history so remote it's indistinct

Are these the decayed bones of my own first ancestor;
Or are they the fossil of an ancient biological skeleton

At that time,
Would he imagine
This very pile of dry bones
Once made their sound in the world,

Loved
Hated
Mourned
Cried out
Agitated

Would he imagine
That this pile of dry bones
Once had a face contorted with bitterness
Once had a pair of silently cursing eyes
Once silently endured with bloodless tight-closed lips
Once wrote poems as eternal as the moon and stars

These are the bones of a poet
There are the bones of one who while hoping, lost hope, gave up hope
These are bones that furiously fought
These are the bones of one who walked this world, struggled, was tempered
These are the bones of a skeleton shattered and all put together again
 These scattered bones of a man
These are the dry bones of jaws that ground from hatred
These are the dry bones that resisted, clanking aloud
These are the dry bones that have seen the heavenly lightening strike
 Have listened, head cocked, to the growing clamor of all the earth's creatures
These are the dry bones of a Man

After billions of years,
Of billions of years in the ground
A future anthropologist
A geologist
An archeologist
When digging up my dead bones
Will, please, under this same burning sun
Raise up these remains of water and air, and
Seek out the Man. (1968)

It is a pity that our so-called "scar literature" writers never reveal the essence of such vicious realities. They dare only touch the surface of a certain period, a certain political line. They dare not face life squarely as a dissident against the system. The reason is simple—that dissention cannot make them well-known, cannot win them prizes, but will make them lose their freedom, even their life.

In 1979, I was persecuted politically for the third time. As a matter of fact since the very beginning I suspected the cult of personality, and angrily condemned violence and despotism. Starting with "Song Of Torch" which I wrote in 1969, I wrote my big-scale suite of poems "Vulcan Symphonic Poem."

On October 11, 1978, I arrived in Beijing with a large collection of my poems and a few friends. We posted the first big-character posters in the Democracy Wall Movement and published the first issue of our self-published publication "Enlightenment" at the entrance of a lane next to the former main office of the *People's Daily* on Wangfujing Street (Marco Polo Street). This caused a traffic jam in the street. Hua Guofeng, who was then Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, viewed it as the repetition of the Hungarian Events of 1956. Pressed by those around me, I recited my poems impromptu.

On November 24, 1978, at noon, we openly declared that the first non-governmental society known as the "Enlightenment Society" was forming. I posted two huge slogans negating Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution. To make the international community pay closer attention to China's human rights issue and to place this issue under the control of international public opinion, I posted the open letter that I had drafted "To President Carter," which for the first time called international attention to the human rights situation in China. Then, our fourth act moved to Beijing's Xidan District. All together, six times, coming from a remote province, we stormed Beijing.

Then, Wei Jingsheng, who enraged Deng Xiaoping, was arrested. All members of the "Enlightenment Society" were arrested in Guizhou Province and taken into custody at Guiyang City's Chaigouwan Detention and Investigation Station. There, we staged a collective hunger strike in protest against the persecution, which included abuse of inmates, in particular of female inmates, by the prison authorities. After we were released, we were handed over to our respective units' security sections for forced labor under supervision, and we were not allowed to appeal to Beijing. For more than one year, I was deprived freedom of action.

After the "Enlightenment Society," and because of my involvement in the college students' civilian publication "Rising Generation," public security units were ready to get me and were constantly monitoring my every action. In 1984, I was in love with my current wife Zhang Ling (pen name Qiuxiaoyulan). At the climax of the campaign to "deal heavy blows at criminal activities" they arrested me on charges of rape, and secretly escorted me to a detention facility, 5th Sub-Bureau, Chengdu Railroad Bureau, Guiyang City, where I was incarcerated. They were looking for a chance to execute me. They summoned Zhang Ling, who was then a student in the Chinese Department of Guizhou University, and detained her for three days and three nights, wanting her to cooperate with the government and to sign the indictment. However, she declined and said she would accuse them openly instead. Finally, they had no choice but to release me, but because they were still angry at Zhang Ling, they forced the university to expel her. If she had been even slightly weak-willed and unable to stand up to the threat, I would have been a dead man.

In 1987, I was invited by Beijing University to attend the university's first literature and art festival. They wanted me to give a course of lectures and invite a group of Guizhou poets to Beijing. But, my lectures were later canceled. Nevertheless, we made unremitting efforts in championing the "Literary Group" at five Beijing colleges: Beijing University, Beijing Normal University, China People's University, Central Academy of Arts and Crafts, and the Lu Xun Academy of Literature. We made speeches, recited poems, spread leaflets, sold poetic letters. For that, I was once again arrested and thrown onto death row as a hardened criminal at Guiyang City's No. 1 Detention Facility. Those who handled my case interpreted my "literary group" as "sending a human bomb to Tiananmen Square." At the five colleges, they tried to collect evidence on their presumption, but failed. They had no choice but to persecute me on charges of "stirring up campus disturbances" and "disturbing social order," and I was sentenced by Guiyang City Intermediate People's Court to three years of Reeducation through Labor and one year deprivation of political rights upon expiration of my sentence.

I served my sentence in Wangwu Labor-Reform Detachment. During my servitude, the June 4, 1989 events took place, and I was thrown into a solitary confinement cell.

In 1995, Writers Press was bold enough to break the ban and printed my collected poems and essays, but soon after, the press was prohibited from publishing them. I sued the authorities. Several times, my wife Zhang Ling and I joined Xu Liangying, Wang Dan, Liu Xiaobo, Liu Nianchun and others in collecting signatures calling for human rights, tolerance, the rehabilitation of the leaders of the June 4, 1989 Movement, the abolition of the Reeducation through Labor system, and etc. On the eve of the fourth anniversary of the June 4, 1989 movement, my wife and I were secretly arrested by Beijing Public Security Bureau and placed under custody at Changping County Custody and Interrogation Facility located in a Beijing Suburb. It was a living hell on earth. Twice, my wife staged hunger strikes in protest against the way the facility treated prisoners. In the one month of our detention, my wife and I were tortured both physically and mentally, and we nearly died. After the anniversary, four police agents sent by Beijing Public Security Bureau escorted us back to Guiyang to be further incarcerated by local authorities. Guiyang Public Security Bureau commuted our incarceration to supervised residence under three conditions:

1. We were not allowed to go to Beijing;
2. We were not allowed to leave Guiyang;
3. The authorities were to be notified before we went out of our residence.

Meanwhile, Guizhou Public Security Department fabricated a case of "active counterrevolutionary organization," and we were accused of being "behind-the-scenes manipulators" of that organization.

This is the story of how I was cruelly persecuted and illegally incarcerated six times. According to the nature of the Communist system, China's mainland is essentially a huge labor-reform camp, which emerged with the Mao Zedong Era but still endures even after the demise of the dictator.

ZHANG GUOTING

Zhang Guoting was among 3,000 children from Shanghai who, during a labor shortage, were rounded up in 1960 and sent to forced labor camps. He spent twenty-two years in Reeducation through Labor and Forced Job Placement.

IN TEARS, BLOOD AND PUS, I DECLARE WHAT HAPPENED TO ME AND TO MY BUDDIES:

The 1960 Incident

On Friday, June 24, 1960, a long train of oven-hot boxcars left Shanghai heading for the loess plateau in Northwest China. Stuffed into the boxcars were not cattle, but children, who should have been under their mothers' care.

Most of us, 3,000 children between eight and fifteen years old, were secondary and elementary school pupils. Among us were also street urchins and children who had fled from famine-stricken areas with their parents. Deceived and intimidated by the Chinese Communist Party and its police, we became "apprentices" in name and were escorted to Laojiao Reeducation through Labor camp in Shanxi Province, where we were subject to cruel dictatorship.

These children were the victims of an evil bargain reached between Shanxi Province Labor-Reform Bureau and Shanghai Public Security Bureau, with the Ministry of Public Security in Beijing as the go-between; an agreement for a labor force for coal mining. When the Shanghai Public Security Bureau failed to fulfill the agreed-upon quota, they turned to detention and custody facilities. Finally, they turned to schools and neighborhoods. Large numbers of children were rounded up, among them children followed by their younger siblings, especially three siblings by the name of Ni. Mention should be made of a government employee whose son was rounded up in the hunt while he was abducting other children.

Thus, these innocent children, cut off from their families and schools, lost their freedom and were thrown into the mincing machine. Many of them later died.

Could these children—many who wet their bed and could not take care of themselves—survive the mincing machine of the dictatorship of the proletariat?

At first, in the hot summer, the children, unaccustomed to local climate, suffered from vomiting and diarrhea. Bitten by flies and mosquitoes, their scalp and skin festered. Rotary kilns were used for brick making. To conserve coal, policemen would, without waiting for the kilns to cool down, force the children into intensely hot kilns to unload fired bricks and then load raw ones. They built offices and dormitories for police cadres. They froze in the bitter cold winter. They dug irrigation canals and ditches, carried manure, watered fields, loaded carts in midnight hours, and cut into mountains with explosives. Many young children were wounded and crippled. One child's feet were frostbitten, which finally led to amputation of both of his legs, and only thus could he return to Shanghai. A few other children were released back to Shanghai

because they were driven insane. Some children died, their corpses wrapped in straw mats, carried out through the clinic's back door and buried. The police said they died from diseases, but in actuality, many of them died from frost, hunger, and torture. Young girls were frequently molested and raped by administration cadres. A girl became a nurse in the clinic, and the head, a discharged Korea War veteran who was at least twice her age, married her on condition that she would be freed. In the daytime, when she was not in the clinic, she had to take care of his daughter who was almost her age. Thus, she became a virtual slave in the old bastard's family.

These innocent children, who could not even be termed juvenile offenders, became victims of the Laogai (Reform through Labor) system, and spent their miserable childhoods in the Communist Party's juvenile criminals disciplinary facilities. When we saw the words "juvenile criminals disciplinary facility," we were so angry that we smashed the signboard. The term "juvenile criminals disciplinary facility" was replaced with the term "juvenile disciplinary facility," but the inmates' destiny did not become better in the least.

The wicked administration cadres said, "All you kids who never listen, your youth is wasting away. Kids, get ready for your razors!"

Thus, the children had to labor beyond physical endurance. They were subject to all kinds of physical punishment and torture. They were released from the facility four years later. For some of them, it was five years later.

We Laojiao prisoners were not given a term, but "no term" was more terrible than a term. When we were given the "rehabilitation notice," we were salt-and-pepper bearded, middle-aged men. But, I am anticipating.

Job Placement — Continuation of Labor Reform

Aha, job placement! Sounded good, didn't it? Literally, it meant a job and freedom, but reality was totally different. In Communist China, many things proved that what the authorities said was fraud.

The Communist Party's Laojiao system ruined many people's childhoods, youth and future. It ruined my whole life.

At face value, released Laojiao and Laogai prisoners are supposed to go back to their families, to their native places, to their original work units, and do their best for the society. In reality, thousands upon thousands of job-placement camps do their utmost to squeeze the last ounce of energy out of former prisoners. They remain living targets for the Communist Party's ideology. Physically and mentally, they are in an even worse plight than when they used to be prisoners.

So, we youngsters who grew up in juvenile disciplinary facilities were sent to labor-reform coal mines in Northern and South-East Shanxi Province. Some of my buddies and I were sent to second-term labor reform in a labor-reform coal mine in a gully.

As I said above, Forced Job Placement (Jiuye) is a continuation of labor-reform. Jiuye personnel are not allowed to act freely. They could only pursue something when they numbered three or more; they could not leave the gully. They had no dignity, not even their own thoughts. They were forbidden to show any

grievance or offer the slightest resistance. They were under the control of the same labor-reform cadres in the same labor-reform facilities. They had to labor the same way as unexpired Laojiao and Laogai prisoners.

Here, bludgeons, steel-toed boots, and other forms of physical punishment were replaced by ropes, handcuffs, leg irons, confinement, and all other forms of Laojiao and Laogai. But, what was most painful was not physical, but mental sufferings and endless denuncings. We had to endlessly confess what was on our mind. What was ludicrous was that we had to confess what crimes we had committed before we were thrown in. Pressed beyond endurance by endless movements and camps, I thought many times of taking my own life.

During the short two years in Wangzhuang, one by one, I lost my childhood buddies, because:

They could not endure brutal physical punishment.

They could not endure brutal mental persecution.

They could not endure dual, physical and mental torments.

To put an end to reform in Jiuye, they had no choice but to end their lives.

A cadre by the name of Li Shiying said sarcastically then, "Your suicide troops include all branches: army (railroad), navy, air force, airborne..." Why? Because :

Some of them ran against high-speed locomotives.

Some of them drowned themselves in the reservoir.

Some of them dove into deep, deep coal mine pits.

Some of them hung themselves on trees.

Some of them...

They were all my childhood buddies. When they died, they were not yet twenty years of age. Because of them, I want to speak out. This is why I am accusing the Chinese authorities here.

Communist China itself is a huge mincing machine. Wangzhuang Jiuye Battalion is only one of the thousands upon thousands of mincing machines. In the small mincing machine of Wangzhuang Coal Mine in Huoxian County, Shanxi Province, in a short span of two years, so many Shanghai boys I knew killed themselves. You can just imagine how many Jiuye personnel killed themselves in Shanxi Province, or in the whole of China over the decades.

I witnessed how some intellectuals (many of them "rightist" elements), repeatedly oppressed, mentally wrecked, and willfully insulted by Communists, changed from irresolute and hesitant scholars into beasts, and that was most tragic. During the Cultural Revolution, in the frenzied years of factionalism, when our coal mine was placed under military control, Laogai cadres competed to show who was the most revolutionary by treating Jiuye personnel as ruthlessly as they could. In those unprecedented years, they demonstrated Communists' inhumane nature to the fullest.

The following are a few instances of how barbarous policemen were and how terrible Jiuye units could get: Yang Baoyin, a young man, was termed counterrevolutionary and executed upon verdict in Wangzhuang Coal Mine for writing four words on a cigarette package "Down With Chairman Mao," his skull was cracked open and his brain was scooped up and eaten as medicine for treating Parkinson's disease.

Of the ten persons who were involved in a “counterrevolutionary organization,” five of them were shot in one volley, and the five who survived were thrown into the bottomless abyss of prison. I was one of those five survivors.

Miscarriages of Justice All Over China

Prisons were crammed with maximum penalty criminals. They lived in the abyss of darkness.

Among the maximum penalty criminals, political prisoners, or “counterrevolutionaries,” were doubly tormented because they had to endure both the police and the brutal “revolutionary” criminals who were imprisoned for killing in factional armed conflicts during the Cultural Revolution. Even in prison, these extremist revolutionaries claimed they were “defending Chairman Mao’s revolutionary line” and wanted to “carry on the revolution to the end.”

Shortly after I was thrown into prison, I witnessed how a Laogai cadre and a group of “revolutionary” criminals hung a prisoner up and beat him to death. Beat him to death!

Later on, that cadre became our commander. Just imagine how terrible it was to be under that cadre and his “revolutionary” criminals all the time!

In those years in prison, you lost sense of time and needed no calendars. So after being released from prison, you realize you cannot speak, walk, and keep track of the bills appropriately. You don’t understand? Well, just imagine being incarcerated for years in darkness and then suddenly exposed to sunshine. When I was finally released at the age of thirty-eight, I had been incarcerated for a whole twenty-two years. I was totally disabled. To date, I cannot work.

My Appeal

I cry out on behalf of the thousands upon thousands of souls perished in China, in that huge prison.

I call upon the international community and all those with a conscience to pay attention to China, because the Communist government and its police and courts are still hunting down innocent people and creating wrongful cases. The vicious Laogai system still exists.

I call upon the international community, all humanitarian organizations, and all fellow Chinese with a conscience to urge the ruling Chinese Communist Party and its government to establish a legal system that is true to the people’s aspirations, to give back human rights to the people, to abolish the wrong labor-reform system, and to treat all prisoners in a humane way.

I sincerely hope —

That there will no longer be such miscarriages of justice.

That such tragedies will no longer happen in China.

That such things will no longer happen in China.

RETING TENPA TSERING

Reting Tenpa Tsering was jailed for taking part in Tibetan independence activities following the Chinese occupation of Tibet. His twenty-two years in the Tibetan Laogai, and the beatings and interrogations he endured, have only strengthened his resolve to continue struggling for human rights in his homeland.

I was born in 1930 in Reting, in Central Tibet, North East of Lhasa.

In 1949, China invaded Tibet. I joined the Tibetan resistance movement, *Chushi Gangdruk* (Four Rivers and Six Ranges) in 1958, leaving my wife and children behind. We fought for two years, attacking and retreating several times, as there was great difficulty in obtaining any weapons or other resources. In 1960, we finally lost in a terrible battle in which I saw all my friends killed around me. I was wounded and the Chinese handcuffed me and chained my ankles together. They imprisoned me and kept me in that state for a year and eight months. I was then sent to a camp where I had to do five years of hard labor (the Chinese philosophy behind this was to ensure that we earned our keep).

In 1967, I was sent to Pawo Tramo, a prison in Kongpo, and was kept there for nine months, also doing hard labor, cutting trees and digging stones for new buildings. Then suddenly I was sent to another prison, Nyatri Shen, where I was imprisoned for the next five years, until 1982. When I was finally released, I went to Lhasa, where I was lent money to begin a trading business, which I did for five years. Then on the 27th of September 1987, demonstrations in Lhasa began. People were shouting for Tibet, "Tibet is independent. Long Live His Holiness. Tibet and China are separate. Chinese, go back to China." I joined the demonstration on that day.

Three days later, on October 1, 1987, there was another demonstration against the Chinese police, and again I joined. It started at eight in the morning and we demanded that the Chinese police release the people they had arrested. These people had been tied to beams inside the police building, and the police were beating them. Among the demonstrators were monks, nuns, and lay people. When the police refused to release the prisoners we set fire to the door. The police retaliated by shooting at us. I was the first one to be shot. My abdomen rapidly started to distend and I had to be taken to hospital.

They found that the bullet had pierced my intestines six times. My abdomen was full of the contents of the intestines and blood. This all had to be removed and cleaned up. Then they stitched the six broken pieces back together and replaced them, and I was sewn up again. The medical cost of that was 3,000 Chinese yuan, for which I was charged. I was in that hospital for three or four months. It was only when I had recovered and was ready to leave that they x-rayed me and found that the bullet was still in my body! To this day I still have that first bullet in my spine.

The shooting continued. Seven people were killed that day, and seventeen others were wounded and had to go into the hospital. An eighteen year-old girl was shot dead right beside me. There was also a seventeen-year-old killed. The door of the police building collapsed, and the building started to cave in. In the chaos, some of the prisoners escaped, but others were later found dead under the rubble, as I just learned recently.

On March 5, 1988, we were fighting the Chinese again all day, in the Barkhor, flinging stones at them. At one in the morning, I was arrested and handcuffed. I was kicked and beaten for four hours, with my hands tied up high behind my back, and my body tightly tied with nylon string. My new Tibetan shirt, which I had on for the New Year, was cut by these ropes. I remember the worst moment of the night. I was slapped round the face and fell back on the floor. One of the military guards put his boot down on my throat so I could hardly breath, forcing it down, and telling me, "Now you shout about independence, now you throw stones and be happy." At that moment I believe I nearly died.

At 5 a.m. I was taken to Uta Thu, Prison No. 5 in Lhasa, for about three or four months. Then I was moved to Zitru, the Prison No. 4, which is more severe. I was there for a total of eleven months and twenty-four days. During this time there were at least two or three interrogations every month. I was slapped, kicked, and verbally humiliated. They would say, "Are you going to shout for independence and throw stones now?" My condition deteriorated over this period and my wounds became very infected. I was seriously ill. The Chinese did not want to pay for any medical treatment, so they decided to release me. In November 1989, I was released on condition that I would never again shout for independence, that I would not throw stones and would not enter any more demonstrations. Two other people made this agreement on my behalf as well; my wife and my brother-in-law.

Once released I went home, but was soon recalled to the police building. This continued every two months. I was called in for interrogation about whether I had been demonstrating. On these occasions I would always be severely beaten and slapped. The situation became very bad for my family, and I felt that I had to escape—it was the only way I thought I could survive. Finally, I arrived in Switzerland in 1990, where I live today.

ZHANG HECI

Zhang Heci was a member of the elite class of those with “red” backgrounds—children whose parents had participated in the Communist Revolution—when he joined with other students to found a publication that was considered subversive. The Party leadership decided to make an example of these young people, to demonstrate that “contradictions” among the formerly loyal would not be tolerated.

On February 12, 1963, four Chinese students founded a publication entitled “X.” Their names were Sun Jingwu, Guo Shiyong (son of Guo Moruo, Mao Zedong’s favorite scholar), Ye Dongqing and Zhang Heci. I am Zhang Heci. We were students of No. 101 Secondary School, and continued to be friends after graduation. In the 1960s, No. 101 Secondary School was a very special school. Almost all the students’ fathers were either Chinese Communist Party Central Committee members or State Council (cabinet) ministers. Our journal, “X” existed only three months, with only three issues—from February 12, 1963 to May 18, 1963, when we were put under custody by the Public Security Ministry.

There are many reasons why we decided to call our journal “X.” In mathematics “X” denotes an unknown number. For us, it meant suspicions and explorations. “X” could also be the sign of error. We used it to denote negation, and also another meaning—to emphasize thinking independently and going down our own road. Besides, “X” denotes a crossroads—our hesitations and surveys, and also four hands held tight together.

In the first years of the 1960s, we went through a brief period of political fervor. In 1963, still in high political passion but more sober-minded, we realized that a publication like “X” was our goal for the future. The handful of us could not change our society single-handedly, but we were unwilling to let our youth slip idly by; we wanted to do something. We went to see a student of the Institute of Drama, but he knew nothing about O’Neill and Ibsen. So we decided to run a publication, which we had tried to do during secondary school—literature and art, poems, novels, political comments. Sun Jingwu wrote a political commentary on Mao Zedong’s paper tiger. The poems we selected were similar to the hazy poems that emerged a dozen years later. I really cannot imagine what those public security agents thought of the poems—they resembled codes to be cracked or words mumbled in one’s sleep.

We were taken into custody on May 18, 1963, when I was not yet twenty. “X” was a very special case in its day. It was handled by the Public Security Ministry (main force), 14th department of Beijing Public Security Bureau and the general logistics command’s security department (initially the PSB had had only 13 departments, the last one, the 13th, being responsible for Forced Job Placement of personnel who were expelled from original work units and became jobless; 14th department was a late comer, its explicit purpose confidential). To date, I am not totally clear about the whole thing. Besides, it was strictly confidential. In later years, Sun Jingwu’s younger sister married Li Jukui’s son, and Li Jukui was chief of general logistics command’s security department at the time, but even he could not get into the “X” case’s inside story.

Fortunately for the 14th Department, the system lacked due process, so there was no obstacle such as defense lawyers to get in their way. They could let their imaginations run free. Besides, there were quite a few “caged birds” who could be forced to “sing” a confession.

We were detained no more than ten days. In this way, the authorities seemed to be abiding by the law. Then, we were formally arrested on May 28th, but were not told it was formal arrest, for fear it would be too much of a mental stress to us, and that was not in keeping with the law. In late July, we were sentenced to Laojiao (Reeducation through Labor), followed by retroactive formal arrest. The four of us were treated in three ways respectively. Sun Jingwu and I were sentenced to two years of the Laojiao, with three additional conditions: 1. We could not leave Beijing; 2. We could not go home; 3. We could continue our college educations only two years later. Almost nobody before us had been discharged from the 14th department with a mere Laojiao sentence, and I was thinking that life was incomplete without prison experiences. Our performance in Laojiao was not satisfactory, but Zhou Enlai said, "I believe we may still be able to reeducate them." Thus, Sun Jingwu and I were given another year. That additional year coincided with the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and virtually turned into a life term, and we wasted sixteen years, the best part of our lives, in the Laogai.

By taking on the "X" case, the Communist Party brandished its sword to the "second generation growing up under red banners." At that time, as the result of repeated political movements and campaigns, particularly the anti-rightist movement and the anti-right-deviation campaign, most independently-thinking people in China had been struck down to the dust and trampled by a jackboot. The survivors, either scared, brainwashed, or both, were silenced. Young people sincerely believed in the Communist Party, in socialism. Those like us, who departed from the Marxist-Leninist classics and rebelled against orthodoxy, were but a handful. Most of us were born into privileged families that never starved in the "three years of famine," being backed up by special supplies. That made our case all the more incomprehensible, either to the ruling top or to grassroots citizens. But, with a grossly exaggerated opinion of our abilities, we stuck to our own ways.

Besides family backgrounds of those involved, the "X" case was also taken seriously because of Mao Zedong's theory of "revisionism is sprouting within high-salary strata." Like the old woman in "The Fisherman and the Goldfish," Mao Zedong, who became China's emperor, wanted to be the world's overlord. With the Sino-Soviet split in full swing, Khrushchevite cliques had to be ferreted out from strata with family backgrounds like ours.

In spite of the nearly impenetrable ideological and cultural blockade, we managed to know what was going on outside the bamboo curtain through internal publications, and we knew about non-Marxist trends of thought in the outside world. We began suspecting everything around us. Naturally, we came to suspect and repudiate the Communist Party, Marxism-Leninism, Socialism. It was natural and logical for our suspicion to evolve into repudiation. We had come to see through the emperor's new clothes.

Actually, public security units had long taken notice of us, either while we were still at secondary school or soon after we graduated. The letters we sent to each other often arrived unsealed. In the 1960s envelopes made of recycled paper were so brittle that with their primitive equipment the agents had a hard time unsealing and resealing our letters, so the envelopes' edges were always worn and torn. But the authorities were nice to us then. Only the personnel unit talked to me. Sun Jingwu was isolated in his army unit, but no further measures were taken. Then, the Public Security Ministry started pursuing the case, apparently because of Mao Zedong's imperial decree. Although public security agents denied they had opened our letters, words in our letters were quoted during interrogation sessions, and the words in our letters went even farther than those that we printed in "X" itself.

The victims of the "X" case have never been fully rehabilitated. Sixteen years later, I went back to Beijing. From 1978 to 1980, through Sun Jingwu as well as our two families and our parents, we repeatedly

appealed to superior institutions. Three times, I tried to appeal to Hu Yaobang, then Communist Party General Secretary. On the first try, Dai Dahuang reviewed confidential materials at the New China News Agency. On the last two attempts, Tao Siliang (daughter of Tao Zhu, a top-ranking Communist Party and government boss) assisted me. Hu Yaobang made his written recommendation to accept our appeal, but the Public Security Ministry resisted his instruction. Hu Yaobang even thought of turning to the Communist Party Central Committee's organizing department, but the department could not handle our case.

On May 21, 1980, in their letter to Sun Jingwu's parents, Ling Yun and Gao Yunxiang, then vice ministers of public security, claimed that the case had been handled prudently and correctly—Premier Zhou Enlai himself had decided to send us to Reeducation through Labor or to farm labor. The nature of the case had not been determined as hostile, and no one had been epitheted. It turned out that cases determined by Mao Zedong could be reversed, but not cases determined by Zhou Enlai.

Since the time of our arrest in 1963, we had never seen anything in writing to indicate why we had been dealt with the way we had been and incarcerated for sixteen years. It was only in 1980, in the two vice ministers' letter, that we saw something definitive. The charges were: organizing "X" faction, editing "X" journal, slandering the Communist Party's leadership, venting grievances against the socialist system, and plotting to flee abroad.

The rehabilitation decision of August 31, 1981 was not much different from the original handling, only the charges of "slandering" and "venting" were left out. The Public Security Ministry repeatedly tried to persuade us that no conclusion was better than a negative conclusion, because "no conclusion" meant that the conclusion was kept in the ministry's files without our units' knowledge. But we were persistent. Anyway, as I think now, it was kind of the Public Security Ministry to leave out the two charges. Finally, no mention was made of how we visited Peng Dehuai (National Defense Minister), because he had been rehabilitated posthumously.

During the Cultural Revolution, the "X" case became a tool of power strife. Xie Fuzhi (Public Security Minister) and Li Zhen (Vice Public Security Minister) attacked Xu Zirong and Ling Yun (both Vice Public Security Ministers), maybe even Zhou Enlai, for harboring us counterrevolutionaries and not punishing us accordingly.

From the judicial point of view, we did not violate the constitution, which safeguards freedom of assembly and freedom of press. The way we viewed Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong, fierce and vicious though it might have been, was not criminal. We did think of fleeing abroad, but these were only things we talked about and constituted no criminal offense.

We had ample reasons for rehabilitation. It was ridiculous for a ruling Communist Party with an army of eight million and a police force of millions to treat four unarmed youths around the age of twenty that way.

Nevertheless, from the ruling Communist Party's point of view, we were traitors and heretics: some of them would say, "Look, unlike them, millions of good citizens died of hunger without rebelling during the three lean years!" We ate our fill and acted outrageously. We violated the Communist Party's principal taboo: we organized and founded a publication. That was exactly how the Communist Party got its start. We challenged the Communist Party's lifeblood—the dictatorship of the proletariat, which Deng Xiaoping re-named as one of the "four persistences." We thought that Socialism was but a dynastic change brought about

by peasant movement. We regarded Mao Zedong as the “First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty plus Stalin,” and we thought that his system was feudal and fascist in nature. No wonder Xie Fuzhi seized upon this matter and made a big issue of it. Were it not for our family backgrounds, we would have been treated much more harshly.

The issue is not good or evil. A Laogai camp is a place where good guys turn evil, including even public security agents who guard those institutions. Of the nearly one hundred cadres whom I had dealings with, a few had a human touch, and one was particularly amiable to me. Chadian police agents and he were in charge when I was escorted by train from Liangxiang to Chadian. He took me into the dining car, had a hearty chat with me, and said he would like to see me upon my release. However, the rest of the cadres I came into contact with were extremely hostile to me, and they had every reason to hate me—I was from Beijing, an intellectual, a counterrevolutionary (special counterrevolutionary at that), a lifer (before release), a life Jiuye inmate (after release), disobedient by nature. Interestingly, the better the few cadres treated me, the more fiercely I contradicted them. You know, the leopard can’t change his spots.

Briefly, I wish to also introduce the case of my grandfather, Zhang Dongsun. He used to be active in political and academic circles, but soon sank into oblivion. Recently he became an unearthed archeological relic. He was said to be a “veteran of three dynasties”: Japanese occupation, Nationalist (Kuomintang) and Communist rules. Political satire goes that the Nationalists did not allow people to speak up, while the Communists do not allow people not to speak up. Still, under the Nationalist rule many of his works were published, and he spoke a lot, but under the Communist rule he, trying to be as reticent as a fish, was thrown into Qincheng Prison, and died there nearly at the age of ninety. My father was incarcerated for eight years in the same Qincheng Prison, where he developed mental disease. Eventually he was released, but all his teeth were gone. We never mentioned “Qincheng” in his presence, for simply hearing that word would upset him. When in his fits, he would display dual personalities—the interrogator and the interrogated. It was a dreadful scene to watch. My two uncles and one aunt killed themselves during the Cultural Revolution, one of them due to persecution by Jiang Qing. I think my uncle would say Jiang Qing was her husband Mao Zedong’s scapegoat.

One can say that the Chinese people do enjoy 100% of constitutional rights. But the rights are for the people, not for “enemies,” and the demarcation line between the “people” and “enemies” is randomly determined by those in power. You did something not to the Communist Party’s liking? You are out! You have nothing to do with constitutional rights! That means you enjoy a slave’s freedom. You don’t want to be a slave? Then you have no slave’s freedom! And that is how excellent Mao Zedong’s people’s democratic dictatorship is!

WU FAN (CHRIS WU)

The devastation and suffering during the Great Leap Forward caused widespread disillusionment among many people formerly devoted to the Chinese Communist Party. Wu Fan was among those who reevaluated his beliefs during that time. His criticisms of CCP policy brought repeated denunciations, struggle sessions, and finally, during the 1970 movement to “deal blows at counterrevolutionaries and the three vices,” he was imprisoned. He spent nearly twelve years in the Laogai before his rehabilitation in 1979.

My original name is Wu Qianfan; my current name is Wu Fan. I grew up in Wenchang County, Hainan Island. I received elementary and secondary education in Shanghai and Haikou City in Hainan.

In late 1950, the Chinese Communist authorities waged the movement “to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea” throughout the whole nation. I was then fifteen. Full of youthful vigor and naivete, I thought that the Communist Party could save China. I applied and was admitted to the People’s Liberation Army School of Military Cadres. Upon graduation, I was appointed to serve in naval units in Hainan Island and Zhanjiang City. In April 1958, I was discharged from the navy and went to an army farm in Heilongjiang Province.

In 1959, I was admitted by Anhui Normal University, a branch of the Anhui Teachers College and the University of Southern Anhui, as a technician of the radio laboratory in the physics department. That same year I became a student in the physics department. I graduated in 1965.

From late 1959 to early 1961, millions of peasants died of hunger in Anhui Province’s rural areas. As a result of malnutrition, I developed general dropsy and was hospitalized. While in the hospital, I made the acquaintance of some rural area cadres, who told me about the shocking realities—people in rural areas were dying by the thousands. That broke my illusion about the Communist government. I began thinking about China’s social problems. Why was there such a tremendous gap between the mythical Communist paradise and the shocking realities? Why did the Communists, while talking loudly of a coming utopia, treat the people in their trust so horribly?

I began extensively reading the historical works on travels in foreign countries, philosophy, etc., in the hope of finding the truth about foreign society and acquiring a knowledge of social theory. I began questioning the “Three Red Banners” —the general Socialist Line, the Great Leap Forward, the people’s communes. In foreign countries, which were not guided by the “Three Red Banners,” people lived better than in China. I came to believe that people’s communes were established too early and improperly, that “making steel with local methods” lost more than gained, and that it was idealism for the Communist Party to demand that people open their heart to it, to encourage those who were “red” and to criticize those who were “white.”

In late 1964, the Communist Party began launching the “Four Clean-ups Movement” across the nation. Because of my previously-mentioned thoughts and ideas, I was the first to bear the brunt. I became a target in the physics department. I was criticized among teachers, staff members and students of the department as a “successor to bourgeois intellectuals.” They accused me of thinking only of how to be accepted but not how to be “red,” and of being a “reactionary-minded true son of the bourgeoisie.” I was rejected and thrown out of the Party. I was demoted and placed on probation within the youth league for one year.

In 1966, when the Cultural Revolution began, I said without reservation that the “Cultural” Revolution was actually a “martial” revolution; that the movement would make people refuse to have anything to do with their relatives and friends; that Mao Zedong was as cruel and despotic as the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty and the First Emperor of the Ming Dynasty, with Lin Biao and Jiang Qing as his accomplices; and that university campuses had become battlefields. For that, once again, I became the target, was severely criticized in big-character posters and was denounced in mass meetings. Unwilling to live as a second-class citizen in China, I decided to leave this dark and crazy country and find a way to pursue my studies in a foreign country.

On June 8, 1968, I was detained in Guangzhou. In October 1970, during the movement to “deal blows at counterrevolutionaries and three vices,” I was formally arrested. Because I was stubborn and refused to plead guilty at an open-trial rally of 100,000 people in Wuhu City, Anhui Province in 1971, I was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment as a counterrevolutionary on charges of “attempts to turn traitor and go over to the enemy,” “extreme reactionary mindedness,” and “attacks against the great leader Chairman Mao and the Central Committee of the Cultural Revolution.” After the rally, I was paraded through Wuhu City’s streets and humiliated.

In prison, in order not to let my brains ossify, I tried to read as much as I could. I read *Das Kapital*, *Selected Works by Marx and Engels*, and other works by Western philosophers, trying to find out the trends of social development. By chance, I was able to read *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. The book helped me see through the Chinese Communist Party. Actually, in essence the Chinese Communist Party was no different from Hitler’s National Socialist Workers’ (Nazi) Party. They even implemented the same means of rule. Only in prison, through reading, did I come to understand thoroughly the essence of Chinese society, and to see through the deceitfulness of the Chinese Communist Party.

In the cruel, inhumane environment, as I tried to survive, various people revealed their true colors before my eyes. Thus, I could better understand human beings’ virtues and vices, to explore the significance of life and the essence of ethics, and to strive for an ideal society. I read, I thought. As Bacon says, “First, you explore your inner wealth (wisdom), you will lack nothing else, you will need nothing else.” Wisdom could not give me physical freedom, but it delivered me from the vortex of agony. It made me independent and open-minded, it helped me watch the infinite universe more confidently and soar above the clouds.

In November 1979, after nearly twelve years in the Laogai, I was thoroughly rehabilitated and went back to work at the department of physics at Anhui Normal University. In July 1980, I came to the United States to pursue my studies at my own expense. From 1984 to 1987, I was a Master of Science student at the department of electronics and computer engineering at California State University, Los Angeles. In August 1987, I became senior electronics engineer at Xerox Corp’s microelectronic central laboratory.

YE GUORONG

Ye Guorong spent fifteen months in detention and five years in the Laogai on charges of entering Vietnam "with counterrevolutionary intentions." After undergoing four brutal interrogation sessions, he learned what he calls "the first lesson from behind the guard towers and electric fences — confession brings leniency, resistance brings severity."

One evening in late 1968, the security general from Vietnam took into custody a group of three men including myself and two others. We were detained at the border station on the Chinese side and then turned over to the Chinese border patrol. The Vietnamese authorities had placed us under arrest, and now we were waiting to see how China would deal with us. The three of us were all rather young; I was thirty, but the other two were in their twenties. One of them claimed to be peddling cattle, while the other was going to conduct some private business. I alone had been in Vietnam for personal reasons, having gone to visit relatives. I reasoned that these two men were economic criminals and had committed crimes, but they were both from the border region and after giving their surnames and addresses, they were both released. I had traveled alone over a long distance from the south of Wuhan. I was an intellectual, a cadre. How could the border patrol not release me?

They tied me up with a cord and a short time later the circulation in both my arms was cut off and both arms began turning black. In the evening a cadre came in and I told him my situation. I was born in Vietnam, my family members were all still there. I hadn't seen them for ten years. I had a niece in Hanoi who I wanted to see because I had never met her before. When the Vietnamese police discovered I had entered the county illegally, they escorted me back to China. The cadre asked if I had been to the Soviet Embassy. I said I had just come into the train station and was immediately taken into custody. I hadn't even met with my niece yet. What would I be doing going to the Soviet Embassy? I said I had already had nothing to eat for an entire day. I had traveled a long distance on foot. He said as long as I had not been to the Soviet Embassy, there would be no problem. He called someone to loosen the cords and gave me a bowl of noodles. I thought I was free to go, but then, they unexpectedly kept me in a cell and kept me there for ten days. I was amazed that they could treat me in such a manner!

The cell was very small—only about six square meters. There was nothing inside save a mat and a chamber pot. The door was hinged on wooden nails. There were about ten cells like this together in one building with other people being held in other rooms. There was a wall encircling the house. Besides the cook who came in twice every day to give out water and basic sustenance, no one moved about. Therefore, I knew nothing about how many people, or what kind of people were kept in the other cells. After about ten days had passed, two middle-aged men wearing uniforms, both about twenty years old, called me into a room for interrogation. The room was not large; there was a table, two chairs, and a stump, shaped like a drum one would harness to their waste. The two interrogators sat on the chairs behind the table and told me to sit on the stump. Later, I came across that kind of stump in other interrogation chambers. I guess it was used to ensure the safety of the interrogators. Some people who are interrogated become desperados on the road of poverty and nothingness. They may be reckless, and an ordinary chair could be used as a weapon. If there is only a stump, it's extremely heavy and smooth. A normal person cannot lift it. Maybe a particularly strong person could pick it up, but they still would not be able to throw it at anyone.

The two interrogators followed standard procedures, asking my surname, address, job, etc, and again, they asked me if I had gone to the Soviet Embassy. I gave a resolutely negative reply. On the second day I left the border station. Two guards were there ready to take a special trip to escort me back to Wuhan, where I would be placed under custody. They handcuffed me and watched me continuously. In the evening, they didn't sleep and watched me the entire night. They did not even allow me to close the door when using the toilet! We were on this train from Guangxi all the way to Wuhan. Even though this train had more cars than most at this time, in the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, it was still quite crowded. They asked me to lie down on a three-person bench so that they could keep track of me in spite of the chaos around us. A woman carrying a child was without a place to sit and saw me lying down. She said to me, "Comrade, could you let my child sit down?" She was immediately answered by one of the policemen who said, "This is no comrade!" My hands had been stuffed inside my sleeves. I took them out, revealing the handcuffs. The woman's face filled with shock as she walked away.

I was back again in Wuhan, my home of more than ten years. Again it was nighttime as I entered a small cell. One could see clearly inside the cell. It was about nine or ten square meters. There was a window opposite the door. The floor was made of cement. Leaning up against the wall, about half way to the window, was a bunk. There was iron mesh over the window to keep out dust and sand. The door planks were nailed from the outside, higher than a man's head, making it impossible for the people outside to see what was going on inside. People inside could only see outside if they were standing on top of the bunk. There was a small hole in the door. Outside the hole there was a cover. If one pushed the cover open, one could see what was going on inside. This was used by the guards during confessions and disciplinary actions. Six people slept on each bunk, but not all of the prisoners were able to lay down flat. Some had to lie on their sides for everyone to fit and be able to sleep. On the cement floor there was a footstool, also made of cement. After two days, I heard that about 1,000 police were to meet and inspect the detention center. This was the original reason that the holes had been drilled into the doors. Because the prison had an adequate water supply and footstools, it was considered the best in the city of Wuhan.

In the prison, everyone was called by a number according to which cell they were in. Prisoners were forbidden to use each other's first names. When a guard looked for a prisoner, or called them, it was with this number. For example, "XX room, number XXX, come out!" It was also strictly forbidden to talk in the cells concerning the situation of a fellow prisoner's case. To prevent criminals from discussing their cases and forming alliances or fabricating corresponding testimonies, the inmates were transferred often. Actually, there was really no use for this rule because it was impossible for them to transfer inmates everyday. In addition, with twenty-four hours of eating in the same cell, together confronting safety or danger, confronting the Chinese Communist Party, fellow cellmates got to know each other quickly. When a person comes in and out for even just a few days, the others will all get to know and understand him.

The First Interrogation:

The first time I was brought before the guards to confess, I had been in custody of Wuhan police for over a week. The guard called out my number and I entered a cell. The people who were interrogating me were the same two people from the border station. One was fat and the other skinny. The face of the fat man was harsh, angry, and devilish. I answered many of the same questions they had asked the last time I went through this. I also added further explanation—I had left my relatives ten years ago, and had no relatives with me inside China. In 1962, I received permission to take a leave of absence from work and travel to Vietnam. My passport was already issued, but then the Vietnamese visa was delayed so that by the time I received it, it had already expired. I had received leave from my workplace and still hadn't gone to Vietnam (I'm very

stupid, I still hold work as my highest priority). This can be checked for the record, I told them, this time was the second time I had prepared to take a vacation. Who would know in this second year, the situation would change again?

I knew it would be favorable for me to mention class struggle in my arguments. I began to say that I knew it was my rightist background that had had several negative consequences in my life. It had now made it impossible for me to visit my relatives, before I had been driven out of academia and this was reported even to the remote provinces of China. Now, in the time of the Cultural Revolution, there wasn't much work in factories. I had been employed at Wuhan Diesel Engine working as a statistics compiler. I said I wanted to take advantage of the lack of factory work to go visit my relatives. It was not my intention to enter Vietnam illegally. I wasn't the one who botched the travel documentation. "All I have said is the truth!" I said to the interrogators. I emphatically told them that I had only gone to see my relatives and that I had no intention of going to the Soviet Embassy. In the end, neither of the interrogators had anything to show for their efforts.

I returned to my cell at night time and everyone was very quiet. The light above our heads shone brightly. The entire night it was not turned off. It was very difficult for anyone to sleep except when we were exhausted. I constantly pondered, why had the police units at the detention center continued to ask the same question about the Soviet Embassy that I had been asked at the border station? Certainly there must have been other people who were on the road to the Embassy that day.

People of all kinds and sorts were being held in the detention center. The youngest was only about sixteen or seventeen years old and the oldest ones were over seventy. In my same cell there was a younger guy, maybe only sixteen years old, or seventeen. He lived in an impoverished community of "boat people" where all the families lived together in worn down boats tied together in the harbor. The boy was born on one of these boats. In the boat tied up beside the one where his family lived, there was a family that had a four year-old daughter. This little girl cried loudly and constantly. During a checkup, there was an injury found on her body that made people suspect she had been raped. Some people thought this young man had violated the little girl, and he was immediately arrested and brought in.

We began to discuss his case. Of course we spoke very quietly and paid close attention to the activity outside the door to make sure there was no one passing by and that there were no guards listening to us. These guards would work in two groups and made so much noise, we could hear them coming, so we knew when we couldn't have conversations. We still had to be careful though, because there were some guards who would immediately write up a report if they witnessed even the tiniest infraction.

We asked this guy, "Did you rape the little girl?"

He answered, "No, I didn't."

We asked, "Really? You say this honestly. Then why did you confess in front of the cadre that you did it?"

He answered, "They wanted me to admit it. They said if I admitted it, they would treat me with leniency and allow me to return home. If I didn't admit it and resisted, there would be severity. They've already kept me here for nine months. I don't know how much longer they plan to keep me. The cadres wanted me to strive to receive leniency, so I admitted it."

"You imbecile!" Sun Wanyuan said indignantly.

Sun Wanyuan was a forty-year-old guy who had just moved into our cell that night. He was an expert boxer. All the muscles on his body were well developed. He had said that many of the guards had seen his build and were both envious and admiring. Even in our extremely narrow prison cell, he would teach us Tai Chi boxing. The more healthy you are, the stronger your digestion, the more easily you will endure punishment. In the prison, everyone received the same ration of twenty-seven pounds of grain. Sometimes the older people and the sick people would not finish theirs, but then there was not enough for the younger healthier people. When Sun Wanyuan was unbearably hungry, he would just endlessly drink water and drink it until his face became swollen. He had never talked about his own case, why he was brought in or how long he'd been there. He liked to talk about eating, drinking, women, and how to eat Western food. There were a few good Western restaurants in Wuhan. He liked to hear about other people's cases and develop opinions on them, and talk about the just and noble conduct of criminals inside the prison.

He told us many interesting things. "There are some men," he would say, "who on the day just before their execution, will take the best jacket and other articles of clothing from off their backs and give them to a friend in need. There's also another sort of man who knows he may be executed at any time. As soon as a guard walks through the door, he may be seized by his hatred for the guard and begin hitting him, or even worse, the guards may fight back and hit him with a hammer!"

That evening, together with Sun Wanyuan, there was another older man imprisoned in the same cell with us. He was preparing to go to the execution chamber at any time. His name was Zhang Haisong. He was a bishop for Henan and Hubei Provinces. He had been incarcerated for the crime of "communicating with a foreign country." Bishop Zhang was a tall, large man who was dignified in his appearance even though he was more than seventy years old when he entered the prison. His back was a bit hunched, but he was still about 1.8 meters tall. In the morning and evening before he ate his meals he would close his eyes and pray. He didn't seem to care about the difficulties of others and constantly bragged of his own achievements. His father had been a vegetable farmer in the suburbs. He had studied at a religious school from the time he was a child. Once there was an earthquake at the school and all the children ran away. He was the only one who stayed in the room alone and prayed. For this he received much commendation. He had once preached in Nanjing and even traveled to America. He had been entertained at the mansion of a retired army general where he had seen many wild animal skins hanging on the wall. Whenever any foreign religious leaders come to visit China, he would take it upon himself to receive them as guests. His son and his niece were both professors at Hubei Medical University and so on, and so forth. Sadly, not only was he being held in the detention center, but his wife was also there.

With a history and a background such as his, the Chinese Communist Party had begun to watch him very early. When he was interrogated, the interrogators would have him look at mail that he had sent out to foreign countries. He would argue that they were all ordinary correspondence. He would say things like "This is injustice as profoundly deep as the ocean! Times of glory and joy are all long passed and now it is the time for husband and wife to be locked in a prison enduring torments!" The Chinese Communist Party not only detained him for sending letters to foreign countries, but also on the testimony of others. Even other pastors of the church had responded to the call of the government and exposed him for crimes of conspiring with imperialists. The testimony and material evidence against him was very complete. He could be taken before the firing squad at any time. Not even God could save him.

Especially before major holidays, the Party found it necessary to take several groups to the execution grounds. When soldiers in the firing squad prepare for a national holiday, they are like doctors of Chinese medicine mixing a prescription. The prescription of a Chinese doctor must contain certain necessary elements such as some of the Chinese angelica herb, some Fangdang seeds, and a little of the herbacious white peony. If any ingredient is missing, the prescription will be incomplete. The executioners likewise dictate a prescription based on politics. Their execution rallies must include traitors, spies, and capitalists. Bishop Zhang had communicated with foreign countries and conspired with imperialists. He was a suitable candidate to be counted as a spy. Long before each major holiday, he would begin his preparations for his time of execution. He would put on his most outstanding clothing and put all of his things in order. The night before, he would not sleep, but stay awake praying in preparation to "thankfully go to be with the Lord." The executioners always seemed to get those who they come for, and it brings a feeling of dirtiness that brings everyone down together. Bishop Zhang's nervousness around the major holidays would stir up everyone else's nervousness all the way up until the holiday finally passed. When we were not victims of the executioners, we would all heave a sigh of relief. Of course, there were always some less fortunate who could not escape the fate of death.

Reversing the Verdict

One day I told Sun Wanyuan that my case had something in common with the case of the boy from the boat people. "The interrogators also want me to admit to a crime. They want me to admit that I went to the Soviet Embassy, or that my purpose for going to Vietnam was to visit the Soviet Embassy. They say all I must do is admit this, and then I will be released. The second time I went to the interrogation chamber I responded to their demands. They made a recording and I signed a written confession. I admitted that I had the intention to go to the Soviet Embassy. Now what should I do?"

"Here is another imbecile!" Sun Wanyuan exclaimed.

"Do you really believe they will tell you what is good for you? Such naiveté! If you think that if you confess they'll immediately let you free, you're dreaming! The people handling the case just didn't want to have to defend you. They want to receive honors. If you admit that you went to Vietnam to apply for documents at the Soviet Embassy, it immediately appears that those handling the case took action to reveal the truth. They revealed an action of betraying the nation and defecting to the enemy. With this, it is enough for them to take you before the firing squad!"

After hearing what Sun Wanyuan said, I became very nervous. Before leaving for Vietnam, I remembered that someone told me that in the northern region of Vietnam, many people try to escape to Russia. Russia usually sends them back and then they are all sent before the firing squad. I thought about the interrogator from before, the one who was fat with atrocious features and a deep and angry voice. He really had no reason to be so fierce and malicious towards me. Perhaps he could not help himself. Then there was the skinny man with the fake smile who said he would help me and try to save me. I believed him and admitted that I had gone to Vietnam with the intention of going to the Soviet Embassy. I regretted that I had been deceived by his sweet talk and intimate language. But I had already admitted it and signed a confession, what was there to do? Sun Wanyuan said to me, "Don't be nervous, it's still early. Next time they ask you, say that they led you to make this confession, that it was entrapment. Say you admitted it only because they said you would be set free and in reality, even when you admitted it, they did nothing of the sort!"

The third time I went for interrogation, there were two strangers in the room instead of the two from before. Again, they asked all the same questions about all the events from start to finish. But this time, the conclusion was completely different. I admitted that I had gone to Vietnam, but for no other purpose than to visit the relatives that I had not seen for ten years. As for why I had admitted last time that I had gone with the intention of going to the Soviet Embassy, this was because the interrogators told me that if I admitted it, they would let me go. These two new interrogators looked a bit surprised, but they did not seem worried, and left soon afterwards.

When I was interrogated for the fourth time, they once again brought the two people from my period of custody at the border station. When they heard of the reversal of the verdict they flew into a rage because I had not acted according to their aspirations from my previous written and oral confessions. They left their chairs, twisted my hands against each other, bound them behind my back, and strung them up above my head in the infamous position of "flying the plane." They kicked me with their feet. But I already understood their true intentions and I was not moved by the torture. They raised my hands higher and higher behind my back till I could hardly endure it any longer. Finally, it was making them tired as well to constantly inflict suffering upon me for such a long time and in the end, they hatefully walked away.

For a long time after that, no one came to interrogate me. Inside my cell, I grew irritated from hunger. I spent a lot of time doing nothing but waiting for food. There was very little rice because all the crops from the fields had been bought up to the last crumbs and remnants. For all the inmates, the cook who brought us our food became like a master bringing forage for animals—in reality we were treated like beasts. Still, we hoped he would come sooner with this forage to fill our stomachs. Every morning when the sun was coming up, the shadows from the eaves on the roof were all flat. As the sun continued to rise, these shadows would gradually drop lower on the walls. When the shadows reached down to the seventh row of bricks in the wall of the cellblock, it was noon. Lunch would be coming soon and we would receive some slight temporary alleviation of our hunger.

I was at the detention center for fifteen months all together until I was tried and sentenced to five years. The judgement was passed according to the policy of "repressing the counterrevolutionary." For criminal charges of entering Vietnam with counterrevolutionary intentions, I received a five-year sentence.

After leaving the detention center, I was escorted into custody at Hebei Number One Prison. Not long afterwards, a young criminal came in by the name of Ceng Shouzhi. He had been a good son at home and a good student in school, but in society he was a chief hooligan. He appeared to be quite familiar with my case. He said that experienced government officials had discussed my case and that they were ready to send me to be executed. I felt helpless, unable to save myself, but in the end the execution was never carried out. No one knows why. I suddenly came to realize that if I hadn't reversed the confession during my third round of interrogations, lifting the crime of betraying the nation and defecting to the enemy, I would certainly no longer be alive. There would have been no hope for survival, especially since I still carried the label of a rightist.

The propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party says to ask for instructions first and then make your reports. Before you eat, you should dance the dance of loyalty to the Party. Did you give your praises to the bright and shining savior Mao Zedong? Do you revere the Communist Party and all of their ways? You hear these demands, and all the while you know you have a thousand reasons to damn them, curse them, hate them! While countless people raise their copies of the *Little Red Book* and shout "Long live the Party!,"

“10,000 years to the Party!” you must store your thoughts and sentiments deep inside your heart and cannot say them aloud. Otherwise, the soldiers will be waiting with their slogans and regulations. They will be out to get you to humiliate you and drag you through the streets.

TASHI PALDON

Tashi Paldon faced repeated hardships because of the violent nature of the Chinese occupation of Tibet. She spent fifteen years in the Laogai in Tibet for charges of having helped her brother in his attempt to escape Tibet. After the relaxation of certain regulations during her sentence, she taught Tibetan to fellow prisoners in an attempt to preserve Tibetan culture.

My name is Tashi Paldon and I was born in Tibet. I went to Narongshar school in Lhasa. In 1959, my education came to an end when my father, a Tibetan government official, was arrested. He spent twenty years in a Chinese prison. He was tortured and was in leg irons and handcuffs for many years. He died never having regained his health.

My mother, brother, sister and myself were forced out of our house. Being the eldest child, I went with my mother to work on dam and building construction. At that time, there was always unpaid forced labour, which we would be called to do day or night and these would be made especially difficult or unnecessary just to punish us. As a result of constant public humiliations and purges my mother became bed ridden. She died later because of the harsh treatment.

Then my brother was arrested when he was around sixteen for his attempt to escape to India. He was routinely tortured and beaten until his execution at age eighteen.

I was accused of advising my brother to escape from Tibet and was arrested on July 13, 1970. My interrogation lasted four months. In October of that year, there was a change in the prison policy saying that every third prisoner was to be tortured and executed. My interrogation stopped suddenly and I was sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor at Drapchi prison camp. Everyday, other women prisoners and I were forced to work sixteen to seventeen hours a day. We made bricks and carried rocks on our backs during the day, and attended meetings and reform studies from sun down to 11:00. From 11:00 until 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. in the morning we were forced to make woolen yarn. A few years before my release the policy in the prison became more relaxed and I taught Tibetan reading and writing to fellow prisoners during my spare time.

I was released on July 13, 1985 and I left for India soon after. My daughter and I came to Salt Lake City two years ago. I work as a dishwasher at the University and my fourteen-year-old daughter goes to school.

Although I have lost my youth and health as a result of many years of hard labor and poor food, I am lucky to be alive and to have this opportunity to speak. Countless numbers of women have lost their lives through torture and execution or silent killing (this term is used when prisoners disappear after their arrest). Thousands are still in prisons today and going through even more terrible gender specific tortures.

Please help end this horror now.

PENG JIPAN (JAMES PENG)

During the Cultural Revolution, many Chinese citizens were forced to migrate to rural areas in an attempt to close the gap between classes. Faced with stringent travel and labor restrictions, many of these migrants were unable to apply for work, or receive food and schooling. Peng Jipan and others led a protest in the capital of Yunnan Province calling for the government to remedy this predicament. The authorities responded by arresting Peng among others. He served five years in Reeducation Through Labor for "counterrevolutionary activities."

On March 10, 1975, the Intermediate People's Court of Kunming City, Yunnan Province sentenced me to an eight-year imprisonment on charges of "active counterrevolutionary organization." I was escorted to Dongshan Coal Mine attached to No. 44 Prison, Qujing District, Yunnan Province. In 1979, during the movement to redress wrong cases, my sentence was commuted from eight to five years, and the nature of my case was changed from active counter-revolutionary to common criminal. I should have served from March 10, 1975 to March 10, 1983, but instead I was released on March 10, 1980.

My family was ruined while I was serving my sentence. After I left prison, I had no home to return to. I contemplated leaving the country. In 1981, I arrived in Thailand via Burma, then, in 1984, I arrived in Taiwan. In late 1985, I came to the United States.

The following is a short description of my "counterrevolutionary activities":

During the Cultural Revolution, in accordance with Mao Zedong and Lin Biao's instruction "Prepare for war, prepare for lean years, get ready for war," the movement to rectify class ranks was sweeping the whole nation. Nine categories and twenty-three kinds of persons were sent to rural areas in Yunnan Province, to be reformed under the supervision of the poor and lower-middle peasants. Most of them were the elderly and minors who could not make a living with their labor. They became a burden for Yunnan peasants and were greatly discriminated against. Thus, like refugees, they went back to Kunming City, had no residence permits, no ration cards, no jobs. Kids could not go to school. Seniors and young kids had to beg in the streets, and young girls became prostitutes. The dead could not be cremated, as they had no residence. Years of such a vagrant life drove those people to the limits of their endurance.

Hundreds of thousands of them took the street, demonstrating with their children, carrying their dead. They sat in front of the building of the provincial Communist Party committee in Kunming, requesting that the authorities give them the right to survive.

I joined with a few others outraged by such injustice to represent these people in talks with the authorities. We wrote the "Open Letter To Kunming City Party Committee and Yunnan Province Party Committee," "Beggars' Rebel," "First Decent Meal In Years," as well as other big-character posters, and posted them in the streets in the hope that the authorities would take the people's plight into consideration and grant these people the right of existence in the form of residence permits. We enjoyed people's sympathy and support. But, instead of implementing relevant policies, the authorities dispatched troops and policemen to suppress the people's justified demands.

Thousands of people sitting in front of the building of the Provincial Communist Party Committee in Kunming were arrested. A few others and I were termed “ active counterrevolutionary organizers” and sentenced to prison terms. More than one hundred were sentenced to Reeducation through Labor and thousands were sent to rural areas to labor under supervision.

GAO HAN

Gao Han spent over six years in prison. In his testimony, he recounts his experiences of torture and starvation during eighteen months in a county detention center. To this day, detention centers are the sites of some of the worse abuses in the Chinese prison system.

I have been imprisoned two times because of my status as an “active counterrevolutionary criminal.” The first time was in 1975 and the other in 1977. In the latter instance, because I resolutely refused to admit my guilt or expose others as guilty, I was sentenced to eighteen years. I stayed in three different Laogai camps in Sichuan Province: Sichuan Provincial Number Three Prison (outside alias: New Life Auto Assembly Plant), Sichuan Provincial Number Four Prison (outside alias: Sichuan Southern Brook Flax Spinning Factory) and Sichuan Xingwen Laogai Brigade (outside alias: Sichuan Xingwen Sulfur Factory).

Many of my friends know that I once wrote some drafts of political and philosophical theory, but there is almost no one who knows that I was once imprisoned in China, or of the hardships and suffering that I endured there. Truly, this is the worst sort of torment existing among men on Earth. I don't even want to talk to my wife about all the sorts and types of savage torture that I endured while in prison! Yesterday, there was a young reporter who questioned me and said that she regrets and does not understand why so many people who have been in prison are rather unwilling to talk about their days of incarceration. My opinion is that it is because of these things, these memories in the depths of my heart where they bleed and tears fall. These are things are unfitting to simply bring up at any time or place. Today at this solemn meeting of Laogai survivors who have traveled here from all over the world, I want to briefly disclose my experiences in prison, to stand in denouncement and bear witness to the fascist and autocratic power of the Chinese Communist Party.

Past Experiences That I Dread To Look Back Upon

Everyone please look here at my wrists. On each one of them there is a long and deep scar. This is the evidence of the crimes of ruthless punishment that the Chinese Communist Party inflicts upon political prisoners. From 1977 to 1978, I was kept in custody for eighteen months in Sichuan's Da County Detention Center. I constantly refused to admit my guilt and resolutely refused to cooperate with the authorities and expose others, so the Chinese Communists immediately attacked my “stubborn attitude,” and punished me. One day in the summer of 1977, I was called to a high wall opposite the prison cell. Two of the guards brought out a thin rope made of flax that had been dipped in water. They removed my shirt and bound up my hands and my wrists together. It took the limit of their strength to tie me up in this way. Then they pushed me into the sunlight and it was shining down upon me torturously. The rope was bound very tightly and it was so hot and coarse that as the rope dried, it shrank and contracted. It is said that anyone who endures this torture for more than half an hour will surely become permanently injured. In this half hour, the pain was so extreme and so severe that I moaned constantly. I could not stand up straight, I could not sit down, I could not slouch over. I stood like this endlessly in the sun, swaying from side to side, endlessly groaning in pain. I struggled, sweat dripping like pouring rain all over my body. The warden of the Da County Detention Center, nicknamed “Horse Face,” and a few other military police were sitting on the side in a shady spot waiving their fans while they looked on with satisfaction, enjoying my hardship. After a half hour had passed, because they did not want me to become permanently injured, one of the military police

approached me. First he untied the ropes on my neck and back and then with flying speed, then he ripped the ropes around tearing them off of my hands from where they had already embedded themselves in my skin. At that moment, from the spots where the rope had been bound to my arms, the blood gushed out as if it had simply skipped over the blood vessels. That sort of pain leaves a deeply ingrained inscription on one's heart. The pain of this one instant greatly exceeded the time I had spent bound up in the sun. At the moment the ropes were loosened, I saw the deep impressions from the ropes that remained engraved in my arms and I turned as white as snow. To this day I still clearly remember the state of shock that I felt as I saw my own skin being ripped off and the blood streaming forth.

However, even though for the moment they had removed the ropes, the punishment was not yet over. "Horse Face" brought out a pair of old fashioned handcuffs and began to handcuff me. These handcuffs were very tight. I was pushed onto the ground and with their feet, they stomped and trampled upon my wrists, forcing the handcuffs to lock tighter around my wrists. These were not the ordinary handcuffs; these were the type that we prisoners referred to as the "di kao" handcuffs. They consist of two semi-circles that come together into a circle using two plugs. These "di kao" handcuffs don't just limit a prisoners' freedom—their function is to inflict pain. They were purely and genuinely a tool of torture. These cuffs were tightened when someone used their feet to stomp on the plugs and force them through the openings, locking the bolts in place. The longest time period for this type of handcuffs is three days. After three days, then a person's hands and wrists can become permanently crippled. As for the half hour of being tied up that I just spoke about and the 72 hours of punishment wearing the handcuffs, I'm afraid that there are many criminals who would have been permanently maimed, and their hands amputated!

After I had been handcuffed, I was pushed into a prison cell. In the 72 hours that I wore the handcuffs, all of the other criminals came into the cell only to sleep; the rest of the time they were out laboring. However, I was constantly moaning in pain and pacing back and fourth in the cramped cell, feeling like an ant in a hotpot. If I stood up I wanted to sit down, if I sat down I wanted to stand up. Due to the extreme tightness of these handcuffs, after about four or five hours my hands began to swell. After one day, my fingers gradually began turning black and it looked like I was wearing a set of black and red boxing gloves. At that time, the part of my wrists that was in contact with the handcuffs began to break out in ulcers. Also, a few green-headed flies seized the opportunity to jointly attack me. They stayed beside me and would not leave. In these three days and nights, there was no way I could sleep. It was only on the second day, when I was tired of pacing and tired of moaning, I suddenly stumbled as I began to nod off. But I immediately regained consciousness and was again in pain. Therefore I was continually pacing and constantly moaning in pain. During these 72 hours, a day was truly like a year to me. Each and every second, I was in extreme pain and suffering. In those moments and only in those moments, did I truly come to experience a taste of hell.

In the prisons of the Chinese Communist Party, it is an out and out hell for all people inside. After the three days, the handcuffs were taken off of me, but the sores on my wrists continued to fester and they constantly streamed out smelling with vile puss. Both of my hands remained swollen. Because the detention center officials refused to give me medicine the flies continued to swarm about, and after about a week, maggots suddenly began to crawl out from the wounds on both of my wrists. In certain spots, my bones began to show through. It was only at that point that the prison hospital applied a Chinese herbal medication and gave me a few doses of antibiotics. It was another three months until the ulcers slowly began to heal. However, the wounds left these scars that I will carry for the rest of my life. It also left behind shame and humiliation from being a political prisoner held under the autocratic power of the Chinese Communist Party.

This all occurred before I was formally tried and sentenced. Even though I eventually gave in and lowered my head, admitting my guilt and turning in others, I still was subject to all these cruel punishments. As for the struggle sessions that I endured, some were broadcast to all the factories and production teams. Notices of these sessions, threatening that I would receive the death penalty, were posted on billboards to demonstrate the strength of the Party the masses. On and on I endured all such cruelties! I don't even want to discuss the details!

In January of 1978, I was sentenced to eighteen years. Still, after receiving this specified term of imprisonment, I remained in custody at the detention center. In our cell, the majority of prisoners had already been tried and sentenced. Often months would go by and no one would be sent to trial. Instead, we would sit inside the detention center, with no paper, no pens, no newspapers. Usually once a week we would receive a week old copy of the Sichuan Daily Paper. In this state of mind, spent in silence and in wasting time, how difficult it was to endure! To pass the time, I began studying English and mathematics with a fellow sufferer in the prison who was a technical engineer. I would grind down the soap until it was smooth and shiny, and then use a needle to carve vocabulary words on it and to work math problems on it. After I had written something down, I would use my finger to wipe it off and then I could write on it again. I did not realize that this would be seen as a grave violation of prison regulations. According to the prison regulations, one was not permitted to do things that were not concerned with the recognition of one's guilt. When criminals are kept in the detention center, prior to their trial, all they should do is activities having to do with recognition of one's guilt. After they have been tried and sentenced, then activities should all have to do with the remaining crimes and reporting the crimes of others. One day, the prison police suddenly opened the window to check in and keep watch, and at that moment I was carving vocabulary words onto the surface of a steamed bun. I reacted one or two seconds too late, and so I was caught and had to undergo "correction and rectification." I had just been doing something that had entirely nothing to do with admitting my guilt of turning in others. For my offense, I was again dragged out and my hands were tied up and put in handcuffs. This time they also added twenty-five kilogram shackles (fifty-five pounds) to my feet. The handcuffs that they chose for me were slightly looser than the ones I had been forced to wear before. Again it was the guard called "Horse Face" who put on the handcuffs as he spoke in his nasal voice. "I see that you desire to turn the prison of the proletariat dictatorship into a school," he said over and over again. "I see that you desire to turn the prison of the proletariat dictatorship into a school!"

This time when I endured punishment, I was unable to move my legs and I could only sit and moan in pain. But when wearing handcuffs, no matter where you sit, you must always remain hunched over at the waist so your hands will not come into contact with anything. Finally, my best alternative was to sit on top of the toilet cover, and place both my handcuffed hands in the gap between the circular mould of the toilet and the corner of the cell wall, only in this way could I straighten up my body while sitting. If there was someone who needed to use the toilet, then I had to drag myself upright while still wearing the heavy shackles. In those three days I sat there on the toilet and dozed a few times. However, in those three days, every day during the five-minute period of exercise, it took four criminals to help me get up and move around. It was as if they were carrying around an animal. They had to lift me on and off the toilet, and of course there was always some unfortunate person who had to help me to relieve myself. It goes without saying that I also needed help eating. But with the degree of hunger and starvation in the prisons, how could I be expected to wait for others to come and feed me while I gazed on helplessly as they ate? I would simply ask another inmate to dish out my vegetables onto a plate and place it on the edge of the brick bed, and then I would squat down like a pig and lap up the food into my mouth like a dog. Even though my entire face and mouth would become covered with bits of food and soup, only at the end of the meal when there was just a small amount left over would someone come to help me put the last few spoonfuls into my mouth.

Friends, I don't want you to think that before when I spoke of being tied up, that the use of handcuffs is the most severe form of punishment and torture used in the prisons of the Chinese Communist Party. There was almost no one inside Sichuan's Da County Detention Center who had not endured the punishment of handcuffs and of being strung up. Actually, in the eyes of the prisoners, the most painful form of punishment, the punishment that greatly surpasses all other cruelties of the detention center, was that of "starvation punishment." This is the type of hunger that deeply ingrains itself into one's soul, the type that puts you on the verge of death and on the brink of chaos. Only when a person's body has experienced it and truly met the breaking point, can one know of such painfully slow and agonizing torture. It could be said that this type of torment by far surpasses all other physical punishments. In the Detention Center, there were many death row criminals whose one last wish was to eat a full meal before their sentence was carried out. In this kind of terrible and empty existence, their only desire was for one mouthful of soup. Often prisoners would search through pig droppings to pick out the small undigested chunks of vegetables. People would even fight over them and sometimes people would die in these fights. Sometimes, as a punishment for fighting, sentences were extended or people would be executed. It was even said that when some prisoners were finally released and returned home, their anxiousness would cause them to eat too suddenly and violently, and they would die because their stomachs were no longer accustomed to digesting food. This demonstrates the darkness and the ruthlessness that exists in the prisons of the Chinese Communist system.

From "Under the Red Flag"

I was born into a newsman's household. In the 1940s, my father was a journalist in a celebrated publishing house. It was said that this publishing house was once a secret headquarters of the underground Communist Party. But to this day I do not know what my father's voice sounds like, or how his smile looks, or whether he is dead or alive. I was born in 1951. In the words of the Communists, in this period it was as if I was "born into the new society and under the red flag." But in the spring of 1952 when I was only half a year old, my father was arrested and sentenced to fifteen years and sent to a Laogai camp in Xinjiang Province. He was charged as a "historical counterrevolutionary," and from that time on, we received no letters from him.

In order to "draw a clear line of separation" from my father, my mother divorced him and I took my mother's surname. From the time I was first able to comprehend, I was required to "draw a clear line of separation" from my father whom I had never met. I was to hate my own father, to curse my own father. Even though at the time I truly believed those things and I truly did those things, still my crime of "counterrevolutionary family background" remained. No matter how I tried to atone for my "sins" there was still no way I could redeem myself.

In 1964, the Communist Party tightened their control, greatly stressing class status and the political line. This was when I was about to graduate from elementary school. I often got the highest grades in school, wrote the best essays and even had the highest scores in my school district for dictation of model essays. Still, that year as I graduated from elementary school, I was unexpectedly denied permission to take the entrance examination for middle school. On August 3, 1964, I saw the guys who had once copied my homework all happily and freely enter the gates of the middle school, yet I myself was not allowed to go. I felt horribly ashamed. In my humiliation, I decided to leave home and go to the countryside. At that time I was only thirteen years old. In reality, I had not yet come of age, but I spent that year, when I was in the "youth of my knowledge," passing myself off as a man.

I spent eight years in the countryside. Even when I had to perform strenuous manual labor, I still would not abandon my studies. Under a kerosene lamp in the Paba Mountain District, I don't know how, but I gradually became fascinated with philosophical studies. Bit by bit, I carefully read volume after volume and work after work. During the Cultural Revolution, all of the other young people returned to the cities and there was nothing for me to do on the tree farm in the countryside. Because of the "campaign against the four olds," I spent my days trying to hide or disguise any kind of journal of literary and scientific studies that entered the production team headquarters, wrapping them in brown paper, so that they would not be confiscated by the authorities.

Both before and after my imprisonment, I had published essays in many university journals. In 1983, after I was released from prison, many professors from those universities encouraged me to participate in the yearly entrance examinations for graduate school. However, despite the fact that I had been rehabilitated and "pronounced without sin," this was still followed by the declaration that "this criminal has committed serious political mistakes." For this reason, in 1984 when I attempted to take the entrance examination for graduate school (at that time I was 33 years old, so I had exceeded the age limit for taking the undergraduate examinations), I was disqualified and the graduate school at the Chinese Teachers College rejected my certification papers. Because of political discrimination, I was once again denied my right to receive an education.

All you readers of my essay, I believe there may be many of you that may be surprised that even today I still have only an elementary school education. Some may say that today I should feel ashamed that due to my own "family background" and inferiority, I have failed in my education. Well then, I will say that it was Gao Han's very own motherland that made it so he would have only an elementary school education and it is this political system that should feel ashamed. As long as Gao Han's pen continuously writes and his writings continuously have readers, then the shame and humiliation of the autocratic system of the Chinese Communist Party can only increase with every passing day. There was once a French philosopher who said "Catastrophe possesses eternal value; it is the unfortunate source of great strength." Last year, a doctoral student who read one of my manuscripts on political theory wrote me a letter addressing me as "Professor Gao." I answered him, "Don't flatter me so, I only have an elementary school education." But he still persisted in addressing me in this manner. In 1985, I was invited to give lectures on philosophy and political economy at a university in Beijing. In 1994, the department of political science at the University of Central Europe in Budapest approved and recognized my "educational equivalency" at the graduate level. They required only that I improve my scores on the TOEFL Examination (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and then I could receive a diploma. Even today I am still studying English, I am still preparing to take the TOEFL examination and I still have a dream of attending college. I even still hope that one day I may return to a democratically governed China to attend college!

Friends, the miseries that each one of us has endured individually are all simply a microcosm of what has been endured in every household across China. The exceedingly cruel persecution of China's people at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party is a disgrace to humanity today. It embodies a crime committed against all humanity. Because of this, it is my hope that all humanity will begin to pay attention to the misery of the Chinese people. It is my hope that all humanity will begin to listen to the voices of political prisoners, thought criminals, prisoners of conscience, and those who are imprisoned for religious reasons, and to take notice of the miseries that each one of them endures.

For this reason, I propose the establishment of a museum of the cruel tortures of the Chinese Communist

Party, including collections of every written record, every photograph, and other pieces of information from every case. This memorial would stand to forever preserve the autocratic power of the Chinese Communist Party on the most shameful page of the world's historical record books. We do this not in retaliation, but as a mark of disgrace and to serve as a warning. We strongly maintain that the Chinese Communist Party must be punished according to the law, for their crimes against humanity, and we look to the future when it may become possible for a truly democratic Chinese government to implement a process to put this history on trial. I also resolutely oppose using methods of resentment and animosity against the autocratic authorities of the Chinese Communist Party, or the use of cruel torture in retaliation. These crimes against humanity that they have committed ought to be replaced by a respect for human rights, not just for the few, but even for the most hardened criminal. Otherwise it is not only a loss in the cause of historical justice and historical progress, it is also the miseries that all our generations have endured and the crimson blood shed that will continue to flow in payment towards the east.

I thank you all.

WANG XIZHE

One of the major actors in the 1979 Democracy Wall movement, Wang Xizhe describes, from first-hand experience, the trial process for those charged with political crimes. What invariably greets them is a Kafka-esque farce, full of violation of the Chinese constitution itself and completely lacking in due process. Wang spent fifteen years in reeducation through labor.

Based on my experiences as a political prisoner under the Chinese Communist regime's rule, I would like to describe how the Chinese government unjustly, defying human and divine laws, treats political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in judicial facilities and prisons.

I was three times jailed, for a total duration of fifteen years. To date, I am still a prisoner of the Chinese authorities. In 1981, the Communist authorities deprived me of my political rights for a period until this coming December, i.e., the last days of this century. So, according to Chinese law, the fact itself that I am talking here today is a criminal act. But, I totally ignore the Chinese law. I will still speak.

In the past, the Chinese Communist authorities labeled all actions by political opponents as "counter-revolutionary crimes." Now, the same actions are labeled as "crimes of subverting state power." The label has changed, but not the essence. In the courts of Communist China, prosecution of "crimes" against the Communist rule transcends punishment for all other crimes. "Counterrevolutionary crimes" are heavily punished, and the punishment is accompanied by various illegal persecutions.

The first step of the judicial procedure is detention. Detention itself is a punishment. According to Chinese law, the duration of detention is generally fifteen days, and cannot be extended over one month. But, in practice, judicial personnel can lengthen the duration of detention as they please. For instance, in 1977, I was thrown into jail for the "Li-Yi-Zhe Big Character Poster," and was detained for two full years until I was released in 1979. [Ed's note: The Li-Yi-Zhe poster was a collection of manifestoes posted on a stretch of city wall in Guangdong in 1974. The poster spoke against the distortions of socialism that were leading to corruption, and the tyranny over the masses by a small group of Communist Party members.]

Mr. Liu Qing, a dissident much more prominent than I am, was detained in early 1979 for publishing the "April 5th Tribune," whose goal was to expose the truth of the Wei Jingsheng trial. He was not released until more than one year later. Many dissidents and intellectuals who were critical of unlawful extension of duration of detention were persecuted, even jailed, including me; one of my "crimes" being opposition to the infinite detention of Liu Qing.

Next comes interrogation. In the process of interrogation, instead of presuming that a political dissident is innocent, they do everything in their power to presume that the dissident is "guilty," concocting all possible false materials and evidence. For instance, they extracted sentences from my different articles, then pieced them together, and guided by their presumption that I was "guilty," interpreted my actions as "instigating" and "subversive." Thus, it was presumed that I was guilty of "counterrevolutionary propaganda and agitation."

For an additional example, in June 1980, in a hotel located in Ganjiakou, Beijing, I spoke with Mr. Xu Wenli simply about the possibility of establishing a political party. Then, the Chinese Communist authorities used a certain Mr. Liu as a “witness” to provide fraudulent evidence that we were actually already establishing a political party. We were not allowed to confront him. It was thus established that Mr. Xu Wenli and I were establishing a political party. I must note that, according to Chinese law as it is written, it would not be a crime even if we actually did so.

In regards to defense, the authorities did not allow us to hire lawyers we trusted (mention should be made that in mainland China few lawyers dare to represent political prisoners). The lawyers are appointed by the authorities. Instead of preserving defendants’ interests, they work hand-in-glove with the authorities to try to frame defendants. My so-called defense lawyer, Chen Jianwen, was one such lawyer. At the court, I denied that he represented me.

Courts do not allow political prisoners to thoroughly defend themselves. For instance, Justice Zhang Rui (now president of the Guangzhou Intermediate People’s Court) repeatedly interrupted my defense speech “Let History Be the Procurator, Let the People Be the Judge.” Finally, using the pretext that I was “instigating,” he prohibited me to further defend myself.

The notion of “open trial” is a sham. In my case, the court did not announce the beginning of the trial to the public, nor to the members of my family. As a result, my relatives and friends could not attend the trial and know the truth. Those seated in the “public” gallery were actually appointed by the authorities. There were perhaps one or two reporters, but they are also appointed by officials. Their duty was to report to their superiors, not to tell the public the truth.

Finally comes the verdict. Prior to any trial, the verdict has already been decided by the judge’s superiors. For instance, I was sentenced to fourteen years for the “Democracy Wall Case,” but neither the verdict nor the judge provided an explanation as to the basis for that sentence.

Servitude comes right after the verdict. Political prisoners are subject to more inhumane treatment than common criminals. Prison authorities wantonly deprive political prisoners’ right of family visit. Family members are not allowed to send food to prisoners, and the prisoners are constantly in a state of extreme hunger.

Jailers arbitrarily put political prisoners in the “prison within prison”: solitary confinement cells. With no newspapers, no books, and no contact with other people, solitary confinement for extended periods does irreparable damage to the prisoners’ mental well-being.

Political prisoners are placed among criminals, who constantly control, bully and oppress them. And they are made to do the heaviest jobs.

Hunger. Cold. Intense heat. Thirst. Filth. Instruments of torture. Diseases.

Even after protracted sentences expire, as “released counterrevolutionaries,” political prisoners are subject to discrimination in society. They cannot find jobs, cannot make a living. In my case, after I was released in 1999, policemen would throw a monkey wrench into whatever commercial activities I was engaged in. I was not allowed to establish a company and be its manager, not even be hired by another company as manager,

the reason being that I was deprived of political rights.

Certain people might say: "That's history. China has changed. Nobody's subject to such persecution anymore."

That is simply a lie. The Chinese Communist authorities' nature remains unchanged. They might gloss over certain aspects, but they are never merciful in suppressing and persecuting all those who dare challenge their despotic rule. Just recently, they jailed a large number of pro-democracy activists who established a political party in accordance with the United Nations' International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, and the spirit of the Chinese constitution itself. Xu Wenli, Qin Yongming, Wang Youcai, Cha Jianguo, Gao Hongming, Liu Xianbin and others are being subject to more cruel persecution than I experienced.

All people the world over with a conscience should take care to support them, try to obtain their release, and make China a humane, democratic and bright country where no political persecutions exist.

LIN MUCHEN

The Laogai has been a constant presence in Lin Muchen's life. His father was a Kuomintang officer, and so was persecuted and imprisoned after the Communist victory. Because of his father's affiliation, Lin was labeled as belonging to one of the "five black categories," a veritable untouchable caste in Mao's China. For this he was repeatedly detained. In 1968, his work unit warned him that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was hanging over his head like a Damocles Sword. In 1981, that sword finally came down, and Lin Muchen was sentenced to four years in Reeducation through Labor for his participation in the 1979 Democracy Wall movement.

My father was a Kuomintang army officer. In 1949, leading his troops, he crossed over to the Communist side. Nevertheless, he was sentenced to imprisonment. After he served his sentence, public security agents sent him to a Reeducation through Labor camp under the pretext of "job placement." Thus, he spent a total of thirty years in Reform through Labor and Reeducation through Labor camps. Spiritually, he became a walking corpse.

Since my early childhood, my father's sufferings made me realize what Reform through Labor and Reeducation through Labor meant. Perhaps the biggest difference between the two is that the former has a time limit, while the latter has none. Prisoners were all directly sent to Reeducation through Labor by the "people's government" without a judicial procedure, because they either did not have a job, were "street urchins," or lived a problematic lifestyle. I have made the acquaintances of several people who became "forced job placement employees" of the same Reeducation through Labor farms. They would remain on Reeducation through Labor farms for the rest of their lives.

Those sentenced to Reform through Labor and Reeducation through Labor are forced to labor under horrible conditions. Sometimes, labor goes beyond physical endurance. There is no labor safety gear. While laboring in a stone quarry, my father's lumbar vertebra was damaged and he nearly died. Additionally, the food provided to the prisoners is meager in quantity and quality. When I used to visit my father on his Reeducation through Labor farm, I watched how they went to fetch meals with their washbasins. When they came back, what I saw was a little bit of pumpkin and thin rice gruel that hardly covered the bottom of their washbasins. Some prisoners moved around slowly, without a trace of vitality, their whole body swollen from extremely severe hunger.

During the years of the Great Leap Forward, people all over the nation were starving. More than thirty million died of unnatural causes. You can imagine the plight of those in Reform through Labor and Reeducation through Labor. They were even closer to dying from hunger. It was a desperate period of terror.

The Chinese Communist authorities' Reform through Labor and Reeducation through Labor policies also caused many hardships for the prisoners' families. I once knew a girl about my age whose mother had to sell her blood to keep the whole family alive. Because her father had accidentally lost his account book, he had been sent to Laogai as an economic criminal. The girl became withdrawn and habitually avoided people.

I was in a similar situation. Ever since I was a young child, I was isolated from others because my father was deemed a "reactionary army officer," and "labor-reform prisoner." The parents of my schoolmates

ordered them to stay away from me. At times I was bullied and beaten at school. When I was in the fifth grade in elementary school, a substitute teacher accused me of plagiarism in a composition. I protested, and he hit my head against the wall. The principal came and instead of upholding justice, he asked me whether my “reactionary” conduct was the result of my family’s instigation. In the end, he gave me a disciplinary warning.

In mainland China, authorities officially defined a large number of untouchables under the “Five Black Categories.” Those who were defined as evil under the “Five Black Categories” were deprived of all human rights. During the Cultural Revolution, persecution of children of the “five black categories” by children of the “five red categories” became the most savage and most horrible persecution a whole generation has ever suffered. [Ed.’s note: “Blacks” were children with parents classified as landlords, rich parents, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists; “reds” were those from families of workers, peasants, revolutionary officials, revolutionary officers and revolutionary martyrs.] The campaign of abuse also seriously deformed the personality of the children of the “five red categories” who carried out such persecution.

In another case, in one of the detention facilities, I witnessed how a teacher was dragged and beaten to death. A village intellectual was shot only because he told the truth in his open letters. His death shocked me. His righteousness impressed me greatly. It can safely be said that he aroused my political consciousness.

In winter 1968, I was released from a junior detention facility and went back to my factory. After that, in every political movement and campaign, I became an instant target of persecution, particularly in the movement to “deal blows to counter-revolutionaries and the three vices.” The work team wanted to label me a “Hu Feng-type counterrevolutionary” [Hu Feng was a literary scholar condemned as a counterrevolutionary]. They brazenly stated, “We have every right to shoot you.” They ultimately concluded that I was a “hostile case to be leniently handled as non-hostile,” but warned that the “dictatorship of the proletariat” was hanging over my head like a Damocles Sword.

While I was being persecuted, my mother was also subject to severe persecution. As a college instructor during the Cultural Revolution, she was repeatedly insulted. Because she had been an athletic instructor in the Kuomintang’s Central Training Corps, she was thrown into a “bad people’s den.” She was often beaten until her body was covered in bruises. She contemplated suicide many times. In fact, during this time, many college professors throughout the nation committed suicide. In the final period of the Cultural Revolution my mother was sent to a “May 7th Cadre School.” May 7th Cadre Schools were really a form of Reeducation through Labor in disguise.

In late 1978, I took part in the Democracy Wall movement. In the summer of 1979, the Public Security Bureau gave me a restrained warning. Then, they detained and interrogated me, threatening they would punish other members of my organization. I was forced to suspend our civilian publication “Swallow of the Storm.” Half a year later, I resumed the publication in my name, and expanded my involvement in the pro-democracy movement. It was at this time that Public Security agents began watching me, monitoring my words, and shadowing me—overtly and covertly.

On October 1, 1981, I was once more detained, first kept in solitary confinement, and then put in cells with criminals and death-row criminals. One week later, I was pronounced formally to be “under incarceration.” Then, I was sentenced to a three-year term of Reeducation through Labor on charges of “anti-Party and anti-socialist crimes.”

The Dafeng Reeducation Through Labor Facility was located in Jiangsu Province and was managed by the Shanghai Labor-Reform Bureau. It was formerly a deserted wasteland until the final period of the Cultural Revolution when young school leaders were sent out to rural areas to reclaim the wasteland. When we were sent there, we lived in houses built by the school leaders. Tall walls, barbed-wire fences and block-houses were built around the houses. Although Reeducation through Labor inmates were called "students," they were actually treated as criminals. We were strictly controlled and forced to do heavy physical labor, especially transplanting rice seedlings, weeding, unloading, canal building, etc. We were exhausted. The food was poor. Many of us developed hepatitis.

I was said to be the first political prisoner there. Naturally, I was more severely restricted than others were. Fortunately, the Reeducation through Labor prisoners respected me and did not bully me. They used to fight fiercely among themselves. In fact, the Chinese police often use some ruffians to manage other prisoners. These ruffians always fight furiously for the top positions until they are bloody. The guards called "commanders" also used to beat prisoners. They used all means of torture. When I first arrived at the camp, I witnessed how handcuffs crippled a Reeducation through Labor prisoner's hands. In a nearby facility, six commanders beat a Reeducation through Labor prisoner to death.

The 1983 movement to "strike hard" brought in more Reeducation through Labor prisoners. Some of them did not obey their superiors. Some stayed away from work without leave. However, most of them were gamblers and thieves. The authorities said their cases were "contradictions among the people," but managed their cases like "contradictions between us and the enemies." One time they were thinking of sending me to Qinghai or Xinjiang. Three years later, after my sentence had been served, they extended my term for one year without any procedure and without giving any reason. Later, they thought of extending my term a second time.

In late 1985, I returned to Shanghai. Friends welcomed me back and said I "regained freedom." But I replied, "China is a big prison with smaller prisons inside it. So, 'freedom' is only relative."

In 1990, I was detained for my involvement in the production of an underground publication. I thoroughly denied my involvement. Finally, the officials cleared the accusation, and they could not arrest me. The police gave me a disciplinary action (still in effect to this day): "waiting for trial while on bail." The police thereafter often summoned me to the police station where I would have to sit for a half-day or a whole day. This is how the police disrupted my involvement in pro-democracy activities.

In May 1994, I decided to come to the United States to pursue my studies. When I got to the airport, the police took me away and secretly incarcerated me for fifty days under the pretext of "supervised residence." The Public Security Ministry was unable to find anything, and they had to escort me to my flight. Basically, this was my expulsion. When they asked me, "Will you come back?" I replied, "Of course, because my rights and responsibilities are here."

WU XUECAN

Now fifty years old, Wu Xuecan was a journalist during the 1989 pro-democracy movement which, centered at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, radiated throughout the country and culminated in a brutal crackdown on unarmed students and workers. On the morning of March 20, 1989, Wu and his colleagues at the People's Daily, the official newspaper of the Communist Party, printed Zhao Ziyang's anti-martial law statement. For this, Wu was sentenced to four years imprisonment on charges of counterrevolutionary propaganda and incitement. Wu spent two and half of those four years in solitary confinement.

In 1989, from April to June, the students, citizens, and intellectuals of Beijing waged a dauntless struggle against the despotic and totalitarian rule of the Chinese Communist authorities. Tanks and machine guns killed two thousand young people, the best sons and daughters of China. Today, we hold the conference, "Voices from the Laogai." First of all, we mourn the heroes who gave their lives in the pro-democracy movement of 1989. We also extend our heartfelt respects to democracy fighters who are being held in prisons of all kinds.

True, we are no longer on the main battlefield of the pro-democracy movement, but struggling against the Chinese Communist authorities remains a significant part of our lives. Today, I am telling the whole world how the Chinese Communist authorities are trying to crush prisoners of conscience and to crush all political prisoners spiritually and physically. I try to make people realize the viciousness, cruelty and barbarism of their despotic rule.

On the morning of May 20, 1989, my colleagues and I at the *People's Daily* printed Zhao Ziyang's five-point anti-martial law statement and distributed it as a supplement to our paper. [Ed.'s Note: Zhao Ziyang was the General Secretary of the Communist Party from 1987 to 1989. He was removed from power and placed under house arrest for his opposition to the use of force against the demonstrators during the 1989 pro-democracy movement.] For that, I was sentenced by the Chinese Communist authorities to four years imprisonment on charges of counterrevolutionary propaganda and incitement. I was released on September 16, 1993, while China was competing for the honor of hosting the 2000 Olympic Games. After my release, I continued with my colleagues Xu Liangying, Ding Zilin, Jiang Qisheng, and others, to devote myself to the pro-democracy movement. For that, I was followed closely by Public Security agents. More than twenty times I was summoned and confined. Whenever the People's Congress sessions and anniversaries of the June 4, 1989 movement were approaching, Public Security agents would be standing and watching at my door.

At the time, I was helping out at a friend's company in order to earn a living. Every three to five days, police agents would go to see my friend and question him about what I was doing, placing my friend in an awkward situation. Thus, I had to leave my friend's company and lost my "rice bowl." With no further means for subsistence, I felt I had no choice but to leave my country and my relatives for America — to survive, and to go on fighting against the Chinese Communist authorities' despotic, single-party rule.

On June 5, 1989, upon the advice of my friends, I left Beijing and fled to a remote province. On December 17, 1989, in Sanya City, Hainan Province, I was arrested and incarcerated for one day. I was then

incarcerated six days in Hainan Province Number One Prison. Escorted by 18 paramilitary policemen, I was transported across the Qunzhou Strait and incarcerated for two days in Guangzhou Municipality Number Two Prison. On December 29, 1989, I was thrown into a solitary confinement cell in Incarceration Zone 203 of Qincheng Prison, a three-story hoof-shaped building. Cell 108 was located in the east wing of the first floor. My number as a prisoner was 8929, meaning I was the twenty-ninth prisoner to be thrown into Incarceration Zone 203 in 1989. A general by the name of Xu was also incarcerated there. His number was 9004, as the fourth prisoner incarcerated during 1990. General Xu also had offenses from his involvement in the Tiananmen Square Movement of 1989, but had been under house arrest for half a year before incarceration in Zone 203. In early 1990, he was court-martialed and sentenced to four years imprisonment on charges of resisting military orders. To the best of my knowledge, it was Bao Tong, another of the leaders from the Democracy movement, who was the first to be incarcerated in Zone 203. Since he had been the first, his number was 8901. He was incarcerated in the west wing of the second floor. Because he was considered an important prisoner, two paramilitary policemen always guarded his cell door. Wu Jiexiang, prisoner number 8918, who recently attended a conference here in America, was held in the middle of floor two. Another prisoner, Gao Shan, number 8916, a vice department chief in the systems reform committee that had been led by Bao Tong. All these men had participated in the 1989 Tiananmen Square Democracy Movement.

Every morning, from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m., we were allowed "fresh air" time, during which we were permitted to sit in a roofless room. Each of us had our own "fresh air" room, about 7-8 square meters. A piece of cement was missing on the doorframe of my "fresh air" room, so I could see what was going on outside. I could see how other prisoners were planting vegetables in an open plot in the middle of the hoof-shaped building. That meant that everyday they could spend two hours laboring together with other prisoners. Solitary labor in Incarceration Zone 203 was totally different from labor-reform. Labor with others was a privilege. Labor made it possible for you to have contact with other people.

Bao Tong, Wu Jiexiang, and Gao Shan were incarcerated alone in cells about twenty square meters in size. Our periods of incarceration varied from two and a half to seven years, Bao Tong spending the longest, at seven years. Seven years is such a long time! Two thousand five hundred days and nights! He must have had amazing willpower to survive! After his release, Mr. Bao readjusted back to normal mental condition rather quickly. I found this quite admirable.

I was incarcerated in a solitary confinement cell for two and a half years, until I was transferred to Beijing Prison's Wangba Building, on July 1, 1992, the 71st anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. During my incarceration in solitary confinement, I was in a treacherous plight, weighing less than 77 pounds, and on the verge of mental breakdown. Fearing I could die in solitary confinement, the authorities had to transfer me to Beijing Prison, to be incarcerated, in their words, with "thugs," Beijing citizens who had taken part in the June 4, 1989 pro-democracy movement.

After I arrived at Beijing Prison, I found myself among other prisoners for the first time in over two years. Everyday, I saw sorrow-stricken people, angry people. I saw their faces, hair, and eyes. I saw them walking, stepping forward, waving their arms, clenching their fists. Gradually, I came back to humanity. Slowly, I came back to life.

I remember my time in solitary confinement was the darkest period in my fifty-year life. I was cut off from human society behind a heavy door more than an inch thick. My situation was worse than that of lions

and tigers in a zoo. They were incarcerated with animals like themselves. Looking out through the bars, they could see zoo visitors — men, women and children.

In my cell, which was 20 square meters in size, there was a desk, a chair, and a bed. In one of the corners was a toilet. There were two windows, opened obliquely at an angle of 80 degrees, pointing upward, like a scoop-shaped wind guard used in winter in Northern China. Looking out through the window, I could see a sliver of the sky. There was a spy hole on my door so the guards could clearly see everything I was doing in the cell. On the wall near the toilet there was a small round window five inches in diameter. Paramilitary policemen could watch even when I used the toilet.

A paramilitary policeman was standing at my door around the clock. Guards changed at intervals of two hours or one and a half hours. They watched and recorded my every movement in a notebook on a desk near the door. Once, when I came back from the “fresh air” room, I leafed through the notebook and saw what they recorded there. The policeman was from my home province. He told me that I should look quickly, lest someone see my action. I saw: “6:30, 8929 got up. First, sat about 2 minutes on bed, then, put feet on floor. Put on shoes, brushed teeth, washed face. 6:45, 8929 ate breakfast, one steamed bun, one bowl of milk, a piece of soybean cheese. 7:50, 8929 drank water, only half a bowl. Walked to and fro in cell.” While I was reading with interest, the guard coughed, and I slipped into my cell. Later on, the guard told me that one notebook was enough for three days. The notebook I saw was about one inch thick, about 100 pages. Asked what purpose it served, he said, “It was learned from the Soviets. Don’t know its purpose.”

In the days of solitary confinement from December 29, 1989, to mid-April 1991, I felt very bad. But the days that followed were even worse. About mid-April 1991, suddenly, I felt sick, my stomach and intestines tossing from side to side, my head whirling, my arms and legs quivering. I tried to sit, to lie down, to stand, or to lie on my stomach, but nothing helped. At that moment, Section Chief Ming of Incarceration Zone 203 came in. The guard had warned him of my condition. He was a native of Sichuan Province, with salt-and-pepper hair, an amiable voice. Seeing my condition, he said automatically, “It’s beginning.” He had seen enough of this. Every prisoner in a solitary cell would sooner or later come to such a condition, in varying degrees of severity. It could come earlier or later, and varied with physical condition, age, professional habits, etc. Some people called this “solitary confinement syndrome.”

Since that night, every night, in order to have five or six hours’ sleep, I had to take a sleeping pill. Every morning, our guards brought breakfast of porridge, milk, steamed buns, steamed twisted rolls, and soybean cheese to our doors. Lunch and supper consisted of two dishes and a bowl of soup put in a meal box, on which the prisoner’s code was written. I often joked with myself that only in Qincheng Prison did I come to realize the benefits of socialism: a big, twenty square meter room for a single person, two dishes and soup for every meal, of decent quality and good taste, hot bath once a week. But, a man is *not* a dog. He may eat good meals in prison, but he has no freedom, he cannot talk with people. Even a dog is better off. I would rather stay in Beijing Prison, where prisoners had no hot bath, share five square meter cells, and eat steamed corn buns and vegetable soup. I would have felt much better than in solitary confinement at Qincheng Prison.

What was the worst thing for a prisoner? The answer was different for each prisoner. For me, the worst thing was insomnia. Before late March 1992, with sleeping pills, I could sleep five to six hours a day. But one night, in late March, I took a sleeping pill and fell asleep for a while, but woke up quickly. I looked out from the slit in the doorframe. It was still dark outside. I asked the guard what time it was. He said half past midnight. So, I slept only half an hour. I tried to fall asleep. But, as much as I tried, I just could not fall

asleep. I lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, counted from one to one hundred, then to one thousand. But, it did not help. I simply got on my feet. I walked two hours, got tired, but still could not fall asleep. Three months later, my belly swelled like a drum, but I was weighing less and less. As soon as I began walking, I felt like my legs were swimming. A few days later, I developed severe hemorrhoids. I could hardly walk. The prison administration sent me to a public security hospital for surgery. There was a scale on the floor. I weighed myself: less than 77 pounds, and my legs were about as thick as my arms are today.

Soon after that, the guards realized I was only getting worse and wasting away being kept in solitary confinement. So, I was escorted to the Second Company attached to the battalion directly under Beijing Prison, where I was incarcerated together with thirty other Beijing citizens who had participated in the 1989 pro-democracy movement. I was not allowed to take sleeping pills at Beijing Prison and on the first day, I stayed awake throughout the night. The second day, I was able to sleep for a half an hour and then it continued to get better and better. Slowly, I came back to life.

What I went through proves that solitary confinement is extremely inhumane. Such cells do not exist in most civilized countries. But, the China that exercises totalitarian and despotic rule still keeps such a cruel system. I hereby call upon the whole world: let the United Nations urge China to abolish such an ugly system of solitary confinement.

ZHANG JIE

Because of Zhang Jie's involvement in the June 4th Movement, he was arrested and spent five years in Reeducation through Labor. In his testimony, he details different instances of corruption among prison guards and the punishments that those deemed "counterrevolutionaries" received in order to break their spirits.

My name is Zhang Jie. I used to be a member of the Ore Dressing Section at the Changsha Municipality Non-Ferrous Metals Design and Research Institute in Hunan Province. In 1989, I happened to participate in the student strikes of the Democracy Movement, and was subsequently arrested by the authorities as a "counterrevolutionary." I was sentenced to five years in prison and two years' deprivation of political rights.

Today, I want to give an introduction of my experience during my five years of imprisonment. The time I have been allotted at the conference here is quite short, so I must be brief. However, I truly hope that for everyone here, my story will offer you a face and an image to attach to the Laogai system.

The Situation in the Detention Center

On September 23, 1989, I was arrested and taken into custody in the twenty-fourth ward of Changsha Municipality No. 1 Detention Center. I was interrogated. There was a room of about twenty square meters with about twenty people already crowded into it. There were murderers, rapists, penal criminals, and political prisoners all detained together. Inside there was a large bunk for sleeping. Other than the time spent laboring (making matchboxes) and eating, everything happened on that large bunk. In the scouring heat of summer, every day working for more than ten hours, everyone smelled of sweat. There was no mention of showers; there wasn't even enough water for drinking! If anyone worked a bit too slow, any one of us could suffer a beating at any time. This left everyone constantly in a nervous mindset. The labor output of every cell was directly related to the bonus going to the guards, so when the guards received a slight reduction in their bonus, it could cause someone to come and denounce or criticize the chief duty prisoner. So in order to brown-nose with the guards, the chief duty prisoner oppressed the other prisoners to make them do more work. Prisoners in these kinds of detention centers are like machines, from early in the morning till late at night incessantly working. A meal is made up of two or three grains of rice in a bowl, "the soup the party has given to you," (pickled Chinese cabbage soup). An empty stomach all day, so empty that your stomach rumbles from hunger. There's also no way to have peace and quiet while sleeping in the evening because twenty people are all crowded on that one large bunk! How can one get any sleep like that? So when sleeping, inmates must first get very close to each other and then turn on their sides, just like bricks stacked in a row. Otherwise all those people won't fit. In 1990, during the "Strike Hard Campaign," the situation in the cells was even more disgusting—there would be more than thirty criminals in each cell. Skin conditions made it even more frightful, especially the condition known as scabies. Scabies is so contagious, it is inevitable that everyone will catch it.

One warden by the name of Hong broadcast to the whole detention center meeting, describing the situation of the time with great imagery. "In Chinese, the word for prison is 'jianyu,' and the character for 'yu' has a dog radical, this originally was a place to keep animals and livestock," he said, "inside of it, you guys resemble a bunch of eels all tangled up together. The place is quite small, and the weather is hot, but there's nothing than can be done, the conditions are just always like this."

I spent one year and five months in this type of environment. Inside it was not permitted to sing, to yell or shout out, or to write letters to one's relatives. One must discontentedly bear all one's burdens alone. Now thinking back, it simply was a scene of a nightmare.

The Situation of Political Prisoners in the Jail

On February 7, 1991, I was taken from the detention center to Hunan Provincial No. 1 Prison, also known as the Hunan Electric Motor Factory. Not long after I entered the prison, in a struggle session for all the criminals in the prison, a political instructor by the name of Zeng lectured and said, "All of you," he pointed directly to all the political prisoners, "don't be too arrogant, all of you counterrevolutionaries are the worst of all criminals. You will not only be under the supervision of the guards to receive reform, in addition, the penal criminals should also supervise you, because you are all worse than them!" This sort of talk undoubtedly lowers the status of counterrevolutionary prisoners. This sort of ranking reflects on the type of work political prisoners are allocated, and it also reflects on the Chinese system of laws for political prisoners.

In the casting works of the factory, where I worked, there was a young criminal by the name of Gao Longfa, he was about seventeen years old. He came from the eastern part of the countryside in Hunan Province. During the Student Movement of 1989, he had written slogans, so he was therefore labeled as a "counterrevolutionary for instigation and dissemination," and sentenced to four years. Gao Longfa only had a middle school education. He gave others the impression of a child who didn't understand anything. Not long after he had entered the prison, because of the miserable life inside the prison, he decided he would attempt escape. That day, he changed clothes and put on a hat, looking like he was just drifting along. He did not even get through the main gate of the casting workshop when he was discovered. First he received a severe beating, and then he was thrown into solitary confinement. In the end, they added two years to his sentence. If it had been an ordinary criminal, that had tried to escape from the prison, when they caught him and brought him back, they also would have added one or two years to his sentence. Even though Gao Longfa hadn't even made it out of the workshop gate, they still immediately gave him two extra years. This of course, stirred up the counterrevolutionary spirit within him. It was just like the 1990 Strike Hard campaign, the first rule was "rigorously deal heavy blows at counterrevolutionaries!" The status of counterrevolutionaries got even lower than it had been originally! This of course, made the burden even heavier.

There was also another inmate in our workshop called Yu Dongyue. During the student movement he had marched to Tiananmen Square in Beijing and thrown paint on the portrait of Mao Zedong. For this crime, he was sentenced to twenty years. Yu Dongyue held a bitter hatred towards dictatorial autocracy. In 1992, he wrote on a chalkboard in the workshop, "Down with Deng Xiaoping!" These five characters got him into huge trouble. The result was that the prison guards broke his spirit. When he was in an extremely severe state of illness, and his condition was quite serious, the authorities maintained that Yu was faking his illness and pretending to be crazy. They said he was evading correction and reform. They said it would be unfitting for a counterrevolutionary criminal to receive permission to seek medical attention. Therefore the authorities refused the demands of his family that he be allowed to go see a doctor.

In another case, there was a counterrevolutionary criminal from the time of the 1989 student movement who is still serving out his prison sentence. His name is Liu Junfeng. Because he wrote a book entitled "Vocally Support the Students, tell the whole country of our fellow compatriots," guards took him into a closed room, covered his head with a quilt and then beat him and flogged him. They beat him until he had nearly lost consciousness, and then called some other prisoners to throw him into solitary confinement. They continued to inhumanely torture him in this manner for two years. Other types of criminals would

not stay more than half a year in solitary confinement. An end such as this came about only because Liu Junfeng was a counterrevolutionary who would die before he would repent and reform.

Other than that, the rate of death and the rate of sickness inside the prison was alarming. In 1993, in the entire prison of about 3,000 inmates, thirty-five people died. In my section of the factory, in the casting works, 25 percent of the 300 inmates had either tuberculosis or hepatitis.

Corruption of the Guards

Hunan Provincial No. 1 Prison is located on a bare and mountainous island in the Yangtze River. Originally, this small island was overgrown with weeds and it was almost entirely cut off from the outside world. From the fifties to the seventies, this was a place that specialized in the custody of counterrevolutionaries, what were called "cow ghosts" and "snake spirits." All of them were kept in custody here. In the 1983 "Strike Hard Campaign," large quantities of penal criminals began to pour into this prison. At the same time, the culture of corruption from the outside started to come alive, take root, and sprout forth. After the Strike Hard Campaign, in 1990, corruption among the guard units in the prison had really reached the limit. It was an unscrupulous plight! If any prisoner is willing just to spend some money, if they want a favorable type of work assignment, want a reduction in their sentence, want to receive bail, all they need to do is say the word.

Once in late 1992, in order to prevent criminals from causing any trouble, there was a meeting held for all prisoners. The leading warden of the prison, a man named Yang, publicly described to the whole group of prisoners the official operating procedure for sentence reduction. He said, "In order to reduce a sentence, one must pass over several hurdles. First of all, it is up to the Central Administration to appoint a leader to present the case to the leader of the workshop. Then guards will examine and verify the signature, and then it is up to the leader of the guards to report and hand over this report, examine and approve the signature. Finally, it is up to Warden Zhen Jianqiu to turn it over to the court." Yang went on with his complicated explanation, "If the warden regards it as important, he can recommend it to the court to grant a reduction of the sentence...." When Warden Yang had finished his report and was calling the meeting to a close, the prison's Secretary of Examination and Discipline added more to Yang's embellishings. He said, "Just now in Warden Yang's report, he forgot to mention the appointee for discipline and examination. When a plea for reduction of a sentence has passed once before the warden of this prison, it still has to pass through the appointee for discipline and examination. Because if the appointee for discipline and examination has not signed it, it is as if you never reported your information in the first place, so the appointee for discipline and examination is still the most important authority...." After he explained this, the prisoners cynically applauded, each clap filled with more ridicule than the one before. Everyone knew that this "official procedure" could be easily circumvented for the right price.

In China, money implies authority. In the casting division of the prison factory, there was an appointed leader by the name of Mao Wei. He was the most outstanding leader appointed during 1993. He was immensely resourceful, and he could turn over information directly to the warden for a signature. He also had a relationship with the courts. Many prisoners, even from outside of the casting workshop, came to him for help. At the beginning of 1994, the prison was preparing to promote him to Deputy Warden of the prison authority, but this position of Deputy Warden was later snatched by another guard called Ceng Riping. Ceng Riping was old and gruff. Whether in record of education or skill level, there was no one who could surpass Mao Wei. But Ceng Riping had money, so he spent a few thousand yuan and bought the promotion. There was no one in the prison who did not know about this incident. It was no wonder that when Mao Wei was serving bread to the prisoners, he would say, 'isn't it just that he has more money than me?' Afterwards,

in order to alleviate Mao Wei's feelings of misfortune and low morale, the prison authorities offered him a promotion to Deputy Warden for Education, but this was not as good a position, and Mao Wei did not want to accept. He would rather serve his insignificant appointed position and be in charge of more than one hundred prisoners. The profit would still be much more than that of being Deputy Warden for Education.

Some may believe that my explanation on corruption is a bit strange. Considering that every year, the Chinese government severely punishes people for corruption, wouldn't these prison guards be scared? The answer is negative. Of course they are not scared, because this corruption is from the inside to the outside, from the top to the bottom. Everyone participates and everyone divides the spoils. It is this problem, one of the guards once said, "if 100% engaged in corruption, and the government opposes corruption, and then maybe they will arrest five to ten percent of them. But it is impossible for them to catch the other ninety percent who also engage in corruption."

My Contact with Yu Dongyue

On February 7, 1991, six people who were involved in the same case, including myself, were sent to Hunan Provincial Number One Prison. First, we spent one month in a prison work training unit. On March 7, I was assigned to the casting works of the prison factory. At the same time, Yu Dongyue was also in the casting works of the prison factory for his reform through labor. His job was to take responsibility for the reporting and postings on the chalkboards. On the afternoon of March 7, I met Yu Dongyue met up with me, and he immediately came up to talk to me. He's a very direct person. The first time we met, he immediately asked me to talk about politics, but I was still rather cautious since I had just come into the casting works.

After that day, we had spoke often, but these were not in-depth conversations. Believing his twenty-year sentence was too long, he would say, "Now I manage the announcements on the chalkboard. Really, there's nothing that can be done about it. My sentence is so long, and I can't get a hold of a reduction. I know I won't be free until the year of the monkey and the month of the horse." If I expressed all my knowledge and understanding, there was still no way to comfort Yu Dongyue. His burden was so heavy, and the mental and emotional pressure were taking their toll. He constantly talked to himself, saying, "What is there to do? How can I pass this twenty-year sentence? Wait a few days, and all of you will have gone, leaving only me all alone here. What can be done about that?" Truly, from his perspective, the rest of us political prisoners all had very light sentences. There was Zhang Jingsheng who had a thirteen-year sentence, and Zhang Shanguang, who had ten years; Liu Jianan also had ten. It was only Yu Dongyue with twenty years, and he was still very young.

Sometime in February of 1992, all of us went to work, but Yu Dongyue stayed in the cell. When I came back, I heard Yu Dongyue had been placed in solitary confinement, because he had written "Down with Deng Xiaoping" on the chalkboard, these five large characters. Other criminals saw it and reported it to the guards and the words were erased by a penal criminal named Luo Weican. I asked Luo what all this business was about, and he said that maybe Yu Dongyue had made a bet with other criminals that he would do this, so he wrote it up on the board.

Since being placed in solitary confinement was not unusual, there was no one who did not understand the plight. Afterwards, I heard that in the solitary confinement cell, Yu often suffered beatings. The duty prisoners who managed the solitary confinement cells constantly beat him. If any of these guards came into the cell, Yu would yell and scream bloody murder. There was only Tang Ziqing that Yu trusted and no one

else. Tang was an appointed deputy leader at the casting works, and later he was promoted to the post of Party Minister for Education. When Tang went in, Yu Dongyue would immediately calm down. In order to see whether Yu Dongyue really was going crazy, or if he was faking such craziness, they took him to the prison hospital to receive electrotherapy, but there was no result. But it appeared that his condition was worsening. In the hospital, there were other criminals who saw him often reaching and groping for the basin to spit out thick and heavy phlegm. Therefore, the casting works sought out two people to keep him company at all times.

In the summer of 1992, prison authority Zhen Jianqiu personally brought Yu Dongyue to the Changsha No. 2 Affiliated Hospital to give him electrotherapy. The results were unclear. That same day, he returned to the prison. When I ran into Yu Dongyue, he was bent over at the waist as he took a walk around the casting works. I called out to him. He lifted his head and called out "Zhang Jie," and laughed a little. I saw that he still had a scar with ointment on it on his forehead. After that, two prisoners accompanied him directly back to the prison hospital.

In 1993, Yu Dongyue's situation perhaps became known overseas. An appeal was started. To ward off the rumors in the prison, the authorities specifically got out a new work uniform for Yu Dongyue to wear. To change the appearance of the labor he was doing, they also gave him a hoe to carry around. Then they proceeded to take pictures of him. In all honesty, there was no way to completely correct Yu's muddled appearance. That day Mr. Zhang Jingsheng was also called out. They wanted him to pretend he was playing a game of chess with Yu. They also took pictures of this.

I was held up until August 23, 1994, when my term expired and I was released. Yu Dongyue was still in the prison with two criminals to accompany him through life.

In 1992, I heard that Cai Cheng still sought out Zhen Jianqiu, the warden, to tell him that Yu Dongyue was unquestionably a man of influence.

I have heard that at the present time Yu Dongyue is still in prison serving his sentence.

LIU DANHONG

Liu Danhong tried to aid pro-democracy activists flee China after the Tiananmen Square massacre. Betrayed by a friend, she was arrested and confined for one and a half years. She describes how death row prisoners were treated and the ways in which prisoners helped each other relay messages to the outside world.

My name is Liu Danhong. Ten years ago, in late September 1989, in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, I was involved in a secret project: to help dissidents wanted by the Chinese government leave China's mainland. One and a half months later, I was secretly arrested in a Wuhan street, put on trial and incarcerated for one and a half years with death row prisoners. I was released in April 1991. In March 1996, I came to the United States.

I Harbored Important Counterrevolutionaries Wanted by the Chinese Government

I was twenty-three years old in 1989. Fresh out of college, I was employed by an independent social sciences research institute in Beijing. When the June 4, 1989 events happened, the institute's director Chen Ziming and vice director Wang Juntao became the most wanted "black hands." They were put on the top of the national wanted list, and the Public Security Ministry listed apprehension of the two as priority number one.

At the time, Chen was hiding in a coastal area in Southern China, and Wang was harbored by his friends in thickly forested mountains in Wuhan. On September 1, 1989, the Public Security Ministry focused their hunting efforts in Wuhan; Wang's security was greatly endangered. The political situation was so severe then that Chen and Wang would likely have been sentenced to death had they been apprehended. Two of my friends and I planned a rescue project. We would try to smuggle the two dissidents overseas. A Beijing friend was responsible for a liaison with Hong Kong pro-democracy organizations' rescue project "Operation Yellow Sparrow," while my duty was to go to Wuhan and find out Wang's whereabouts.

In October 1989, in an extremely tense atmosphere, I contacted Wang and met a friend who came from Beijing and was to escort Wang to Guangzhou, where Wang would be sent over to Hong Kong. Little did I suspect that the friend from Beijing had become a public security informer. It so happened that he had been arrested soon after the hunt started in Beijing. Unable to face the tremendous pressure during the interrogation, he told the authorities all he knew and promised he would coordinate with public security units in hunting down his former comrades-in-arms. His contact with me was a trap.

In his book *China Wakes* Nicholas D. Kristof, a former *New York Times* Beijing Bureau correspondent, describes his interview of my friend who turned into a traitor. I also wrote a book, *Priceless Friendly Feelings: Public Security Ministry's Big Counterrevolutionary Case*, in which I describe in detail the rescue project and our experiences in jail.

As a result of the failure of our rescue project, not only did the two dissidents fall into the authorities' trap, but the seventeen of us who took part in the project were arrested, among them my brother. I was not formally arrested, but secretly kidnapped. It occurred on the evening of October 20, 1989, when I was

cycling in one of Wuhan's streets. Suddenly, two cars blocked my way. Before I realized what was happening, a few guys rushed out of the cars, took me by my arms and threw me into one of the cars. Immediately two guys on either side held me tightly by my arms and covered my eyes. My last impression of the free world was how people in the street watched the whole thing dumbfounded. Only eighteen months later, when I was released, did I come to know where I had been incarcerated.

I was incarcerated in Wuhan City No. 2 Detention Facility, Hubei Province. I had had a good childhood; I had been a good student, and privileged at that. Now, I was a prisoner. Due to the limited time allotted me, I will talk only about two things: how a death row prisoner is treated in the last minutes of her life, and how I broke the most stringent information blockade in jail and contacted the outside world to secretly write my book.

I Witnessed How a Death Row Prisoner Was Tormented Before Execution

According to Amnesty International statistics, every year, more prisoners are executed in China than in the whole world. During the eighteen months of my incarceration I witnessed how three female death row prisoners were taken out to be shot. The torments they went through while alive are not widely known to the outside world.

Physical Torments

In late November 1989, I was making match boxes with my fellow cellmates. Suddenly, the cell gate flew open. A few serious-looking policewomen were standing at the gate. Before we knew what was going on, two female prisoners carried in a piece of wood bigger in size than a door plank. On either side of the plank's top side were fixed a handcuff, and a leg iron was fixed on either side of the plank's lower side. A policewoman told us that a murderer given a preliminary death sentence had to be taken care of while the final verdict was on the way.

On hearing it was a murderer, the first thing that came to me was that she must be a huge, cruel-looking woman. To my greatest astonishment, it was a small and weak woman in her fifties. She was fair-complexioned and looked terrified. Obediently, she came into the cell and lay down on the wood plank, shunning the policewomen's glance. It was the first time that I noticed a person's glance that was not extroverted, but drawn inward.

Having lain on the wood plank, the old woman stretched both her arms sideways as directed. Handcuffed and leg-ironed, she looked crucified. Later I found out that the device was a newly-invented tool of torture: plank shackles. As soon as a prisoner was given a preliminary death sentence and taken to the cell, he or she was immediately plank-shackled. This was also used to punish prisoners who seriously violated prison regulations.

The old woman, named Wang Guozhen, was a peasant woman in Hubei Province. She asked me to write appeal materials for her and told me in detail about her life story and her case. When she was young, she had been good looking and had sung local operas. After the Communists came to her village, a Communist county magistrate married her, but soon dumped her. She remarried a peasant, with whom she had children. Her children grew up, worked hard but got little. She did not like rural life, so she went to Wuhan City, where she made a living by picking up odds and ends from refuse heaps. Cheated and raped by a seventy-year-plus old man, she killed the man and took a few articles of clothing from his family, for which she was sentenced to death for burglary and murder.

Whenever wardens were making rounds in the cells, she would timidly repeat the phrase, "I'm sorry I made so much trouble to you." Each time, she seemed genuinely sorry.

After seeing Wang shackled for ten days on the plank, we asked the prison authorities to take the handcuffs and leg irons off of her and give her a bath. Her legs were trembling so much that she had to lean against the wall. Her ligaments had been unable to bend for a long period, so they had become flaccid and had almost lost their function. Only then did I realize why death row prisoners had to be propped up on their way to the execution site. It was not necessarily from fear, but from utter lack of strength.

The time from the preliminary death sentence to the final verdict usually took from twenty days to half a year, even a whole year. The reason public security units, procuratorates and courts used such a brutal tool of torture on death row prisoners was to ensure that prisoners remained alive up through the moment they were escorted to the execution site. As a matter of fact they would be held accountable if prisoners took their own lives before execution.

Several times late at night I heard male death row prisoners yelling, "Kill me now, but no more torture!" What was most terrible was not the execution itself, but the protracted torture before death. For the death row prisoners in plank shackles, death came as a relief.

No Dignity Before Death, No Farewell to Family

Plank shackles meant not only maximum physical confinement for prisoners, but also a complete deprivation of dignity. Once a prisoner was in plank shackles, he or she was totally paralyzed. They had to be fed meals and water. They relied on others for going to the bathroom. It was my duty to take care of Wang around the clock. I tried to do my best for Wang. I also played the role of priest and legal consultant.

Certain inmates were impatient with Wang. For instance, a seventeen-year-old young prostitute would scold Wang whenever she wanted to go to the bathroom, so Wang usually restrained herself until another prisoner was on duty.

Some death row prisoners kept a sense of dignity. They simply tried to eat less food and drink less water lest they be too much of a burden.

Wang Guozhen was poorly educated. For fear she would cry and yell, the prison administration only said, "You'll be sent to another place." She was always wondering what it looked like in the Laogai. On the day she was arrested, her son was getting married. Her family did not know what crime she had committed, nor whether she would be executed. One month later, at the same time her son's honeymoon ended, Wang executed without notice to her family. She was executed in the morning and ironically, that same day her son went to the prison to make a visit. He came too late and was only made aware of the execution because of a posting on the prison's bulletin board. Her son was totally dumbfounded.

No Information and Mental Confinement

In prison, extortion of confessions was excruciating. I developed general dropsy due to poor living conditions. I had to adapt myself to the law of the jungle. Yet, that was not the worst of it, compared to the information blockade and thorough mental confinement.

The two dissidents we tried but failed to rescue were incarcerated in Qincheng Prison for political prisoners. There, they enjoyed department-director-level food rations. They could read, write letters to their families, and even engage in research and writing, but in common prisons for criminals, prisoners were given only meager foodstuffs. They were only allowed to survive. Anything more than that was not allowed.

I Tried to Tell My Family

In the initial period of my incarceration I thought constantly of how to tell my family about what happened to me and to my brother since both of us had been secretly arrested in the streets. During the period of investigation under custody (when we were not declared guilty), we were prohibited from meeting with our family, hiring lawyers, reading, and were even not allowed to write a "Hello-I'm-alive-and-fine" letter to our family.

However, I decided that a letter must be sent to my family. I discovered that the cases of some of my fellow inmates were not very serious, which meant that they would soon be released. I asked them to memorize my relative's address (for fear the authorities could censor my parents' letters). Indeed, in less than two months time, three women were released. One of them wrote a letter to my parents, and from that letter my parents finally learned where my brother and I were incarcerated.

I Accumulated Source Materials for Writing in Prison

Everyone had to be searched prior to incarceration. Even belts and shoe laces had to be removed. Pens and paper were taboo in prison. No paper and no pens? Never mind. At first, we used lead toothpaste tubes as pens and material for match boxes as paper. Later on, I had a few ballpoint pen refills, toilet soap packages and toilet paper.

The Following is How I Obtained a Ball-Point Pen Refill in Prison:

One day, I was led into the prison clinic. In the corridor, I saw a male prisoner whom I had never before spoken to working there. He winked at me. I understood. He was certainly not flirting with me. He wanted something. In such a special environment like prison, your faculties became acute. So I purposely walked slower than the guard and put my hands behind my back. At the moment when the guard was inside the clinic and I was not, something tiny fell into my hand. It was a ball-point pen refill.

Thus, through the help of many people, I and my fellow inmates who were involved in the same case were always able to obtain information about what was going on outside the prison. I managed to write a lot of things, many of them were smuggled out while I was still in prison. When I finally was released, I found that I had three big heaps of writing material. Then for five years, I drifted about in the nation. Based on these materials, I wrote a documentary novel in 230,000 Chinese words entitled *Priceless Friendly Feelings*, published by Mirror Press, Canada. The novel was my testimony to China's political movement and the destiny of humanity within that movement. It is also a true description of China's prison and judicial system.

TONG YI

Tong Yi spent two and a half years in detainment and Reeducation through Labor because of her work with Chinese dissident Wei Jingsheng. She explains the labor, humiliation, and lack of dignity that she and her fellow prisoners suffered.

I am a student at Columbia Law School. I was born in 1968 in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei Province. Between April 1994 and January 1995, I was held secretly in the Detention Center of the Beijing Public Security Bureau. Later, without going through a trial or receiving any formal charge, I was transferred to a Reeducation through Labor camp in my hometown, where I spent another twenty-one months.

Through the generosity and support of others, the circumstances of my life have changed dramatically since then. However, my memories about those days remain sharp and clear. My feelings remain especially acute because some of my best friends in China are still experiencing what I was going through not long ago.

My two-and-a-half-year ordeal resulted from my work with Mr. Wei Jingsheng when he enjoyed his brief period of freedom in 1993 and 1994, between his two long-term prison sentences.

After my release in October 1996, I remained under constant surveillance. Once, while visiting my sister in Beijing, I was detained and locked up again without any explanation. At that time I spent eleven days incarcerated with insane women, disabled children and people from provinces across China with grievances against their local governments. These were all innocent people, in my judgment, being held in what is referred to as a Shelter-for-Repatriation detention center. From there, I was escorted by a group of armed policemen to a Wuhan Shelter-for-Repatriation detention center until I was released into my parents' custody.

During my two-and-a-half-year detention, everyday was a battle in which I had to fight for my dignity and my rights as a human being. The worst incident occurred after I refused to work more than the eight-hour maximum day as mandated by Chinese law. At that time I was beaten by a group of inmates instructed by the police guards in the labor camp. I was not allowed to talk with other detainees in that labor camp. I had no access to newspapers, television or radio. My food rations were minimal. I had no meat for 365 days a year. What I dreamed of most was a hot bath and eight hours of sound sleep.

My conditions, however, were not as bad as those of some of my inmates. One of my cellmates was sentenced to death because she embezzled \$25,000 from her company. Her hands were always cuffed and her legs were always chained while she was waiting for her death bullet. It was common knowledge among the cellmates that the government would sell healthy body parts removed from the people who were executed, and that parts were sold for good prices in the international market. From her example, I began to understand the Chinese government's economics of capital punishment.

Another of my cellmates came in three months after I was detained in April 1994. She always looked yellow and fragile. One month later, she was summoned away for three days. When she came back, she shivered constantly even though it was the middle of summer and wore a padded cotton jacket. She told me

that she was forced to have an abortion while her hands and legs were fastened to the four corners of the operation table. Afterwards, she had to remain in bed for three days with her hands and legs fastened.

In the Reeducation through Labor camp, the work was a cruel game. Perhaps because I was a political prisoner, I was singled out to do relatively light work alone, though under heavy surveillance. All the other detainees were sent to work in either the battery factory or the garment factory. Through their conversations, I was lead to believe that some of the products they made were for export. Every day, we ate together. We all had to squat while we ate because they wanted to humiliate us more. While we ate, I noticed that many detainees had to eat with unwashed hands that were stained with toxic fluid from the batteries they worked with.

What I found most terrible, however, was not the beatings or hard labor – it was the way the labor camp deprived its victims of their dignity. On humid summer nights when the temperature sometimes reached 120 degrees, the 200 detainees would come back from the factories, sweaty and fatigued, and rush toward the washroom with six showers. They screamed and fought with each other for the limited shower space, trying to finish washing their sweaty bodies and their smeared clothing for the next day within half an hour. After that half an hour, nobody was allowed to stay in the washroom. As a consequence of this routine practice, nobody could have a thorough shower and everybody always had layers of rashes and scars during the summer.

The scars still remain vivid in my mind. In retrospect, I can't understand how my fellow inmates and I could bear all those agonizing days and nights. Compared with my fellow inmates, I feel extremely fortunate that I finally can breathe freely and start a promising life in this free land. But, on the other hand, I am well aware that there are still many people who receive the death penalty even though the punishment is disproportionate to their wrongdoings; that there are still women in detention centers sent to the abortion beds without their consent; that there are still hundreds of thousands of people who eat their meals with toxic elements on their hands, the same hands which provide revenue for the labor camp system; and that there are still many screaming nude women fighting with each other for a clean shower. This is the ongoing reality of China's labor camps.

When I think of Ms. Zheng Nian's bestseller *Life and Death in Shanghai*, I know that there has been no progress in the Chinese prison system and labor camp system since the brutal Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s. What I tell myself everyday is:

Don't forget your past;
Try hard to disclose the evil in China; and
Believe that someday the fortress of the Chinese gulag will collapse.

PANG YILING

While a student at Inner Mongolia Normal University, Pang Yiling was arrested for participating in protests against the restrictions imposed on the people of Inner Mongolia by the Chinese government. For his alleged crimes, Pang Yiling served one year in Reeducation through Labor in Huhhot, Inner Mongolia.

From November 8, 1996 to November 8, 1997, on charges of disturbing public order, I served one year in Reeducation through Labor at Huhhot Reeducation through Labor Facility (supervisor: ZHANG Li-Hua) located in the southern suburb of Hohhot, Inner Mongolia.

The causes and events that led up to my Reeducation through Labor sentence are as follows:

In autumn 1996, while I was a student at the Inner Mongolia Normal University, some of the teachers and students of Inner Mongolia University and Inner Mongolia Normal University took to the streets and staged a demonstration spearheaded against the central government's national policy in relation to Inner Mongolia. All of us thought that the policy was excessively strict and that the central government's control of Inner Mongolia was excessive. Meanwhile all of Inner Mongolia's resources were being siphoned to the central government. The Inner Mongolian government had no right over its own resources. As a result, while people's living standards in other provinces were steadily rising, those of the Inner Mongolian people were steadily declining.

Steeped since childhood in democratic ideas from my family, I identified myself with the demonstration and took part in it. I expressed my points of view that the Inner Mongolian government was corrupt, catering only to the central government's whims and disregarding the Inner Mongolian people's hardships. I also stated that whenever the central government adopted a more leftist policy, the Inner Mongolian government was the first to chime in regardless of how detrimental the policy was to the people of Inner Mongolia. People in Inner Mongolia had no democratic rights. Many basic public facilities in Inner Mongolia were insufficient.

Hardly had our demonstration started when we were curbed and dispersed. I didn't think that the authorities would take harsh measures against us, but, like other participating teachers and students, I was detained and sentenced to one year of Reeducation through Labor. I was escorted to make army quilts and padded coats at the No. 3 Reeducation through Labor battalion's sewing factory. Mentally and physically, we were greatly injured. We had no rights. We had to labor like slaves, and were scolded and beaten by the guards.

The Laogai as an Institution

Panel I, September 18, 1999

Moderator: Dr. Perry Link

Philip F. Williams

Melissa Pearson Frugé

T. Kumar

Qi Jiazhen

Introduction by Moderator Perry Link

About twenty-five years ago, the word Gulag entered the English language. By now the word Laogai fully deserves equal treatment. Communist China's vast array of "labor-reform" prisons and camps—a system originally designed in the 1950s with the help of Soviet advisers—is not a photocopy of what Solzhenitsyn called the "Gulag Archipelago." However, the resemblances are strong, and with events such as today's conference, the world can no longer say it does not know what happened. The Laogai stands along with the Gulag—and with Hitler's camps, with Pol Pot's killing fields, with the rape of Nanjing, with South African townships under apartheid—as one of the twentieth century's enormous affronts to human dignity.

The stated aim of the Laogai, which was to "remold" people and create a "new socialist man," never worked as advertised. In his paper below, Philip Williams analyzes the actual effects: people are forced by starvation and the threat of abuse into a narrow self-centeredness. They learn "protective dissimulation" and "habituation to mendacity." They grow alienated from others, even from family, and eventually from the concept of "truth" itself. Because their inner minds become the only realm within which they can be free, they escape into elaborate fantasies. If they are lucky enough to survive the Laogai and return to society, most return not as "remolded" ideal citizens but as passive, broken-spirited subjects to authority.

How should we understand the huge difference between the advertised and the actual results of the Laogai? Can we imagine that the rulers of China do not know what actually happens? Of course not. They are intelligent politicians, and they know much more about the workings of their system than we on the outside do. There must be a sense, then, in which crushed, broken-spirited people are exactly what they intend to produce. It could be that in the privacy of their own minds this is exactly what they mean by "new socialist man."

But then why do they cling to nice-sounding phrases like "remolding," "reeducation," and "new man"? Why the fig leaf? Here, too, they resemble other twentieth century despots: Pol Pot committed mass murder and called it "purification;" in Bosnia we saw ethnic "cleansing;" Hitler sought a "final solution," and so on. Why do despots resort to euphemism? Do they, at some level, realize that what they are doing is hideous and hence want to disguise it? Perhaps. But it is just as likely that deep inside their fevered minds they are convinced that what they are doing is right, and employ euphemism only as a defense against large numbers of other people whom they know will disagree.

In her paper below Qi Jiazhen exposes other official euphemisms. *Jiuye*, or "taking up an occupation," normally has a positive connotation in Chinese. But Qi translates the term more realistically as "Forced Job Placement" and shows how, in the Chinese penal system, *Jiuye* is simply an extension of Laogai. It is a way to continue remolding (that is, crushing) people after their laogai sentences are complete and under living conditions hardly distinguishable from Laogai. Qi's accounts are drawn from her personal experience, and they are heart-rending. If you are a parent, as I am, just try to imagine yourself going through the experiences of one of Qi's acquaintances in the Laogai. He divorces his wife to protect her and their children from association with his "crimes." His children jettison his surname and assume others. He contemplates suicide but demurs because that would only add to his crimes and thus to their taint. Then, utterly miserable, he escapes into fantasy.

The existence of the *Jiuye* system raises a revealing question: "Why continue to crush people who have

already been crushed?" One explanation is that the rulers of the People's Republic, for whom maintenance of their own power has always been the top priority, want to suffocate all possibility of any renewed dissent. There is also another reason, which the papers by Melissa Frugé and Williams both treat: the Laogai-Jiuye system is an economic as well as a penal empire. It produces a wide variety of products, including some for export, by using labor that is paid only a few U.S. dollars per month, if that. The economic uses of the Laogai—Jiuye system have sharply increased during the "reform" years under Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin.

Qi's and Williams' papers show us that beneath the euphemistic language about Laogai, daily life in the camps runs on petty, arbitrary whim—and in language to match. Qi tells how camp authorities arranged the rape of a female "counterrevolutionary" by a sycophantic truck driver whom they jocularly referred to as the "F— Gun." We should not dismiss this extremely colloquial and arbitrary language. Behind the veil of officialese, it is precisely the casually-phrased comments of power-holders that are the lifeblood of the Chinese Communist system. This is true from the squalid labor camp all the way up to the top. For example the paper below by T. Kumar refers to the national Yanda ("Strike Hard") campaign of the late 1990s. Yanda is not a formal political term. It is a colloquial usage that arose within conversation among top leaders (we do not know which leader used it first), was likely discussed and approved at a Politburo meeting—and then, as policy, suddenly became more powerful than any Chinese law.

The Williams paper compares the Laogai to oppression of human beings at a variety of other times and places, and thus shows in several ways how human responses to extremity tend to be similar. In responding to a Laogai, a Gulag, or a Nazi camp, it matters less that you are Chinese, Russian, or Jewish than that you are human. This finding is important background for the paper by Kumar, whose group Amnesty International begins from the principle that commonalities in the human condition give us not only the right but the responsibility to protest the abuse of fellow human beings at any time or place.

Melissa Frugé's paper goes further in this vein. Frugé shows in detail how evidence from the Laogai shows the Chinese government to be in clear violation of a wide range of formal and customary law: the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, among others. She concludes her paper with a call for an international "Laogai Tribunal."

The Chinese government will say that such a tribunal "interferes in our internal affairs;" but it is exactly the point of Frugé's legal scholarship to show how the modern world has decided that, when fundamental human values are at stake, intervention across national borderlines is legal and right. The Chinese government will also claim (if past precedents hold) that Chinese culture has "special characteristics" that call for different treatment. This argument, at bottom, asserts that Chinese people somehow feel more comfortable with torture, abuse and oppression than do other human beings. Such an absurd claim goes well beyond "culture": in order to believe it we would have to believe that the Chinese nervous system is different. Yet it fails even as a cultural argument: Chinese political philosophy beginning with Mencius (4th century B.C.) provides ample evidence of Chinese distaste for despotism—to say nothing of starvation and torture. The true reason why China's rulers claim "special characteristics" for China has to do with power. They want a free hand to do what they feel is necessary to preserve their rule, and this principle trumps all others.

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Ingraining Self-censorship and Other Functions of the Laogai, as Revealed in Chinese Fiction and Reportage

Philip F. Williams

Introduction

Almost fifteen years after his release from a two-decade stint in the northwestern Chinese Laogai, the novelist Zhang Xianliang (b. 1936) wrote that he still breaks out in a sweat and gets the jitters whenever he picks up a pen to engage in creative writing. He would derive some relief from putting down his pen and turning to some other activity, for it was his supposedly reactionary poetry that was the catalyst that led to his removal to the prison camp system in the first place. Yet if he forces himself to go on with his writing about the camps, he eventually gets so absorbed in his thought processes that he overcomes his fear.

The fact that this mechanism of self-censorship could outlast an ex-inmate's term in the camps by fifteen years suggests that the lingering influence on ex-inmates' lives is considerable. A 1990 PRC establishment treatise on the Chinese prison camp system puts the most positive spin possible on this lingering influence: the treatise not only extols the camps' supposed benefits for Chinese society, but even claims that the underpinning idea of *Laodong Gaizao*, or mandated "remolding through labor," is a glorious principle of "revolutionary humanitarianism" applicable to all mankind.¹ While few would deny the importance of the labor camp system to the PRC government—especially during the Mao dictatorship—most Chinese novels and stories with a camp setting have reached a far different conclusion as to this penal system's human costs and societal effects.

From the Party establishment perspective, camp system apologists have argued that Laogai usually inculcates socially beneficial behavior patterns such as honesty, unselfishness, and a sense of responsibility among inmates. In contrast, writers with personal experience in the camps like Zhang Xianliang and Cong Weixi (b. 1933) have focused more on the regimen's warping influence on convicts: protective dissimulation and a habituation to mendacity; a preoccupation with self-centered cravings to acquire more than one's meager ration of food and other necessities; and a passivity marked by avoidance of conscientious involvement in the frighteningly capricious public realm. These consequences, hardly the ingredients for a utopian socialist brotherhood, turn out to be the more typical results of the harsh and stressful camp regimen described in novels. Even more importantly, the deviant or anti-social tendencies that Laogai is supposed to be so effective in correcting appear instead to have been mostly suppressed or bottled up, thus adding to their potential for reappearing with greater intensity, if not fury, at some future time.² Thus, while the government may absorb many of its correctional outlays with the inmate's cheap labor and take pride in his outward submissiveness to authority, Chinese society would hardly enjoy long-term benefits from absorbing ex-convicts more alienated after their release than prior to their incarceration.

Instilling a Cynicism Towards Language and Truth

Camp administrators tend to see a causal linkage between the regimen of heavy manual labor and self-criticism sessions, on the one hand, with an increasing inclination towards *laoshi* or "honest" behavior among inmates, on the other. For example, a common expression of dissatisfaction among cadres impatient with a prisoner's self-criticism or answers during an interrogation session is "*Ni bu laoshi bu xing!*" [It won't

cut it to be dishonest!]. Yet in order to conform to the camp cadre's expectations and avoid further punishment, inmates actually experience a widening split between their private thoughts and the words they feel forced to come out with in public. The PRC authorities place such great pressure on the accused to confess that the latter almost always do so, even in the many cases in which they are innocent of some or all of the charges.

Conforming to cadres' expectations as to proper inmate attitudes requires often outlandish falsifications of what the inmate inwardly conceives as genuine or reasonable. For example, nearly every night, the reflective narrator and protagonist of Zhang Xianliang's novel *Lü Hua Shu* [*Wasteland Reclamation Trees*] recoils in disgust from what W.E.B. DuBois characterized as the "double life" of subordinate groups:³

In the daytime, I was driven by the instinct for preservation: I would come up with flattering and ingratiating remarks, quietly seethe with jealousy, and pull off stratagems of one kind or another. Yet at night, the lowdown, mean-spirited thoughts I'd had that day would shock me.⁴

At the same time that the camp inmate risks a cut in food rations or worse if he says something offensive to the guards or cadres, he must numb himself to their typically abrupt and contemptuous manner of addressing prisoners. When a fellow inmate in the same novel congratulates the narrator Zhang Yonglin for receiving a transfer from the camp to a neighboring state farm, Zhang is almost at a loss for what to do when offered a handshake: "For me, polite manners of this sort had already become something from another world... I had become so accustomed to scornful treatment that I no longer bothered noticing it."⁵

If receiving sincere gestures of respect has become foreign to inmates required to address the lowliest guard as Banzhang [Captain], the yawning gulf between inner authenticity and outward compliance is extended further by the mendacious indoctrination verbiage that assaults prisoners daily over camp loudspeakers. The protagonist of *Nanren de Yiban Shi Nüren* [*Half of Man Is Woman*], the same Zhang Yonglin but a few years older and slightly crustier, exhibits the familiar hermeneutical approach of "kan fanmian," or "inverse interpretation," in which the listener or reader extracts a hidden kernel of truth from within a tissue of lies and groundless value judgments. After a camp loudspeaker brassily announces that among a group of coal miners, the glorious "spirit of communism" has replaced the defunct and reactionary belief in the Mandate of Heaven, Zhang concludes that the ancient Mandate of Heaven theory must actually be just as viable as ever in that locale.⁶

Perhaps Zhang's ability to maintain a semblance of critical acuity after years of subjection to the Goebbelsian big lie technique is a testament to the staying power of the human need for at least an inner authenticity. In *Lü Hua Shu*, Zhang cites the inviolability of the individual imagination under the most restrictive of social environments: "In places where personal freedoms are most sorely lacking, the wings of a person's imagination can nonetheless soar freely."⁷

On the other hand, many state socialist camp inmates who endured the machinations of agent provocateurs and excruciatingly long hunger strikes, such as the Soviet dissident Irina Ratushinskaya, have concluded that "the perpetual lies" inflicted upon inmates still remained the hardest aspect of camp life to bear.⁸ The combination of self-protective masking of authentic feelings, active dissimulation to avoid penalties or obtain scarce supplies, numbing oneself to scornful treatment from guards and cadres, and private vigilance in the face of repetitious indoctrination attempts adds up to a emotionally degrading and morally exhausting environment for the camp convict.

Extreme Collectivism and the Scramble to Satisfy Personal Needs

Defenders of the camp system typically point to the supposed transformation of inmates' "individualistic" and "selfish" ways into unselfish collectivism as a key contribution of Laogai to society.⁹ Ex-inmate authors like Zhang Xianliang and Solzhenitsyn have indeed mentioned moments during manual labor when they felt the joy of being so engrossed in the task at hand as to have temporarily transcended the day-to-day concerns of self, and thus achieved a sort of serenity in the midst of gloom, drudgery, and want.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the ordinary state of affairs has been quite different, especially when chronic undernourishment leads camp inmates to think constantly of stratagems to get more food. If it were really share and share alike throughout the collective, there would be no need for prisoners to hide leftover hardtack bun morsels near their bunks, an action repeatedly portrayed by both Zhang Xianliang and Solzhenitsyn. Nor would Cong Weixi's inmates—so famished as to seek out and greedily devour field mice, crickets, and fruit tree worms—fight rancorously among themselves over a mere pound of sugar.¹¹ The periodic jostling among certain inmates to elevate their status from ordinary slogger to trusty would also be inexplicable, were it not for the personal material advantages to be gained from such a "promotion."

Since this type of self-centered, divisive behavior has occurred with understandable regularity in the camps, it would seem that the ethical regeneration implied by terms like "unselfishness" and "collectivity" would be an unlikely achievement for inmates. As Confucius long ago pointed out, there is little point in discussing the cultivation of virtue if people are too distracted by their own lack of food to pay much attention to issues affecting the broader social group. Even Zhang Xianliang's most altruistic and reflective characters find their thoughts obsessively revolving around petty calculations over food once the hunger pangs grow too intense. Unless the labor camp administrators have been too dull to perceive that semi-starved prisoners have little inclination to waste their energy on sincere attempts at "thought remolding," these high cadres must have tacitly given "remolding" a far lower priority than either the sheer intimidation and control of inmates—through divide-and-conquer tactics—or the bottom-line mentality of lowering prison expenditures on food and other necessities to the bare minimum.

At this point, it is worth recalling that non-normative, unpretentious terms like "labor camp," "prison camp," and "concentration camp" had already taken on a pejorative coloring by the early years of Stalin's rule, forcing the Soviet leader to put a "reformist" face-lift on the whole affair by retiring these terms in favor of "corrective labor camp."¹² The notion that prisoners were actually being morally or politically regenerated by a forced labor regimen raised a smokescreen of paternalism around the repressive measures of police-state autocrats, who could thereupon react with wounded outrage in the face of any complaints from abroad about their harshness toward the swollen ranks of societal deviants.¹³ Subsequent state socialist leaders around the world, including China's Maoists, have apparently found Stalin's formulation adequate; George Orwell's suggested "higher synthesis" of "joycamp" still remains in the realm of literary speculation rather than actual political discourse.

"Remolded" Responsible Citizens—or Wary and Passive Subjects?

Except for a relatively small number of *jiji fenzi* [activists] who are willing to go to any lengths to curry favor with the camp cadres, even to the extent of informing on fellow prisoners, the camp inmate tends to settle into a state of wary passivity. In *Lü Hua Shu*, scythes and similar farm implements have grown more and more blunt, but since no cadre has ordered any inmate to sharpen them lately, none of them sees fit to

take any responsibility for doing so. Moreover, this passive approach toward work duties persists long after the inmates are transferred from the camp to the neighboring state farm, where life is less regimented, and the incentives for increasing work efficiency would ordinarily be greater.¹⁴

The expression of passive resistance to an authority inmates dare not openly confront may expand from ordinary shirking of this sort to varieties of casual vandalism. For the sake of taking a shortcut from the fields back to the barracks, prisoners in *Nanren de Yiban Shi Nüren* often ruin the fruit of many hours' work by carelessly trampling the edges of irrigation channels and cropfield embankments built by other inmate brigades. As long as no guard has specifically forbidden the prisoners from doing this, in their alienation from the forced labor routine they see no harm in destroying something that their neighboring inmates are bound to have to fix later on. They simply lack the material incentives to preserve agricultural construction that a family farmer in the market system would have.¹⁵

This pattern of ducking responsibility whenever the consequences for doing so seem negligible is a feature of camp life that exists in less acute form within the mainstream of state socialist society, particularly in state enterprises. As Harold Rosenberg has noted, "Despite their tactics of ubiquitous 'activation,' modern revolutionary parties actually promote an enormous passivity."¹⁶ It is little wonder that even a long-time dedicated communist cadre like Luo Zongqi in *Nanren de Yiban Shi Nüren* sighs that he has simply lost his patience with brave-new-world rhetoric in the Party media, and plans to ignore it in order to pay more attention to his home and family life. He goes on to advise Zhang Yonglin to get married as soon as possible and focus on private matters instead of national affairs.¹⁷

The connection between passivity and a dependence on authority ingrained through years of forced labor reaches Zhang Yonglin's conscious awareness shortly after he wins a transfer from camp to the state farm in *Lü Hua Shu*: "Though I realized I'd gotten my freedom back and become a 'self-supporting manual laborer,' I subconsciously felt somewhat at a loss were I not to be shouted at and ordered about; I needed to follow behind somebody who would keep tabs on me, leading me along my way."¹⁸

The emotional emasculation of an enforced dependency on authority comes across most vividly in Zhang Xianliang's choice of metaphors with which he describes his predicament as a Kafka-esque figure forever puzzled as to the exact nature of the wrongs he is supposed to have committed. At one point, Zhang's alter-ego protagonist in *Nanren de Yiban Shi Nüren* likens himself to his fellow herder on the farm, a man nicknamed "the Mute" on account of a psychological trauma in the wake of sudden and intemperate political denunciations that left him bereft of speech.¹⁹ While Zhang Yonglin never loses his ability to speak, he often sinks into silent interior monologues due to the dearth of friends who can both follow his meandering ways of thought and yet be relied upon not to report him to the authorities for his heterodox views. He often finds himself talking out loud while herding livestock all by himself, and even fantasizes carrying on a philosophical dialogue with a castrated horse.²⁰ The horse, like him, must keep its wisdom to itself or risk shunning by the herd (i.e., society); it is a beast of burden provided with merely the bare necessities for subsistence—just enough food to prevent its losing the capacity to serve its masters; in spite of an emotional desire to give vent to its lust, it cannot get an erection, having had its sexual life taken away from it by the masters; and it must meekly submit to the daily round of impatient lashings and shouted commands that come its way. Like the pathetic mute herder, the gelding grimly muddles through a crippled and inhuman existence, never beyond the reach of the bosses responsible for its lamentable condition.

In a similar manner, Zhang has lapsed into an unnatural state of sexual impotence in the camps due to years of emotionally internalized vilification, a semi-starvation diet, the imperative to repress personal

emotions and instincts, and the mind-numbing grind of heavy labor. His long-term loss of virility resonates with numerous accounts of other former camp inmates such as Jean Pasqualini, and suggests an erosion of the self that extends well beyond the penal term.²¹

From the ruling strata's perspective, it is hard to imagine a more expedient manner of handling persons who make trouble for the Party than putting them through such rigors that they will consider themselves fortunate if able to emerge from the camps with merely their normal bodily functions intact and a chance to enjoy the ordinary pleasures of home and hearth. *Lü Hua Shu* contains a scene portraying how the camp regimen has squelched the protagonist's ambitions to make an impact on his society; in his exhausted state, he sympathizes with a simpleton in one of Pushkin's verses whose sole aims in life were a well-stocked cupboard and a wife to take care of him: "Having gone through four years of harsh collective forced labor, plus hunger of such intensity as to give me a brush with death, various sorts of impractical ambitions...were all dumped into the great ocean to the east."²²

Even for ex-inmates whose commitment to staying involved and vocal on social issues never weakens, they cannot help but remain aware of the feebleness of the individual's legal status compared to the broad discretion Chinese officials enjoy in matters of sentencing prisoners. *Lü Hua Shu* describes how the camp term of a cart-driver was immediately lengthened a year when he accidentally flicked a cadre passenger with his horsewhip.²³ And as a piece of reportage by Wang Anyi (b. 1954) shows, even former inmates who have been assured immunity from prosecution if they cooperate with the police in incriminating an important suspect sometimes find themselves summarily sent back to camp for the maximum term provided by the regulations.²⁴ It is little wonder that the wife of a former camp inmate urges her husband to maintain the lowest possible profile in the school where he has resumed teaching after two decades of punishment: in a story by Zhang Xianliang from 1979 entitled "Colors Stand Out More Under a Heavy Frost" [Shuang Zhong Se Yu Nong], the teacher complains to his security-conscious wife that he cannot force himself to play it safe in curricular policy disputes at school, but must remain vocal and open about his views.²⁵ His wife reproachfully reminds him of how this forthrightness had earned him a "rightist" label and a long labor camp stay beginning in 1957. He thus promises to bear her misgivings in mind, for her sake and their child's if not for his own, but he cannot promise to stifle his tendency to outspokenness.

The passive helplessness of the ordinary Chinese citizen faced with vengeful and insecure officials comes across clearly in the ex-rightist's vision of how quickly he could be ordered back to the camp and his family driven from their home if the higher-ups were so inclined: "The home and everything else we've built up here could totally slip through our fingers overnight, and I'd have to go back inside that cramped and squat adobe hut."²⁶ Articulated fears of this type contribute much to our understanding of how the institution of the labor camp can cudgel the average Chinese adult into a state of wary passivity whenever a politically sensitive controversy threatens to encroach upon his or her life.

Continuity in Laogai from Mao to Deng and Jiang

By the 1990s, an outworn label like "rightist" would have to give way to a more recent vintage of Party invective, such as "bourgeois liberalizing element." Nevertheless, the striking differential in power between the extra-judicial authority of Party leaders and the non-Party citizenry, bereft of bona fide legal channels for the redress of grievances, has changed little from 1957 to the Deng-Jiang era. The only significant difference has been a reduced frequency of resorting to these draconian measures for political offenders, who now make up far less than 10% of the camp population, as opposed to over 80% during the 1950s.²⁷

Many essays on labor camp fiction use words such as “teshu” or “teding” [special; unusual] to draw a borderline between the rank injustices often committed in camps during 1957-1977 with the supposedly humanitarian criminal justice system under Deng.²⁸ Yet what we know about the harsh prison experiences of a post-Mao generation of human rights activists such as Wei Jingsheng, Liu Qing, Han Dongfang, and Xu Wenli lends little cogency to this position. Many of these prisoners of conscience endured lengthy stints of harsh solitary confinement, and were force-fed by a tube down the throat during hunger strikes.

Growing Attention to the Bottom Line in the Deng-Jiang Camps

The increasing emphasis upon the economic bottom line in the administration of the Laogai of the Deng-Jiang era has greatly reduced the emphasis on ideological “remolding” [gaizao] as a key function of the camps, in spite of the official rhetoric to the contrary. One Chinese story from 1988 that presents such a scenario illustrates how a camp commandant finds it politically expedient to detain an economically valuable inmate longer than is justifiable due to the latter’s high ideological marks stemming from obedience and diligence. An interesting tension develops as the commandant persists in bureaucratic foot-dragging to delay the deserved parole even as his own daughter remonstrates with him.

The commandant finally relents and reluctantly prepares the necessary parole documents, but soon gives in to the pressures of production quotas and demands of economic expediency and adamantly refuses to allow the request for parole to be sent up the line for approval. The commandant’s conversations, thoughts, and actions reveal that the imperative of ideological remolding has all but disappeared from the set of factors he considers in deciding the inmate engineer’s fate. Other stories and reportage confirm this gradual downgrading of the ideological mission in Deng-Jiang-era prison camps to a merely mechanical catechism of “remolding first, production second” that pales in seriousness beside palpable economic imperatives. Although labor camp farms have been downsized due to inefficiency in provinces such as Qinghai, some provinces such as Xinjiang still see the Laogai system as a viable economic concern.

Conclusion

The utopian notion that prison camp labor has an ennobling and reforming effect upon prisoners has paled dramatically since the passing of the Mao era. However, the basic Laogai system has changed less than many other aspects of PRC society in the Deng-Jiang era, even as the ratio of common criminals to political prisoners has grown even larger of late, and as some provinces such as Qinghai have downsized their Laogai for largely economic reasons.²⁹ Since the actual outcomes of the prison camp regimen differ substantially from what the theory would predict, it behooves the researcher to approach this topic from an empirical angle, and take into consideration the wide variety of camp inmate testimonials, both autobiographical and fictional.

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Notes

¹ Shao Mingzheng, ed., *Laogai faxue gailun* [Legal Studies Outline of the Labor Reform Camps] (Beijing: Zhongguo Zhengfa Daxue chubanshe, 1990), p. 37. One could agree that the camps have benefited an autocratic government, but not society as a whole, which includes camp inmates as well as their families and friends. Perhaps it is the non-person status of inmates, in that their

rights of citizenship are stripped away upon arrest, that allows Shao to dismiss considerations of their welfare from his judgment of society's welfare as a whole.

² Shao Mingzheng gives the laogai system the credit for the PRC's criminal recidivism rate, which is supposedly ten times lower than the norm for "bourgeois" countries. Notwithstanding the dubiousness and unverifiability of these statistics involving an area of Chinese government long veiled in secrecy—the security apparatus—Shao ignores other factors such as the severity of sentencing (i.e., more life terms and executions), the likelihood of receiving parole, and the percentage of inmates who die in a camp or jail (and thus are unable to become repeat offenders). And if the recidivism rate were actually as low as the 5% claimed, one wonders why the book would include a section with detailed suggestions about handling repeat offenders (pp. 182-183). See *Laogai faxue gailun*, pp. 14-15, 40, 291-292.

³ According to DuBois, "A double life with double thoughts, double duties...must give rise to double works and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretense or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism." Quoted in James C. Scott, "Everyday Forms of Resistance," in Forrest D. Colburn, ed., *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), p. 21.

⁴ Lü hua shu, in *Zhang Xianliang xuanji* [An Anthology of Zhang Xianliang], vol. III (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe), p. 186.

⁵ Lü hua shu, in *Zhang Xianliang xuanji*, vol. III, pp. 167, 164.

⁶ Nanren de yiban shi nüren, in *Zhang Xianliang xuanji*, vol. III, p. 485. Liu Binyan has provided a model example of kan fanmian hermeneutics, taking Central Secretary Jiang Zemin's 1989 speech entitled "On the Question of Party Construction" as his object of analysis: "We must give full rein to the Party's unifying power, attraction, and fighting power." Chinese readers immediately translated this passage into their own language: what Jiang meant was 'The Chinese Communist Party is disintegrating (no unifying power or fighting power), and is opposed by the absolute majority of the Chinese people; its members are no longer docile tools of the Party, but each one goes his own way.'" See "Tell the World": What Happened in China and Why, tr. Henry L. Epstein (New York: Pantheon, 1989), p. 163. See also Philip F. Williams, "Remolding' and the Chinese Labor-Camp Novel," *Asia Major* 4:2 (1991), 133-149.

⁷ Zhang Xianliang, Lü hua shu, in *Zhang Xianliang xuanji*, vol. III, p. 168.

⁸ Irina Ratushinskaya, *Grey is the Color of Hope*, tr. Alyona Kojevnikov (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1988), p. 156.

⁹ See Shao Mingzhen, *Laogai faxue gailun*, p. 110.

¹⁰ Solzhenitsyn replies to detractors of the way his zek Ivan derives great satisfaction from what is unpaid slave labor in the cinder-block-laying scene in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (pp. 96-112 in the 1963 Time Book edition of Ralph Parker's translation). See *The Gulag Archipelago Two*, tr. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 257-259. A more recent account of the Soviet camps reinforces Solzhenitsyn and Zhang Xianliang on this point: "There is beauty even in prison life; if you use only dark colors you won't get it right." See Sergei Dovlatov, *The Zone: a Prison Camp Guard's Story*, tr. Anne Frydman (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1985), p. 91.

¹¹ See Cong Weixi, "Yuan qu de bai fan" [White Sails Far Departed], in *Cong Weixi ji* (Fuzhou: Haixia wenyi chubanshe, 1986), pp. 210, 220, 196.

¹² Robert Conquest notes that "'Concentration camp' was changed in Stalin's time, as the camps grew more deadly, to 'corrective labour camp.'" See "Totalterror," in Peter Stansky, ed., *On Nineteen Eighty-four* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1983), p. 184.

¹³ Estranged Party members who have been jailed under both the pre-revolutionary and state socialist regimes have tended to agree that prison life has been significantly harsher under the latter "people's" republics. See, for example, Wang Ruowang, "Ji'e sanbuqu" [Hunger Trilogy], in *Yanbuzhu de guangmang* [Glory That Can't Be Covered Up] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1983), English translation by Kyna Rubin with Ira Kasoff (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991); and Milovan Djilas, *Of Prisons and Ideas*, tr. Michael Petrovich (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), especially pp. 67-68, 76. Of course, imprisoned foreigners and celebrities are sometimes treated with special leniency, partly in the hope that accounts of their prison experiences will circulate abroad and be taken as representative of the norm in China (a Soviet example is the cushy treatment Gary Powers received in Russia after being shot down during Eisenhower's second term; it is pithily described in Anatoly Marchenko's *My Testimony* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1969). Therefore, the prison memoirs of leniently treated inmates like the Ricketts and Dai Qing should be read in conjunction with accounts in which the PRC prison authorities behaved with less concern about world opinion, such as those by Wang Ruowang, Liu Qing, Bao Ruowang (*Prisoner of Mao*), and Lai Ying (*The Thirty-sixth Way*).

¹⁴ Zhang Xianliang, *Zhang Xianliang xuanji*, vol. III, p. 164.

¹⁵ Nanren de yiban shi nüren, *Zhang Xianliang xuanji*, vol. III, pp. 434-435.

¹⁶ Harold Rosenberg, "Marxism: Criticism and/or Action," in Irving Howe, ed., *Twenty-five Years of Dissent: an American Tradition* (New York: Methuen, 1979), p. 251.

¹⁷ Zhang Xianliang, *Zhang Xianliang xuanji*, III, p. 478.

¹⁸ Zhang Xianliang *xuanji*, III, p. 174.

¹⁹ Nanren de yiban shi nüren, *Zhang Xianliang xuanji*, vol. III, p. 463. Having lost control over basic motor functions in the larynx due to psychological trauma, the "Mute" is probably suffering from hysteria, in the rigorous psychotherapeutic sense of the word—not the popular usage that means "overwrought," "frenetic," or "frenzied." His dysfunction is related to Zhang's impotence but

more serious, since the vocal apparatus is more resistant to psychosomatic interference than the sex organs or excretory system.

²⁰ Zhang Xianliang *xuanji*, vol. III, pp. 510-516.

²¹ See, for example, Anatoly Marchenko, *My Testimony*, tr. Michael Scammell (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1969), p. 171; Jerzy Kmiecik, *A Boy in the Gulag* (London: Quartet Books, 1983), p. 151; and Bao Ruo-wang (1926-1997) and Rudolph Chelminski, *Prisoner of Mao* (1973; rpt. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1976), 224, 242-243.

²² Zhang Xianliang, *Zhang Xianliang xuanji*, vol. III, pp. 220-221. Among the ideals of Zhang's that were destroyed over years of habituation to cruel treatment in the camps was his originally tolerant view toward a woman whose sexual mores might have differed from his own. Zhang preferred not to probe Ma Yinghua's past amorous liaisons in *Lü hua shu*, but in *Nanren de yiban shi nüren* he harshly upbraids Huang Xiangjiu again and again for having given in to Secretary Cao's sexual advances on merely a single occasion. He thus blows her transgression out of all proportion while keeping his anger at Secretary Cao bottled within his private thoughts—after all, nagging one's spouse is safe enough, but betraying one's anger at a Party cadre could be terribly dangerous. This is not to say that Zhang should have confronted the Party secretary and gotten another term in the camps, but that he was unfairly using Huang Xiangjiu as the vent for his anger at the political system responsible for his impotence in the first place.

²³ Zhang Xianliang *xuanji*, vol. III, p. 260.

²⁴ Wang Anyi & Zong Fuxian, "Fengshuling liu ri—Baimaoling nu lao jiao dui caifang jishi" [Six Days in Fengshuling—Interviews from the Women's Re-education Through Labor Brigade at Baimaoling]. *Da qiang neiwai* [Inside and Outside the Prison Walls], 1988, no. 4, pp. 3-9, especially p. 7.

²⁵ Zhang Xianliang, *Zhang Xianliang xuanji*, vol. I, pp. 44-73.

²⁶ Zhang Xianliang *xuanji*, vol. I, p. 49.

²⁷ Wu Hongda (Harry Wu), "Mai laogai fan de jiu, he laogai fan de cha: Zhongguo dalu de laogai qiye" [Buying the Wine and Drinking the Tea Produced by Labor Camp Convicts—Mainland China's Labor Camp Enterprises], *Jiushi niandai* [The Nineties], August 1990, p. 23. For a more in-depth examination of prison camp enterprises, see Hongda Harry Wu, *Laogai: The Chinese Gulag* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 33-49. Wu's book is the first full-length scholarly study of the PRC prison camp system.

²⁸ The most conspicuous example might be Li Qian's sketchy and formulaic study, *Teding shiqi de da qiang wenxue* [Prison Wall Literature from an Unusual Period] (Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe, 1988).

²⁹ Unlike Xinjiang's bingtuan camp system, which has continued to import convicts from other provinces throughout the 1990s, the provincial leaders in Qinghai province have reversed their past practice of importing prisoners en masse, largely out of desires to increase agricultural productivity and tax revenue. See James D. Seymour and Richard Anderson, *New Ghosts, Old Ghosts: Prisons and Labor Reform Camps in China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 132, 173-174. While some of Seymour and Anderson's conclusions are controversial and require further research and clarification, they make a good case for expecting wide variations in the management of China's prison camps and prison enterprises from one province to another, and even from one locale to another within a given province.

The Laogai & Violations Of International Human Rights Law

Melissa Pearson Frugé

Introduction

I am honored to be here speaking before you to discuss how the operation of the Laogai by the Chinese government violates international human rights law. I am going to first discuss applicable international human rights treaties, then I will briefly discuss the legal precedents established in response to the Nazi concentration camps and how these might apply to the PRC and its forced labor camps, and finally, I will discuss my proposal for abolishing forced labor in China.

Laogai translates literally as "Reform through Labor," but this definition does not portray what is happening to Laogai prisoners any more accurately than the Nazi's slogan "labor makes free" depicts what happened to concentration camp victims.¹ The Laogai is principally a tool for communist political coercion which operates by means of forced or slave labor.

Within the last few years, international publicity of the Laogai has increased and the PRC has responded by officially replacing the term "Laogai" with "prison." The reason for this change probably stems from the fact that according to international law, prison labor is legal and encouraged by the United States² and many other countries throughout the world.³ The United States and other members of the international community have apparently accepted that the Laogai is prison labor and consequently permissible under international law.⁴ The PRC has escaped international legal ramifications by clothing its human rights violations under a thriving economy that benefits the PRC and other powerful nations.

I. International Human Rights Law

A. International Human Rights Documents

1. United Nations Charter

China is a principal member of the United Nations ("UN"). The UN Charter was one of the first documents addressing the need for countries to guarantee human rights to their citizens. The purpose of the Charter is to obligate UN member states to "promote ... universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms."⁵

Even if we take a narrow interpretation of this broad statement, China is in violation by operating the Laogai. For example, the basic human rights accepted by the international community include the protection from slavery, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and prolonged or arbitrary detention. Such rights have attained *jus cogens* status, meaning that they are legal principles that no country can violate. In international law, countries are generally free to pick and choose what they will be bound by, for example by choosing to enter into a treaty. However, no state may choose to opt out of *jus cogens* principles.

China violates the basic human rights of Chinese prisoners by subjecting them to torture and inhuman treatment. Laogai survivors and their relatives have documented that prisoners have been subjected to treatment

including deprivation of food and water, extended solitary confinement, work in dangerous environments, and work for little or no pay, just to name some of the atrocities. Furthermore, even though the Chinese government has in recent years reformed its criminal procedure laws, it is questionable whether Chinese citizens are properly charged with acts constituting crimes and are afforded proper trials. This all leads to the conclusion that China violates the UN Charter by operating the Laogai.

2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (the “Declaration”) is another important treaty. It was promulgated by the UN in 1948 to ensure that the lessons of the Nazi concentration camps would not be forgotten. The Declaration creates legal obligations for China and the other UN member states.⁶ Many of the human rights embodied in the Declaration have evolved into *jus cogens* binding on all countries.

China’s operation of the Laogai denies prisoners rights in violation of the Declaration, including several civil and political rights. These include:⁷

a. **The rights to freedom and equality** (arts. 1, 2.). In China, citizens are not considered equal. Those from different economic backgrounds are viewed differently because of the government’s goal to achieve a classless society.⁸ Freedom is also not protected in China. Many have been sent to the Laogai for criticizing communism or practicing religion.

b. **The right to life, liberty and property** (art. 3.). These rights are violated when citizens are arrested without a fair trial or are summarily executed. Furthermore, those living in the Laogai are often subject to malnutrition, freezing weather and severe beatings.

c. **The right to be free from slavery and torture.** There have been numerous documented instances of slavery and torture in the Laogai and many Laogai prisoners have experienced such treatment, including the use of electric cattle prods, shackles and a number of other tools.⁹

The following summary of the methods of torture utilized in the Laogai illustrates the absence of human decency in the Laogai. Most prisoners are subject to harsh living conditions, including one or more of the following: inadequate food, inadequate clothing, inadequate building structures, and lack of access to sufficient medical care. Prisoners are forced to work very long hours under dangerous conditions with little or no pay. Prisoners are tortured in their daily working environments for purposes of punishment and coercion. A recent eye witness account confirms that Laogai prison officials continue to force prisoners into life threatening circumstances, such as processing sheepskin hides while standing naked in chest-deep vats of toxic chemicals.¹⁰ Third, prisoners may be subject to punishment that is grossly disproportionate to their alleged crimes. Finally, such punishment is often done more for purposes of demonstrating the power of the PRC Government and degrading the prisoner rather than as a reaction to a heinous act done by the prisoner.¹¹

d. **The right to due process.** (arts. 10,11) Due process rights include the right to be free from arbitrary arrest, the right to a fair trial, and the right to be presumed innocent. A large number of prisoners have been denied these rights. Such violations continue despite the PRC’s recent attempts at legal reform.¹² Harry Wu’s 1995 detention is but one example. Wu spent nineteen days without being charged and was given no opportunity to present evidence during his four-hour trial.

e. **The right to freedom of speech, religion and assembly.** The Chinese continue to be imprisoned for exercising these rights. The brutal suppression of protesters at Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the ongoing repression of practitioners of Falun Gong are again prominent examples.

f. **The right to freedom of movement.** (art. 19) This right is violated not only by unlawful imprisonment but when the PRC extends the sentences of prisoners without justification. The practice of revoking residence permits (*hukou*) from a prisoner's place of origin and the system of forced job placement (*Jiuye*) further violate this freedom.

g. The Declaration also sets forth economic, social and cultural rights (arts. 23, 24). These rights include: (a) the right to equal pay for equal work, (b) the right to enough pay to permit an existence worthy of human dignity, (c) the right to rest, leisure and reasonable limitations on working hours, and (d) the right to education which develops the human personality and strengthens respect for human rights. In the Laogai, prisoners are given little or no pay for long hours of demanding work and they are not given a nutritious diet or adequate room and board. In fact, many prisoners have died under the poor conditions they are forced to work under. Furthermore, the "education" provided in the Laogai is not geared toward furthering the prisoners' intellectual or independent spirit. Rather, it consists of orders to memorize and obey the teachings of the Chinese Communist Party. Those who disobey are severely punished.

All of these acts of the PRC constitute serious violations of the Declaration.

3. Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Apart from the UN Charter and the Declaration, the Convention Against Torture is one of the only other international human rights documents China has ratified.¹³ As many of the principles in the Declaration, the prohibition of torture is considered *jus cogens*. As I discussed earlier, China has violated the Convention Against Torture by inflicting various forms of torture and inhuman treatment on Laogai prisoners.

4. Nuremberg Charter

I would like to briefly discuss the Nazi concentration camps and the Nuremberg Charter and Tribunal that resulted from the atrocities committed at the camps because there are common threads which run between the concentration camps and the Laogai. During World War II, the Nazis terrorized the countries they occupied by using humans for medical experiments, forcing masses to work as slave laborers and murdering the occupants of entire towns. Many of the same atrocities have taken place in the Laogai.

Because there was no existing legal precedent or system to address the Nazis crimes, which were considered unique, the Allies set out to establish clear principles to inform and guide the future acts of all nations.¹⁴ These principles were embodied in the Nuremberg Charter, which established three major crimes: (a) crimes against peace (waging a war of aggression); (b) war crimes (including the murder, ill-treatment, forced labor, etc. of a civilian population); and (c) crimes against humanity (including the murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation and other inhuman acts committed against any civilian population committed before or during war).¹⁵

Today, the political climate now is not as it was after World War II—there are not a group of states seeking to punish the loser of a war. This, as well as the economic benefit countries obtain from China helps

explain why the international community has devoted little effort to stop the abuses of the Laogai. However, despite the probable political opposition to upsetting China, the Laogai should be met with its own charter and tribunal.

II. Remedy Proposal

A. Exposing the Problem

The first step must be to expose the problem. This step is already taking place thanks to the efforts of Harry Wu and international human rights organizations publicizing the Laogai. This has been and should continue to take place through conferences like this one, media attention, educational materials, and government testimony, among other efforts.

In addition, the International Labor Organization (ILO) needs to get involved. One of the main goals of the ILO is to abolish forced labor around the world.¹⁶ While the organization has not actively taken a position on forced labor in China, the ILO has expertise in this area and has successfully combated forced labor in other parts of the world. The International Labor Organization is a specialized agency of the UN created to improve working standards in the international community. It has promulgated two major conventions against forced labor, the Forced Labor Convention of 1930 and the Abolition of Forced Labor Convention of 1957. Where violations of these conventions have been found, the ILO has responded by persistently investigating complaints and continuing periodic investigations and persuasion (Indonesia is one example).¹⁷ In addition, the ILO uses certain partners to assist in its efforts, including universities, hospitals, worker and employer organizations and the media. If the ILO would get involved in the case of the Laogai, it could encourage: (a) universities to educate students; (b) hospitals to educate medical students and to inquire into organ donations originating in China; (c) workers and employer organizations to implement policies to try to avoid the use of products from the Laogai; and (d) the media to engage in investigative reporting.

B. Establishing a Laogai Tribunal and Charter

After sufficient exposure of the human rights abuses in China, the public should support abolishing the Laogai. The UN should take the lead here to establish a specialized body as it has done in other situations of serious human rights abuses, such as those in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. A charter should be drafted identifying the relevant human rights legal principles and authorities. Then there should be a massive fact finding effort. This should include the identification and inspection by independent agencies of Laogai camps and interviews with present Laogai prisoners and Laogai survivors. Finally, a trial should be conducted. To avoid a lengthy trial, the PRC and high-ranking officials should be the defendants, because involving all the Chinese government officials involved would be very time consuming.

The trial would likely result in a finding that the Laogai violates even the most basic human rights and it should be abolished. This judgment would then need to be implemented by the specialized UN body and perhaps with the help of the ILO. The judgment should order the PRC Government to: (1) re-define crimes warranting criminal responsibility so that current provisions of PRC law criminalizing behavior permissible under international law are invalid; (2) make a determination regarding which Laogai prisoners were imprisoned for crimes warranting criminal responsibility; (3) afford due process to prisoners arrested for committing crimes warranting criminal responsibility, including just and proportional punishment; and (4) free all Laogai prisoners unjustly imprisoned.

Thank you.

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Notes

¹ Harry Wu meets Nazi Hunter, LAOGAI REPORT (Laogai Research Foundation), Sept. 1996, at 2 (comparing the Laogai to concentration camps).

² U.S. CONST. Amend. XIII, § 1. The Eight Amendment permits criminals to be treated as slave laborers. *Id.* It provides "[n]either slavery or involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." *Id.* (emphasis added).

³ The UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners advise UN member states to require prisoners to work. UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, E.S.C. Res 663 (XXIV) UN ESCOR, 24th Sess., Supp. No. 1, at 11 (1957).

⁴ A Memorandum of Understanding entered into by the PRC and the US refers to prison labor rather than Laogai. China-United States: Memorandum of Understanding on Prohibiting Import and Export Trade in Prison Labor Products, September 1992, 31 I.L.M. 1071. The International Labor Organization ("ILO") also considers the Laogai prison labor. Telephone Interview with Max R. Kern, Chief, Freedom of Workers Section, Application of Standards Branch, International Labor Standards Department, International Labor Organization (October 19, 1996). When asked why the ILO has not taken action with respect to the Laogai problem in China, the ILO Chief of the Freedom of Workers Section responded "prison labor is not illegal under international law." *Id.*

⁵ UN CHARTER art. 55(c).

⁶ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Dec. 10, 1948, UN G.A. Res. 217. "It is the first comprehensive human rights instrument to be proclaimed by a universal international organization." THOMAS BUERGENTAL, INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS 30 (1995).

⁷ Steven M. Karlson, International Human Rights Law: United States Inmates and Domestic Prisons, 22 NEW ENG J. on Crim. & CIV. CONFINEMENT 439, 446 (1996).

⁸ Harry Wu, LAOGAI (Ted Slingerland, trans. 1992) (explaining the PRC leadership policy to use the Laogai to "eliminate all 'class enemies' and 'anti-socialist' elements.")

⁹ See also STATE DEPARTMENT DISPATCH: CHINA HUMAN RIGHT PRACTICES 1995, § 1 (c).

¹⁰ See Daniel S. Ehrenberg, *The Labor Link: Applying the International Trading System to Enforce Violations of Forced and Child Labor*, 20 YALE J. INT'L L. (1995) at 368 (describing Harry Wu's visit to the Qinghai Hide and Garment Factory, also known as Qinghai No. 5 Labor Reform Detachment).

¹¹ *PRC Releases Laogai "White Paper,"* LAOGAI REPORT (Laogai Research Foundation), Jan 1993, at 1.

¹² STATE DEPARTMENT DISPATCH, § 1 (d).

¹³ Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Dec 10, 1984, 23 I.L.M. 1027, as modified, 24 I.L.S. 535 (1985).

¹⁴ Steven Fogelson, *The Nuremberg Legacy*, 63 S. CAL. L. REV. 833, 834 (1990).

¹⁵ Charter of the International Military Tribunal, *reprinted in* 1 TRIAL OF THE MAJOR WAR CRIMINALS BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TRIBUNAL, art. 6 (1946).

¹⁶ Steven Simpson, Enforcement of Human Rights Through ILO Machinery, HUMAN RIGHTS BRIEF (Washington College of Law, American University), Fall 1995, Vol. 3, No. 1, at 23. see also generally INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION MANDATE.

¹⁷ International Labour Organization, Observations 1982, Convention No. 29: Forced Labour 1930, Indonesia (1982) (on file with Freedom of Workers Section, Application of Standards Branch, International Labour Standards Department, ILO)

The Strike Hard Campaign (Yanda) and the Death Penalty

T. Kumar, Amnesty International

Thank you very much. It is always a pleasure to attend meetings of this nature, a meeting which brings about real voices and sufferings from the ground. Human rights activists give a voice to the voiceless, and here we have people who are giving voices to the voiceless prisoners, behind bars in China. This conference has an extremely important significance for the promotion and protection of human rights in China. I was nervous to hear the speakers before me because they are all experts, professors specializing in Laogai and China. Amnesty International as an organization has been monitoring human rights not only in China but around the world. However, we have been increasingly concerned about the continuing abuses in China for several years now. In 1995, we held a special campaign to highlight these issues in China.

The long-standing forced labor prisons and the Strike Hard campaign that the Chinese initiated in 1996, have managed to establish the appearance that they are legally permissible systems. Today, I want to highlight the nature of due process in China. Amnesty International was alarmed and has reported repeatedly the miscarriage of justice and the lack of due process that exists even today in China's judicial system. Although certain attempts are being made to improve China's judicial system, the advancements have only affected the corporate legal system. The criminal justice system is still used as a mechanism to suppress the voice of peaceful dissent. It's a well-known fact that in China, individuals' verdicts have been issued well in advance of standing trial. That means there is no fairness at all; verdicts first, trials later. If Chinese officials disagree with my accusations, I urge them to make their trials public and allow human rights monitors to be present. Until they do so, the mounting evidence permits the international community to rightly accuse China of not delivering due process to its people.

An egregious abuse of justice delivered in China is the zealous application of the death penalty. At Amnesty, we oppose the use of the death penalty in every country including the United States. However in China, the absence of due process exists and is manifested through defendants who do not stand trial for their crimes, have no means of appeal, and receive swift and sometimes public executions. The number of executions is astounding. Innocents have been executed because of the nature of the Chinese supposed judicial system. We have documented many cases of individuals charged and executed within days. One particular individual was charged on May 24, 1996, and was executed on May 31st. The whole process, trial, appeal, and sentence took place within seven days. We can only imagine the feelings and experiences of that individual's family, who lost him within a week.

Political prisoners have been executed in the Xinjiang Province, a Muslim province in China. From our information, family members were informed just prior to their loved one's executions. They were not allowed to be present at the trial.

I would like to address the issue of active participation and citizen support outside China for the plight of the Chinese inside of China. Yesterday, the survivors attending the conference attended a reception in the Senate building. We need to keep in mind that the Clinton administration's policy is going downhill, from a human rights perspective, when it comes to China. We at Amnesty are worried about this turn of

events, especially after the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. We believe that the continued interaction on the part of the U.S. gives a very strong signal to the Chinese that the Clinton administration is prepared to bend over backwards to satisfy them in light of our alleged mistakes.

Less than a month ago, a couple members of the Congressional Research Service went to Xinjiang, China, the Muslim province in Urumqi. The Congressional Research Service had a phone number of Rebiya Kadeer, a well-known Uighur businesswoman whom they invited to meet with them. On her way to meet with the U.S. officials, Ms. Kadeer was arrested and taken into custody. We immediately reported the incident and we urged the international community, including the U.S. government, to take action. Within a week she was charged with contempt for giving information to foreigners. To this day, we have not heard a whisper from the administration. We understand that they must engage in private diplomacy. We know they are engaged in diplomatic negotiations; however, almost a month has lapsed. Is it a mistake for a Chinese citizen to meet with Congressional staff people? If that is so, what is the U.S. government's position? If it were one of the administration's staff who was taken into custody, would the actions of the U.S. government be any different?

President Clinton met with the President of China, Jiang Zemin in Auckland, New Zealand, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting. We urged him through different channels to raise the case of this woman, because the U.S. has an obligation to do so. We do not know what President Clinton decided. What we do know is that the Chinese government is ready to make her stand trial. We fear that unless the Clinton administration makes a strong statement on this issue and on the issues of other human rights abuses that take place in China, that the activities of human rights activists outside of China will have no bearing on the lives of people inside of China. That's why focusing our attention on the White House, the State Department, and to a larger extent the Commerce Department is extremely important. If this conference can achieve anything, I hope we encourage Senators and members of Congress to take the lead against the abuses being committed in China.

There are significant current developments on the foreign arena that position China as a key international player. As you are aware, the United Nations is sending an international peacekeeping team to East Timor, and the Chinese are going to be a part of it. The Chinese, through their actions, are implying that human rights are an international concern. An international community has the responsibility and obligation to send armed troops to protect and promote human rights. I also would not be surprised if they signed on to an International War Crimes Tribunal. If that's the trend the Chinese are taking, we can urge them to practice what they preach outside their borders and to make sure that we all can see a day when we can have conferences inside China to talk about abuses around the world just as we have conferences here criticizing human rights in the U.S. Until that occurs, we all have to be vigilant. We all have to be extremely cautious because the legal system is being used to justify executing and torturing people, putting people behind bars, and charging those who dare talk to American government officials.

Thank you very much for indulging me.

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Jiuye (*Forced Job Placement*): Extension of Laogai

Qi Jiazhen

A Laogai prisoner's term has come to an end. He has been looking forward to the day for so long. But, what comes next? Not true release, not physical and mental relaxation, not turning over a new leaf, not hot baths at home, not delicious meals with his family. He is moved next door, to a Forced Job Placement facility, so-called Jiuye.

Like most manifestations of Communist ideologies, Jiuye is completely unjustifiable. Jiuye means a Laogai prisoner who has completed his or her term will not go free, but only move from a small prison to a larger one, where incarceration and reform go on as usual, only under a new name.

Laogai and Jiuye form a complete set of means of dictatorship. Jiuye is Laogai's neighbor, its extension. Where Laogai exists, there Jiuye exists. Like a truck and the trailer pulled behind it, they head for the same destination. As Jiuye guards often say: "All the squalls of the Yellow River can't cleanse your Laogai skin." Once you get into Laogai, you never come out of it. It is no wonder in the past many papers, even the *People's Daily*, the organ of Communist Party propaganda, called the Jiuye workers "released labor-reform prisoners." But, retention of the term "prisoners" alone meant that in the true sense of the word, there was no release for these people.

My father Qi Zhiguo served two dozen years in Laogai and Jiuye for his "historical and active counterrevolutionary crimes," from January 1951 to March 1975. I myself served ten years in Sichuan Province No. 1 Prison (currently Chongqing Municipality Prison), from September 1961 to September 1971 for my "active counterrevolutionary crimes." Based on my own experiences and understanding, I would like to talk about a few issues:

Why is Laogai Followed by Jiuye?

In the first place, even Communists themselves do not believe such a myth that someone like China's last emperor Puyi could be reformed into a new person, that the "great labor-reform policy" was indeed effective. They do not believe that their law, vindictive and murderous in nature, can transform prisoners. The longer a prisoner's term, the more they are worried. They even believe "the longer prisoners are reformed, the more reactionary they become." This is demonstrated in a complete lack of self-confidence in their own policies. Out of political need they founded Jiuye units, forcing expired prisoners to labor under their supervision, controlling their actions and thoughts through a second term.

Jiuye is also the product of rapacious economic greed. Countless Laogai units are spread all over China, most in outlying areas, where prisoners endure indescribable hardships in perilous environments in places like Chongqing No. 1 Prison, Erbian Farm, Yongchuan Tea Farm, Dongyin Farm, Sichuan Milling Machine Plant, Deyang Brick and Ceramic Plant, Huidong Lead and Zinc Mine, Deyang Asbestos Mine, where continuous operations call for a continuous supply of labor forces. This problem is solved by forcing expired prisoners to labor in the same Laogai enterprises as Jiuye prisoners, and at incredibly low "wages." Their youth and life mercilessly sponged, Jiuye prisoners ensure profits for the Communist regime.

Besides the above-mentioned political and economical factors, Jiuye is also the product of the Communist policy of criminals of association – one person is implicated in political crimes, and the whole family begins having problems. The high-pressure policy demanding that everyone “take a firm class stand and make a clean break with class enemies,” splits countless numbers of families – husbands and wives divorce, children change their surnames, parents excommunicate their prisoner children. In addition, there exists the policy to “cleanse and cut down urban population,” which causes all prisoners who originally were urban residents to forever lose their urban residence permits. Being homeless and having nowhere to turn, Jiuye units are their final and only habitat, manifesting the Communist Party’s high degree of “revolutionary humanism.”

From Laogai to Jiuye—such is the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and is a *de facto* law.

How Do Jiuye Workers Live in the Camp System?

On the surface, prisoners become “Jiuye workers,” and Laogai units become “Jiuye units.” This notwithstanding, the dictatorial essence of Jiuye remains unchanged.

First, living conditions and daily labor or production patterns remain 100% unchanged. To a prisoner who has gone from Laogai to Jiuye, you remain in the same Laogai units. The people around you are the same—all of them “ex” prisoners. Prison administrators and Jiuye inmates remain enemies. Thus the relations between those who exercise dictatorship and those who are objects of dictatorship remain the same. Jiuye workers must be well-behaved and are forbidden to be unruly in word or deed. All of this demonstrates that Jiuye personnel live a life no different than first-term Laogai prisoners.

Management systems and patterns in Jiuye units are largely identical with those in Laogai units, with only minor differences. Before you talk to a commander, you must say “Reporting!” aloud. No free hours, no rest in the evenings, Monday through Friday, and Sunday. There are also endless political study sessions, in which you must, linking the topics with your own actions and thoughts, constantly denounce yourself. You must be labor-minded—every minute, every second. Thus, you are constantly under a draconian sword. Whenever a Jiuye worker’s ideological problems surface, he is criticized in his unit, denounced in his company, and then, his labor quota suspended (hence food rations are reduced), he is forced to conduct a thorough self-examination—in a word, exactly the same as in a Laogai unit. In Jiuye units, commanders urge inmates to monitor and inform against each other. This makes administrators well-informed. They all know who thinks what, who is at odds with whom, even who says what in his dreams. This also makes Jiuye personnel suspect each other. Administrators often hold meetings or directly talk to those in Jiuye facilities, trying to penetrate their minds—attempting to find out what they think about all that is happening domestically and internationally.

Like Laogai prisoners, Jiuye prisoners are bound by the all-knowing net of ideological control and become nonreasoning automatons.

Yes, Jiuye personnel enjoy more freedom than Laogai prisoners, but how much more? What is the scope of their “bigger” freedom? Monday through Saturday, from their sardine-packed dormitory to the canteen, to the toilet, to the labor site, everywhere there are tall walls and barbed wire fences. You are confined to where you belong, not a single step beyond the gates. On Sunday, before Jiuye workers are permitted outside the prison, they must register and report where they are going, whom they will see, and

why they are doing this. Then, the Jiuye unit issues him a single exit pass. No pass, no go. A married man is privileged to spend his Saturday night outside of the gates. A single guy can go outside only on Sunday. Everybody must be back Sunday evening. If you fail to return on time, look out for the results! Administrators will always control Jiuye personnel and punish those who fail to conduct themselves well by forbidding them to go outside for a duration of two months, half a year or even longer. Is this “release?” Is this “job placement?”

Most Jiuye workers do the heaviest, dirtiest jobs. They are sent to places where Laogai prisoners cannot be sent – to carry bricks and sand. They must do what they are assigned to do, in absolute obedience. You used to be a professor, a playwright, an engineer, a college student, or maybe you were an illiterate peasant before you were sent in. There is no difference. It is the same for everybody, physically strenuous labor at a wage of \$2.00 to 3.00 RMB (3.50 RMB for a few) monthly. As Jiuye workers say, “two bucks makes my whole body limp.” Figuratively, they call the money “compensation for exhausted youth.” For those who eat more, this money barely covers their meals, and virtually it is “bloodsucking money.” When some guys grumbled, an administrator would warn: “Remember, you are only a force of labor!” What that meant was that Jiuye workers were not considered human beings, only beasts of burden.

To sum up, release from prison leads to job placement in the same prison, which is equivalent to servitude under the same prison administration system, which means no freedom of thought and action. This is truly a mere extension of Laogai.

Twisted Souls

While in the Laogai, you constantly long for the day when your term expires. Finally the day comes, your term expires. To your disappointment, you are escorted to a Jiuye facility next door, and you become a “lifer.” You have nothing more to long for. Like all Jiuye guys, thrown out of life’s orbit, you become a walking corpse, your soul becomes twisted. I will offer a few examples.

A man named Zhang had been a music teacher in his pre-Laogai days. A talented singer and flute player, he was sent to Jiuye after his ten-year Laogai term expired. Jiuye warped him completely. After his wife embroidered and mailed him a traditional “Twin Heart” patch, symbolizing love, he returned it to her and even accused her of harboring “serious bourgeois sentiments.” Nowhere to go on Sundays, he would sit motionless the whole day on his bed, reluctant to leave, even to go to eat and to the toilet.

When Huang Junjun, who had been a playwright and a director in the army, was serving his eight-year term, his wife remarried and his son changed his surname. With nothing to do on Sundays, he thought of killing himself, but was afraid that his suicide would put his son in an even worse situation, in spite of the fact that his surname was no longer the same. So, he indulged in fantasies. He would imagine that somewhere a house caught fire or somebody was drowning, and he dashed into the house or dove into the river. He would imagine he died, but became a hero. Unfortunately, he became no hero. One day, while he was filling a thermos flask with boiling water, he was lost in fantasies again and failed to notice that boiling water was overflowing, and his hand was blistered.

There was a man named Zhou. His father was a Communist martyr, and was Deng Xiaoping’s classmate in France. Before the Communists came to power, his father was chief of the organizing department in the underground Communist Party committee of Sichuan Province. While he was in the Laogai, his wife still hoped that one day he would come home. But, then his term expired, and he became a lifer in Jiuye. His wife gave up all hope, took away everything from the house, leaving only a fan, and remarried another

man. She told her daughters the new father could bring them a better future. Disillusioned with the mortal world, Zhou wanted to become a Buddhist monk, but there was no Buddhist temple he could turn to, as religions were banned during the Cultural Revolution. Besides, even if there were a few temples, none of them would accept a released Laogai prisoner.

Zheng Keren served eighteen years in prison. During his sentence he completely forgot that he had had a family. His term expired, but he never asked for a home visit leave. Then, I became a Jiuye prisoner, worked in the same place with him, had political studies with him in the same team. Two months later he said, "When Qi Jiazhen arrived, it reminded me I have a daughter about her age. I also have a wife. They are in Chengdu."

Jiuye strangles a normal person's soul and sentiments.

Political Persecution in Jiuye is No Different than in the Laogai

In late August 1970, when I was escorted to a Jiuye factory, cadres headed by a section chief named Chen were going all out, trying to crack a big counterrevolutionary organization. They were clamoring, "If cracked, this will send a sensation throughout the nation." First, speaking and acting on hearsay, they interrogated and pressured a man named Fang Ling, who confessed to false charges under torture and incriminated others. The whole thing snowballed. The "counterrevolutionary organization" grew bigger and bigger in size, until it outgrew the prison. For a period large numbers of Jiuye guys were put on "labor-suspended (hence food-rations-reduced)" status, and were forced to conduct a thorough self-examination and confess their "crimes." Labor suspension included Sundays. This went on for two years, until finally it turned out that the whole thing was fabricated by section chief Chen and others.

The one-armed guy from Jiuye named Zhang Zhansong wrote a ragged verse that was well-known in Sichuan Province at the time: "...Going eastward on horseback. Where to? In search of the winds of freedom." He was forced to confess that he had tried to seek refuge with Chiang Kai-Shek. He had said Mao Zedong Thought could be summarized with two words: "struggle" and "kill." This led to charges that he was conducting a vicious attack upon Chairman Mao the Great Leader. With those two charges, he was sent to be shot publicly. Prior to execution, for fear he would shout reactionary slogans, the authorities put a rope round his neck and tightened it. From suffocation, his face turned purple.

It is as easy as falling off a log to send Jiuye workers from the "bigger prison" of Jiuye back to the "smaller prison" of Laogai, to incarcerate them in a detention facility and interrogate them, then to give them another prison term. A prison administrator only has to say the word and a prisoner can be subjected to another term. For instance, a man named Chen Guang, an engineer, founded the zinc-plating shop in No. 4 battalion. He served fifteen years in Jiuye, but was given another ten-year prison term for counterrevolutionary crimes. Jiuye worker Fu Qinghe served another ten years in prison. Wang Baogeng, who was responsible for the canteen, was accused of embezzlement and was placed under solitary confinement. He nearly confessed that he had embezzled, but held out. Finally, he was released, but after serving more than two years in confinement.

Totally defenseless, Jiuye prisoners are the best stepping stones for prison administrators to achieve promotion.

Shocking Numbers of Abnormal Deaths in Jiuye Units

The plight of Jiuye workers is for the most part identical with that of Laogai prisoners. Pessimism is the dominant mood among those held in Jiuye. Most of them choose to kill themselves whenever they encounter the smallest obstacles. A skinny Jiuye physician nicknamed “Wang the Pretty” slit her wrist and died. Zhou Huijun, a Jiuye woman, killed herself by jumping from a dam. Another Jiuye woman followed in her footsteps, but was saved. Yao Pinghua hanged herself. Zhang Jianhua, a young pregnant girl, tried to kill herself with an overdose of sleeping pills. She was saved, but her baby was aborted. The baby’s father, a young prisoner serving his term, was so scared he killed himself. Fu Qinghe, who served his second prison term of ten years, disappeared a few years later, and was said to have killed himself. While in the hospital, Liu Boxiang removed his oxygen tube and infusion tube, thus killing himself. They were all my fellow Jiuye inmates.

Even more Jiuye prisoners die abnormal deaths in chemical plants, lead, zinc and asbestos mines. Over protracted periods, they are exposed to highly poisonous environments without any labor-protective devices. In Mianyang Asbestos Mine, year in year out, Jiuye personnel inhale lethal quantities of asbestos fibers and dust, which deposits in their lungs, making it impossible for them to breathe, and they die young. Everybody, in particular Jiuye administrators, knows perfectly well what causes their early deaths.

Countless Jiuye inmates are blown to pieces by explosives or die of injuries while they build railroads and bridges. A dozen Jiuye guys die? Jiuye administrators never bat an eye!

Sex in Jiuye Units

Prisoners’ criminal habits may be killed as a result of the Laogai, but not their sexual impulses. Laogai prisoners have no choice but to suppress their sexual impulses. However, the situation is different in Jiuye. The authorities feed them on sexual illusions. Their “wages” are barely enough for food rations. Once a week, they can go out, but only with a single pass. If a man is not divorced, he can sleep one night outside once a week. A single guy may get a fiancée and marry her—if a woman is willing.

In my Jiuye unit, there were hundreds of men. Of the six women, only I was single. Naturally, I became the target for the men’s sexual fantasies.

A Jiuye inmate nicknamed “Sex Wolf” used to go out every Sunday. Wearing no underpants, he practiced indecent exposure in the presence of women in public places. He was tied up, sent back to the Jiuye unit, and was denounced in “struggle sessions.” Since then, he has been forbidden to leave the unit on Sundays.

In the Jiuye unit, the number of homosexual men grew with incredible rapidity. They would dash towards river banks or hill slopes, where they “acted” with the speed of lightning. It was not unusual for one man to entertain several “husbands.” Numerous women also became homosexual.

Recall the women I have mentioned previously. Here are the reasons why they died or attempted suicide as it relates to sex in the Jiuye. Zhou Huijun killed herself by jumping from a dam, because she was chasing a Jiuye man, and he declined. Yao Pinghua tried to kill herself, because the baby inside her was not fathered by her boyfriend. Zhang Jianhua poisoned herself, because she had sex with a male Laogai prisoner.

While at college, Jiuye prisoner Lin Fang said something in defense of the rightist writer Liushahe. For that he was labeled by the College Party Committee as rightist element. Then he became a counterrevolutionary, served seven years in prison, followed by several years of Jiuye. He could not find a woman to marry. His almost forty-year-old brother spoke with a woman about it, and she agreed to marry both brothers. This happened in Northern China. It was the product of humanity and an accusation of the cruel Communist Laogai system—in tears and blood.

The most strange and disturbing incident involved a woman named Hu Weiwei, a fifth year student of pediatrics at Chongqing Medical Institute. When she was taken from Provincial No. 1 Prison to the notorious Erbian Farm as a Jiuye inmate, the commander forbade her to be the girlfriend of Zhen Boyan, the editor-in-chief of the *Sichuan Daily*, saying, “You are trying to marry our party paper’s editor and thus overthrow our party!” A Jiuye driver, nicknamed “F— Gun,” was the commander’s favorite because he was a bootlicker and transported everything for the commander with the truck. The commander arranged for him to marry Hu Weiwei. He went alone to a related unit and obtained a “marriage-approved certificate” by himself. That evening, he grabbed her, dragged her into the room the commander allotted him, and raped her. All Jiuye administrators thought that it was a perfect match for the “F— Gun” to marry a counterrevolutionary woman.

Above was what I went through and represents only a very small part of what has happened all over the nation.

Qi Jiazhen is a scholar and survivor of the Laogai and Jiuye system.

Forced Labor in Totalitarian Regimes

Panel 2, September 18, 1999

Moderator: Gregory Carr

Zbigniew Romaszewski

Semyon Vilensky

Albert Leong

George Bien

Doan Viet Hoat

Steven Marshall

Introduction by Moderator Gregory C. Carr

While chairing the panel on forced labor systems in totalitarian societies, Harry Wu's courageous opening remarks kept coming back to me. Directed at the survivors of the Laogai system, he said: Once we were called 'scum,' we were called 'stinking latrine pebbles that must be reformed.' But we are human beings, survivors of an inferno, witnesses to a system of unprecedented brutality. We have endured unthinkable violence and profound inhumanity and managed to come out with our humanity and our dignity intact. We should be proud to have beaten such impossible odds. We should be proud to be Laogai survivors..." Harry Wu and the people he gathered together for the conference exemplify this pride in survival. They jointly voice the urgency of commemorating their experiences into a tool that can be used to educate the world about hidden prison labor systems that attempt to "reeducate" political prisoners with hard labor, regular beatings and meager food.

Those unfamiliar with China's Laogai system can learn more about it, not only through survivor testimony, but also through attempts to compare and contrast the Laogai with similar prison systems that may be more familiar, such as the Soviet Gulag, on which the Laogai system was modeled. The essays from the panel "Perspectives of Forced Labor" provide an interesting overview of scholarly debate and research on forced labor in totalitarian societies. The panel includes contributions from Senator Zbigniew Romaszewski on slave labor in Central and Eastern Europe; Doan Viet Hoat on his experience as a political prisoner in Vietnam; Steven Marshall on Chinese Laogai as hidden but key tools in the Chinese economic development of Tibet; George Bien on comparisons between the Gulag system and the Holocaust; Albert Leong comparing and contrasting the Soviet Gulag system and the Chinese Laogai system; and Semyon Vilensky on the moral significance of the Gulag for Russian society today. This panel brought the Chinese Laogai out into the light of comparative history, and, in addition, the panelists offered policy prescriptions on how the world can mobilize to put an end to the Laogai system.

One of the most creative suggestions for how to destroy the Laogai system came from Senator Romaszewski, who proposed filing compensation suits against Chinese companies in the United States that use slave labor in China, much like the suits against German companies which used slave labor during World War II. In the case of Nazi Germany, U.S. courts have claimed damages on behalf of former slave laborers of German companies now residing in the U.S. With respect to the Laogai, he advocates winning a few precedent-setting cases that would popularize the Laogai issue in the U.S. and in the West and would hurt China's business activities, perhaps forcing it to reconsider its use of forced labor. Although perhaps not at present legally or logistically possible, this is a very interesting proposal for expanding the precedents of alien tort law and one with fascinating implications.

Next, Doan Viet Hoat related his eleven-year ordeal in Vietnamese Communist prison camps and his formal protest, while in prison, against the mixing of criminals with political prisoners, the implementation of forced labor, and the forced reeducation programs for prisoners. Doan Viet Hoat's moving testimony and his activism remind us that China is not the only country currently using this cruel prison labor system. He draws attention to the need for the international community to work to end Laogai systems in the remaining Communist countries: Vietnam, China, North Korea and Cuba. He suggests that those at the conference should set up an international Laogai association to that end and that the United Nations resolve to abolish all forced labor systems. As we reflect on his story and his plea for further action, we are reminded that although the International Labor Organization's Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (1957), was ratified by 145 countries thus far (though not of course by China or Vietnam), enforcement remains problematic.

Focusing back on China, Steven Marshall's history of Chinese Laogai in Tibet describes how the Laogai system is quite flexible in adapting to new economic needs, thus perhaps ensuring its longevity. Especially in the Tibetan autonomous areas, the Laogai have evolved to produce materials needed for infrastructure and exportable goods, and are even attempting to increase profit margins. At the same time, Chinese leaders know how important it is to hide the origins of goods that originate in the Laogai. Steve Marshall's portrait of this grim institution, mimicking modern business practices while it perpetuates barbaric crimes, highlights the paradoxes in China's development. His work on the Laogai illustrates the hardy nature of China's forced labor system, as he says, "they are not Marxist dinosaurs doomed to extinction" and we should be especially vigilant in tracking their development.

For further dissection of the function and purpose of the Laogai, Professor Leong's account of how the Chinese Laogai was modeled on the Soviet Gulag system is an insightful scholarly analysis of the forces that gave rise to first the Gulag and then the Laogai system and how they differ. He paints the Laogai system as an attempt to universalize the techniques of reeducating and brainwashing political prisoners first used in the Gulag and Soviet psychiatric hospitals but on a smaller scale (political prisoners were allowed a relative high degree of intellectual freedom in the Gulags). Leong is confident that China's increasing use of the Laogai for political control and economic production is a sign of its fundamental weakness and that soon China will be forced to undergo a sea of change as did the Soviet Union.

Combining both survivor testimony and comparative analysis, George Bien relates his experiences as a prisoner for eight years in Siberia. He reflects on the reasons for his survival: a combination of luck and youth; and how history of such troubled times is always filled with stories of exceptions, of luck and chance. He illustrates this with an anecdote, "I was sixteen years old and had been arrested for only five weeks. We were taken for a walk by the prison guards. A Soviet soldier no more than nineteen years with a gun on his shoulder all of a sudden threw a loaf of bread at me. Why?" A chance act of kindness in a Soviet Gulag stayed with him and helped to reaffirm his faith in humanity, even in a system that tried to work him to death.

Finally, Semyon Vilensky addresses the problems of former prisoners and the lack of public discussion of the horrors of forced labor camps in post-totalitarian societies. He proposes finding ways to unite former prisoners of Nazi, Soviet and Chinese labor camps and points to the work already done by the Vozvrashchenie Society, which he heads, in holding international conferences open to former prisoners of labor camps from a variety of countries. He calls for the education of youth in Russia on the topic of the Gulag system, "a whole generation has not been inoculated against totalitarianism as an unnatural, destructive, and pernicious ideology." We would do well to heed his advice and look to make more personal and professional connections between former prisoners and activists around the world—they know best the dangers inherent in neglecting the study of these issues.

Reading the speeches now collected here in essay form, I am struck by the words of Professor Leong, who envisions a time when "Laogai memorials, like Gulag monuments in the former Soviet Union, will arise at the sites of dismantled corrective labor camps in China." I think that is a goal to which all of us are working; to make this cruel system in China, still thriving today, a creature of the past, to be memorialized and its former victims commemorated. Until that day, survivors of the Laogai can take heart that scholars and activists describe it, explain it, and condemn it to outsiders in formats such as this.

Slave Labor in Totalitarian Systems

Senator Zbigniew Romaszewski

I am honored to have been given the opportunity to take part in this conference and share with you my thoughts on the issue of forced labor in totalitarian systems. My presence here is also an expression of my great concern for the universality of human rights. Despite the great diversity of cultures and customs, there is no doubt whatsoever that people are the same everywhere and that they are entitled to the same fundamental rights proclaimed 50 years ago by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today, when the most remote points on Earth have been brought closer to one another thanks to achievements in communications and transportation; when economic processes proceed on a supranational level, when the phenomenon we call globalization has begun to be a fact of life; a system where the same people in different parts of our planet are subject to different sets of rights; and where there are people of class A, B, C, etc., it is simply inadmissible. It is inadmissible because it breeds injustice, and injustice breeds conflicts and violence. Injustice destabilizes the world. I do not belong to those who look forward devoutly to our globalized future. On the contrary, in spite of some doubtlessly positive aspects, I perceive in it many threats and conflicts, I see the end of the colorful cultural diversity, and I see sameness and grayness. However, regardless of whether we like it or not, the world is moving in that direction and it is we who are responsible for whether that world will be a world of justice, brotherhood and peace, or a world of injustice, exploitation and conflict.

This is why the participants in the Third International Conference on Human Rights in Warsaw have suggested to hold the next conference in China and why the Polish Foundation for the Defense of Human Rights has come forward with the initiative to organize it in Hong Kong in November of the year 2000. We believe that the cultural, social, demographic and, finally, economic potential of the countries of the Far East and Southeast Asia, including China, destines them to play an important positive role in building the future world order. However, if these same countries remain within their totalitarian structures, they are apt to cause a conflict that will shock the entire world and dominate the 21st century.

Focusing the attention of the world public opinion on this issue, calling for observance of human rights in the Asian nations, is not just an expression of solidarity, but also of concern for the future of the world.

However, let us come back to the topic of this conference. I do not claim to know much about the Laogai system. I know exactly as much about it as I have found out from the lecture given in Warsaw by the esteemed Harry Wu and from the presentations by Yael Fuchs, Jianli Yang and Wei Jingsheng at the Third International Conference on Human Rights. Therefore, I hope to learn from you as much as possible. As for my contribution to this conference, it will boil down to a few comments concerning labor in totalitarian systems and a discussion of latest developments as it concerns the history of forced labor in Central and Eastern Europe during World War Two. I believe that there is a certain practical dimension in which these experiences could be of use to the victims of the Laogai.

When speaking of forced labor, one must note two extremely important aspects of the very notion of

labor: the human and ethical aspect, and the economic aspect. A man's life is spent laboring. Labor ensures his survival and the survival of his family. Yet it is also, or at least should be, an arena of self-realization, a place where a man can apply his creative capabilities and where he can develop. In this sense, labor is a man's constitutive element and must not be treated solely as an element of the economic process, as is capital, tools, profits or traded goods. This is why the problem of unemployment in the contemporary world is so dramatic. Solving it only at the survival level, through payment of social benefits (which, without doubt, are necessary) does not eliminate the essential issue of social degradation of the multitudes of the unemployed. I believe that, as automation progresses, the unemployment issue will end up dominating the human rights agenda in the 21st century. While it is already today possible to imagine a situation where the needs of all people will be satisfied to a relatively adequate level owing to the furiously growing industrial production, progress in the area of providing these people with work seems totally inadequate. What is more, the modern capitalist doctrine operates in terms of profits, productivity and effectiveness, and does not seem to notice this problem at all. I do not think that the humanistic aspect of labor can be quantified, and all that it proves to me is that the world vision as provided by the economic doctrine is very limited indeed. The problem I am speaking of is far from prosaic - it is already causing the reappearance of xenophobia and the spreading of social ills.

In this context, forced labor is somewhat of an anachronism that demonstrates economic and social backwardness. Indeed, what can be cheaper and more productive than labor executed by machines and robots? Why force people to work when all they want is access to work?

The fact remains that in the current Chinese reality the economic balance sheet does have a position called "cost of labor" and that in order to achieve maximum profits that cost must be brought down to zero, best by using forced labor. So, it is possible for millions of people to be forced to work, while other millions next to them are wandering around looking for work. This is a total aberration of economy, in which humanity has ceased to exist.

Incidentally, forced labor is an extreme example of work dehumanization. It deprives a person of creativity, initiative, satisfaction, and the possibility to develop. It treats him as an element of a machine engaged in the production process.

Seeing man solely as an element of a greater structure, as an ant, a bee or a termite functioning within and for the benefit of some greater good, is not a uniquely Chinese idea. "The individual is nil, a humbug..." wrote Vladimir Mayakovsky, while Joseph Stalin created the Gulag Empire where degraded human beings were meant to build a world of universal happiness. For Adolf Hitler too, humans, not to mention sub-humans, existed only for the sake of the welfare of the Third Reich. If murdered people could be turned into soap, lampshades or gloves (which I saw happening with my own eyes as a five-year-old boy at Buchenwald Concentration Camp), then using their labor before killing them seemed only natural.

Hence, the Chinese Laogai is not an original idea and fits very comfortably on the list of its predecessors. Its predecessors are now in the trash can of history and that is where the Laogai forced labor system will end up as well.

What I say about the humanistic aspect of work is not only a result of some abstract considerations, but also an outcome of certain practical experiences. When in the years 1976-1980, a few hundred or maybe a few thousand of us (the Polish population counted almost 40 million people at that time) took up the struggle against the Communist system as the Committee for the Defense of Workers, a struggle for

freedom, we conducted it on many fronts. A totalitarian state denies freedom to everyone and everywhere. Hence, we fought for the rule of law, for political freedom, for freedom of expression, culture and education, for religious freedoms, and we also fought for the freedom to work. Our movement consisted of several sections that focused on each of these objectives. We did not know which objectives would be widely supported and become the nuclei of a mass movement that was to change the course of history. It turned out that people chose what they knew best from their day-to-day experience. They chose the freedom to work. On August 31, 1980, the "Solidarity" Trade Union was created and soon had up to 10 million members. Under the totalitarian system it is not possible, of course, to struggle for a single cause such as the freedom to work, so the "Solidarity" Trade Union rapidly transformed into a broad anti-totalitarian movement. Nevertheless, it was founded on the deeply felt need to humanize work.

It is maybe worth adding that these experiences were the inspiration of the encyclical *Laborem Exercens*. The selection of human labor as the topic of Pope John Paul the Second's first social encyclical is, without doubt, an expression of the problem's importance. While I encourage you to read this fundamental work, I would like to mention one concise thought it contains: "Work is to serve Man and not the other way round." In parentheses, let me say that the enemies of freedom have also noticed the importance of the problem so that the encyclical prepared to be delivered on May 15, 1981 was not, since on May 13 there was an attempt to assassinate the Pope. It may have been a coincidence, but how meaningful it was.

Let us now move to the issue of fighting the slave labor system. This is not easy since even those states or corporations that condemn forced labor practices, deep-down continue to calculate production costs and recognize the attractiveness of reducing labor costs to zero. So they vacillate between the wish to make profitable business deals with China based on cheap labor and the competition in the form of cheap Chinese products. Still, the only really effective way of eliminating Laogai is a universal boycott of products made in China. Undoubtedly, it will be difficult since, firstly, it requires popularizing the shame of Laogai, at least to the same extent as achieved in the case of the tuna-fish issue (and the mass media support for the anti-Laogai struggle is much weaker) and, secondly, establishing which products made at Laogai camps reach the western markets through the dozens of firms that act as middlemen. As I understand, this thorny path has been chosen by Harry Wu and I cannot add anything to this but the expression of my readiness to assist him.

Now I would like to turn your attention to a recent phenomenon of court claims for compensation of the victims of forced labor in Nazi Germany. A certain number of Jewish, Polish, Belarussian, Russian and Ukrainian Americans petitioned the U.S. courts to claim damages from German corporations that had used slave labor during World War Two. Companies such as Siemens, AEG, IG Farben and others found themselves in a situation where U.S. courts could possibly adjudicate large sums of money to compensate the claimants. Taking this plausibility into consideration (and indemnities granted in the U.S. are substantial indeed) and acknowledging that the indemnities could be exacted from their assets in the United States, these corporations decided to negotiate.

The negotiations, chaired by the Deputy Secretary of the U.S. State Department, involve the German government, respondent corporations, and countries whose citizens have been victims of the Nazi labor camps. Their goal is to establish a fund from which the German government and the corporations would indemnify the claimants. The discussions concern indemnities in the fund amounting to two, six, or possibly even twenty billion dollars.

Two aspects of this issue are interesting from the viewpoint of the topic of this conference:

1. Categorical and practical condemnation of slave labor and admission of its illegality by governments and corporations alike;
2. Possibility to claim compensation in U.S. courts.

While the first issue is obvious, the second in the case of Laogai would require considerable preparation. I cannot make any authoritative statements in this matter since I am not sufficiently familiar with the American legal system or the economic structure of the People's Republic of China, but it seems to me that, without expecting to win an avalanche of cases, there is a possibility of winning a few precedent-setting ones.

Civil law differences between the forced labor system in Nazi Germany and the People's Republic in China are substantial. In Germany, there were private corporations whom the government provided with slave laborers. These corporations have survived to this day and are accountable. They have assets in the United States, from which compensation could be exacted. In the case of the People's Republic of China, the situation is different. Everything belongs to the government and, as far as I know (I might be wrong), governments have immunity before U.S. courts, so that the courts would not be able to consider claims made against the People's Republic of China.

In Poland, however, as in the other countries of the former Soviet bloc, state enterprises functioned as legal entities or even individual companies belonging to the state treasury. Anyway, I think that due to the furious development of the Chinese economy and creation of joint ventures with Chinese and foreign capital, a move for corporate independence must be taking place. So if such companies were using slave labor, it would be possible to launch a compensation suit against them in the United States. Whether the sentence could be executed is another matter, since the company would have to have assets in the U.S., but I do not think that even that is impossible. It is difficult to imagine large corporations not having accounts in U.S. banks and not using their services.

In addition, this undertaking would require accumulation of irrefutable evidence and the hiring of good lawyers. I do not believe that the latter issue would cause any difficulty, since exposure achieved from participating in such a court case and possible rewards in terms of a share in the amount of compensation would be very tempting.

I have no delusions that undertaking these actions would be a breakthrough in the Laogai issue, because breakthroughs are produced through social movements not through court cases, but taking them up would, nevertheless, have the following positive effects: First of all, it would popularize the Laogai issue in the United States and across the democratic world. Secondly, it would put forced labor in the People's Republic of China at the same level as the Nazi labor camps. Thirdly, a positive outcome of these cases would be a major obstacle to the People's Republic of China developing its business activities and might lead it to reconsider its attitude toward using forced labor. Lastly, at least some of the victims of the laogai labor camps would be financially compensated for their suffering.

These are my comments. I would like very much to hear what you think about the possibility of launching such court cases. Thank you for your attention.

Senator Zbigniew Romaszewski is a survivor of Nazi concentration camps and Soviet imprisonment. He is a member of the Polish Senate.

The Moral Significance of the Gulag: Implications for Former Prisoners

Semyon Vilensky

Respected Friends!

First of all, I wish to thank the organizers of our conference for the opportunity to speak for the millions of prisoners incarcerated in Stalin's forced labor camps, very few of whom are alive today.

What I consider necessary to say is known to many people in Russia and in circles of former prisoners in our country, but this painful topic has not become the subject of public discussions. Evidently, this is due to our mentality, which is reflected in the Russian saying, "Don't take out trash from the house" (i.e. "Don't air dirty laundry in public"). But so much trash has accumulated that someone has to take it out! Moreover, in post-totalitarian China (and this time is approaching) our Chinese colleagues and human rights activists might have to contend with analogous problems. May our bitter experience help them.

The West is better acquainted with Soviet dissidents, who came after us as prisoners in the period of Khrushchev and Brezhnev. In terms of numbers, there weren't many dissidents. All of them could be housed in just one of the thousands of Stalin's labor camps. Furthermore, the conditions for confining prisoners has become significantly milder than in the Stalinist epoch. In a word, those worthy people found themselves in an already withering Soviet Gulag. That tens and hundreds of thousands of prisoners were dying in labor camps each year they themselves learned only from books and by hearsay. So, it is not surprising that it was precisely prisoners of Stalin's camps, such as Varlam Shalamov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who revealed most fully and profoundly the essence of totalitarianism, that is, a system that places no value on human dignity and life. The same thing happened in Nazi Germany, Communist China, and a number of other countries.

The Russian government and business interests have not allocated, and are not allocating, any funds for the educational and human rights activities of former prisoners. That's the real situation. Western foundations support exclusively those Soviet dissidents known to them by name.

As a result of all this, in the branches of the Memorial Society, which was created during the period of Gorbachev's *perestroika* or reconstruction, there arose an ever intensifying discord between former prisoners of Stalin's labor camps and Soviet dissidents. Personal ambitions played a role in this, as well as a desire to lead, and an openly condescending attitude on the part of several dissidents towards Stalin's prisoners, as if the latter were only submissive victims of political terror. Ultimately, this discord led to a splintering of the Memorial Society and the appearance of a whole series of parallel organizations that united the former prisoners of Stalin's camps. For instance, in Moscow there are presently eleven organizations of Gulag survivors, the largest of which is the Association of Victims of Political Repression. In my view, it was the KGB who initially caused this split in the Memorial Society. But the KGB, after being convinced of the amorphous nature of the Memorial Society, lost interest in it and similar organizations. In fact, the most active

and courageous individuals from the number of prisoners of the Stalinist labor camps appeared after the collapse of the Memorial Society. But passive individuals who did not distinguish themselves in any way in the Gulag became functionaries in the branches of the Memorial Society that remained.

What kind of consolidation with prisoners of Nazi, Chinese, and other labor camps am I speaking of and proposing in such a situation?

Attempting to overcome the lack of community among former prisoners, the Vozvrashchenie Society, which I head (the name means 'return' or 'restoration'), conducted three international conferences on "Resistance in the Gulag" in Moscow between 1992 and 1994. At each of the conferences upwards of 300 people attended, including prisoners of the Nazi concentration camps. Since that time they have become members of the Vozvrashchenie Society.

We considered it essential to bring together participants of strikes and uprisings in Stalin's Gulag and, by so doing, demolish the stereotype of "submissive victims of terror," so that their heroic resistance would become generally known. We gave the floor to the Memorial Society's representatives. It was then, at those conferences, that prisoners of labor camps from various countries spoke out unanimously with common resolutions, including, in particular, a resolution calling for a trial of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The first book created by our Vozvrashchenie publishing house was the collection entitled *Resistance in the Gulag* that was issued in a limited edition in 1992 for participants of the first conference by that name. Since that time we have published more than fifty books, including translations of books by our German, French, and Dutch colleagues. Since 1993 we have also published—irregularly, it is true, due to lack of funds—*Volia* (Liberty), the "journal of prisoners of totalitarian systems."

The rise of our society is totally unrelated to the split in the Memorial Society. It was formed naturally. Its first participants were authors of memoirs about their years spent in Stalin's labor camps and custodians of manuscripts that entered into the book, *Dodnes' tiagoteet* [It threatens to this day], *Volume I: Notes of Your Women Contemporaries*.¹ This book was issued in 1989 at the peak of perestroika by a major Soviet publishing house in a printing of 100,000 copies. This month it will be published in English by Indiana University Press under the title, *Till My Tale Is Told: Women's Memoirs of the Gulag*.² This was the first representative collection of memoirs by twenty-three women prisoners that was legally published in the USSR. Such was the impact of the book that other manuscripts of memoirs, as well as literary works on the Gulag theme, poured in to me, the compiler of this collection. Naturally, the number of members of our society began to grow.

Our society does not enjoy the systematic support of foundations. They look upon us as dinosaurs, as idealists who have become senile. Nonetheless, we are grateful to Western foundations for the assistance they have rendered to Russian human rights activists. If only a part of that assistance doesn't fall to the lot of imitators or sink into the sand. We ourselves help authentic human rights activists. For example, we offered a large part of our premises in Moscow to the editorial board of the human rights newspaper, *Express-Chronicle*, headed by Aleksandr Podrabinek. True, it is incomprehensible why the right of the younger generation to truthful information about the totalitarian past in Russia is ignored by Western foundations. My colleagues and I from the Vozvrashchenie Society periodically meet at the Andrei Sakharov Center with Moscow school children. It turns out that almost none of them know anything about Stalin's repressions. The Memorial Society occupies itself with scholarly research, but, in the conditions of present day Russia,

that is not enough. Missing is any living link with the younger generation. In the past ten years the Memorial Society has published very few books for mass readers, and not one, as far as I know, for school children.

Although the Memorial Society, Sakharov Center, and a series of other human rights organizations did not reject our proposals to publish the journal *Volia* jointly, those suggestions have not received any practical embodiment. As a result, the most valuable manuscripts and eyewitness accounts that could affect the social consciousness in Russia remain unpublished, such as the two-volume edition of poetry by Anna Barkova, who spent twenty years in the Gulag. The last time she was sent to a labor camp was during Khrushchev's "thaw." Also there are the memoirs of Efrosiniia Kersnovskaia, illustrated with 700 drawings and published in part in a journal variant which had enormous social resonance in Russia.³

For a long time we have repeatedly turned to various Western foundations for funding to publish an anthology on the history of the Gulag for Russian school children, and only recently have we received support for this project from the Henry Jackson Foundation.

This decade of virtual inactivity—while Russian society was developing a nostalgia for the regimented past—has had negative consequences. A whole generation has not been inoculated against totalitarianism as an unnatural, destructive, and pernicious ideology.

Our country has been especially unlucky in the twentieth century. It has been the testing ground for an experiment in realizing an insidious social utopia that corrupted the people and cost countless sacrifices. Even those experiments turned out not to be enough. During the period when the Soviet system in the USSR was rotting away, there resounded voices of people who demanded that the government at least observe the Soviet Constitution and laws. It seemed that individuals at last had appeared who would be worthy in the future of representing power and authority in our country. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet people would listen at night to the voices of dissidents through the howling of stations jamming foreign broadcasts. Where now is that civil and spiritual elite of our country? A majority of them are in the West. Some were sent into exile, while others left the country themselves. Almost no one returned to the homeland when the opportunity appeared. This circumstance demoralized a large part of Russian society.

Russia is a country where the social principles are traditionally inseparable from the personal ones, where around an irreproachable personality is formed a field of values in the eyes of those surrounding that person. By no other way can democratic transformations be realized in my country. And no matter how much money Western foundations expend on human rights activities in Russia as they understand them, Western forms of life will not take root in Russia in the foreseeable future. That doesn't mean at all that it's impossible to build a civil society in Russia; but not by some kind of fixed, abstract plan.

Precisely, for that reason, parallel with our fundamental educational and publishing work, which is connected with the preservation of historical memory, our Vozvrashchenie Society devotes special attention to charity, to the solution of social problems. That means giving assistance within one's power to a children's asylum in a remote part of Russia, to lonely, aged, former Gulag prisoners, and simply to people who have fallen into misfortune due to a totalitarian system that cannot be totally eradicated.

At our international conferences (1992-1994), the prisoners of Nazi concentration camps raised the question of creating a House of Creative Work (*Dom tvorchestva*) for all the authors of Vozvrashchenie where former prisoners could rest, socialize, and work. In 1995 the Vozvrashchenie Society, in cooperation with the Russian Presidential Commission on the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression, was able

to lease for forty-nine years an ancient estate, Chukavino, on the upper Volga, a monument of eighteenth century architecture and landscape art. It has already been restored in part by us and has acquired the features of a cultural center as a place of meetings and conferences. We plan to create on the estate a museum, the idea of which is to show "two Russias" looking as if at one another: Russia with its noble traditions of honor and intelligentsia, and the very same country but during the Gulag period. The doors of Chukavino and our home are open to all fighters against the totalitarian systems of various countries.

I think that it is time for us to be united, or at least to take a first step in that direction. As a beginning, it would be possible to broaden the editorial board of our journal of prisoners of totalitarian systems, *Volia*, in order to publish it not only in Russian, but in the form of a digest in Chinese and English. I hope that publishing Chinese authors and prisoners will help destroy the existing Russian stereotype of present day Chinese society as prosperous and flourishing, in contrast to the disastrous state of affairs in Russia, and that readers of English will find in this journal materials broadening their ideas and images of Russia.

It is extremely important that our tragic knowledge of a social utopia that has been realized in the twentieth century be assimilated by new generations as a whole, namely, as a single vicious phenomenon on different national soils.

(Translated from the Russian by Albert Leong)

Semyon Vilenski, a poet and survivor of Soviet labor camps, is president of the Vozvrashchenie Literary-Historical Society in Moscow, founder of the Vozvrashchenie Publishing House, and editor of the journal Volia. In 1999, Vozvrashchenie was awarded the Pushkin Prize for distinguished contributions to Russian literature, the first time that a publishing house has been so honored.

Notes

¹ S. Vilensky, ed. Dodnes; tiagoteet Vypusk I: Zapiski vashei sovremennitsy (It Threatens to this Day. Volume I: Notes of Your Women Contemporaries) [Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel' 1989].

² S. Vilensky, ed. Till My Tale is Told: Women's Memoirs of the Gulag. Translated by John Crowfoot, Marjorie Farquharson, Catriona Kelly, Sally Laird, and Cathy Porter. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

³ See E. A. Kersnovskaia, Naskal'naia zhivopis' (Petroglyphs), Znamia 3-5 (1990) and Naskal'naia zhivopis': Al'bom (Moscow: Kvadrat, 1991).

Gulag and Laogai

Albert Leong

Introduction

Although the Chinese Laogai was modeled to a large extent on the Soviet GULag (Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps) system, there are significant differences between the corrective labor camps of the USSR and PRC. This study will analyze two major dissimilarities: (1) systematic ideological re-education through “struggle” and “brain-washing” in Communist China and (2) development in the Soviet GULag of the *sharaga* or *sharashka*, special scientific and cultural institutions exploiting the talents of gifted political prisoners - and discuss other notable differences between the GULag and Laogai, such as resistance in the camps, creation of labor camp poetry, and the role of benevolent officials in the GULag and Laogai.

Birth of the GULag

In the wake of the Russian Revolution of October 1917, the Bolsheviks, under Lenin and Stalin, developed techniques of “population control” – concentration camps, forced labor, genocide, and terror - that were subsequently adopted by Hitler in Nazi Germany and Mao Zedong in Communist China, as well as totalitarian regimes in Asia (Cambodia, North Vietnam, North Korea), Latin America (Cuba), and Eastern Europe (Poland, East Germany, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Albania). Central to the rule of Communist regimes in the 20th century was the development of corrective labor camps to hold their perceived enemies and to build a communist society with slave labor.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn has documented the rapid growth of repressive institutions in the new-born Soviet state: establishment of courts and tribunals beginning November 22, 1917; creation of the Red Army at the beginning of 1918; and formation of militia and police units.¹ Since Lenin demanded “the most decisive, draconian measures in raising discipline,”² it follows that prisons and labor camps would soon make their appearance.

In December 1917, Lenin proposed a series of punishments: imprisonment, assignment to the front lines of combat, and compulsory work (*prinuditel'naia rabota*) for any infraction of Soviet law.³ Thus, the concept of forced labor coincided with the birth and consolidation of Soviet power. In response to peasant uprisings Lenin, in an August 1918 telegram to the Penza provincial executive committee, suggested “locking up suspicious elements in a concentration camp (*kontsentratsionnyi lager*) outside the city” and ordered the committee to “carry out merciless mass terror.”⁴ Although concentration camps existed during World War I, they were used for prisoners of war and undesirable foreigners. Concentration camps to incarcerate one's own citizens were a Soviet innovation.⁵

The Soviet government in 1922, transferred prisoners from the concentration camps at Kholmogory and Pertominsk to Solovki, a group of islands on the White Sea at the entrance to Onega Bay and the site of a fifteenth-century Russian Orthodox monastery. The first contingent of 150 prisoners arrived at Solovki on July 1, 1923.⁶ Until 1929 the Solovki concentration camps were the only Soviet concentration camps. Solovki even maintained departments on the mainland at Pechora, Solikamlag, and elsewhere.

In 1930 the Soviet concentration camps (*Kontsentratsionnye Lageria OGPU SSSR*: Concentration Camps, United Main Political Administration USSR) received new names: *GULAG OGPU SSSR* (*Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei OGPU SSSR*: Main Administration of Camps, United Main Political Administration USSR) and *GUITL OGPU SSSR* (*Glavnoe Upravlenie Ispravitel'no-Trudovyykh Lagerei*: Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps, United Main Political Administration USSR). The corrective labor camps of the RSFSR NKVD (*RSFSR Narodnyi Kommissariat Vnutrennykh Del*: People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, Russian Socialist Republic) and NKIu (*Narodnyi Kommissariat Iustitsii*: People's Commissariat of Justice), as well as those of the other Soviet "republics," continued to exist independently of the OGPU *GULag*. *GULag* was the strictest of these labor camp systems.⁷

Exploiting the knowledge gained at Solovki, *GULag* erected the first Soviet gigantic construction projects - such as the White Sea-Baltic Canal (1932), Baikal-Amur Mainline (1934), the city of Komsomolsk-na-Amure (1932), and *Dal'stroi* (Far Northern Construction Trust) [1932], the vast network of gold mines, labor camps, and towns such as Magadan in the Kolyma River region of the Soviet Far East - with the forced labor of hundreds of thousands of political prisoners to compensate for the lack of mechanized equipment. The OGPU widely publicized its "reforging" of counter-revolutionaries and common criminals into enthusiastic builders of communism.⁸

After the 1934 assassination of Leningrad Communist Party boss Sergei Kirov, Stalin launched a reign of terror that destroyed millions of Soviet citizens and vastly expanded the size and scale of the *GULag*. With Stalin's death in 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 speech on the crimes of the Stalin era at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress, the corrective labor camp system was partially dismantled, and thousands of *GULag* prisoners were amnestied. But the *GULag* itself did not die out until the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991.

Iosif Stalin and Mao Zedong

After Mao Zedong established the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, one of his first acts was to turn to Iosif Stalin and the Soviet Union for military protection and economic aid, since China was in a state of chaos and exhausted from years of war. From December 1949 to February 1950, Mao embarked on an extended visit to the Soviet Union to establish a political and economic alliance with Stalin. Relations between the two countries were tense. The USSR earlier had concluded a treaty with the Nationalist (Kuomintang) regime of Chiang Kai-shek, and Stalin saw that Mao was a charismatic "agrarian reformer" who might challenge his domination of the international communist movement.

On December 16, 1949, Mao arrived by train in Moscow. He was met at the station by Foreign Minister Viacheslav Molotov and most of the Politburo. Mao proclaimed to his hosts: "Dear comrades and friends, to visit the great capital of the socialist world makes me very happy!" Mao then went to the Kremlin and met with Stalin for two hours. According to Nikolai Fedorenko, Stalin's interpreter, "Mao shook Stalin's hand for a long time, a very long time. Stalin came out to greet him quite slowly. He knew how to play the role of statesman. Stalin was a wonderful actor and he didn't rush as Mao did."⁹

But Mao's interpreter, Shi Zhe, viewed the meeting differently: "Mao wasn't afraid of Stalin; he wasn't particularly suspicious of him either. The question was, could they find common ground? Mao had his own particular way of thinking. Stalin had his way. But Mao was in no great hurry." Mao wanted to conclude a Sino-Soviet friendship treaty without making too many concessions, and the two leaders were wary of one another. The visit and negotiations dragged on for two months. Shi Zhe reports that Mao said:

"A treaty can be signed for 10, 20, or 50 years. It doesn't matter. But it must not tie our hands."¹⁰

In a telegram on December 18 to Liu Shaoqi, Mao wrote:

(1)... His [Stalin's] attitude was really sincere. The questions involved included the possibility of peace, the treaty, a loan, Taiwan, and the publication of my selected works. (2) Stalin said that the Americans are afraid of war. The Americans ask other countries to fight for them, but other countries are also afraid to fight a war. According to him [Stalin], it is unlikely that a war will break out, and we agree with his opinions. (3) With regard to the question of the treaty, Stalin said that because of the Yalta agreement, it is improper for us to overturn the legitimacy of the old Sino-Soviet treaty. If we abolish the old treaty and sign a new one, the status of the Kurile Islands will be changed and the United States will have an excuse to take them away. Therefore, on the question of the Soviet Union's thirty-year lease of Lushun (Port Arthur), we should not change it in format; however, in reality, the Soviet Union will withdraw its troops from Lushun and will let Chinese troops occupy it. I expressed that too early a withdrawal [of Soviet troops from Lushun] will create unfavorable conditions for us. He replied that the Soviet withdrawal of troops does not mean the Soviet Union will stand by with folded arms [in a crisis-A.L.]. Rather, it is possible to find ways through which China will become the first to bear the brunt. His opinion is that we need to sign a statement which will solve the Lushun problem in accordance with the above-mentioned ideas, and that by doing so, China will also gain political capital. I said that it is necessary for us to maintain the legitimacy of the Yalta agreement. However, public opinion in China believes that since the old treaty was signed by the KMT (Kuomintang), it has lost its ground with the KMT's downfall. He replied that the old treaty needs to be revised and the revision is necessarily substantial, but it will not come until two years from now.¹¹

Finally, in February 1950 the Chinese and the Soviets signed a mutual defense treaty. The treaty also guaranteed aid for China. Mao gratefully accepted the help of Soviet experts in rebuilding Chinese industry. According to Ivan Arkhipov, chief Soviet adviser to China, "We had come from the Soviet Union, where the basis of the state economy was the plan. So we explained to our Chinese comrades that the plan was the absolute basis of everything. The development of the country, the economy, and not only the economy but other branches of knowledge."¹² Arkhipov recalls that "there was a song we used to sing at the time. It was called 'Moscow-Beijing.' People sang it in Russia and in China. It went: 'Russians and Chinese are brothers forever.' Comrade Stalin stressed to me, 'You, Arkhipov, and your team should always remember that.'"¹³

Among the technical assistance that Stalin and the Soviet Union provided Mao was help in setting up the basic institutions of the Peoples' Republic of China. Over the next few years Stalin sent a large number of Soviet advisers to the PRC. Among the Chinese institutions that was thoroughly Sovietized was its penal system, especially the forced labor camps that later became known as the Laogai.

From GULag to Laogai

There are significant differences between the Soviet GULag and the Chinese Laogai, the heir to the Gulag and the largest system of corrective labor camps existing in the world today. The GULag and Laogai are institutions that serve a complex of political, social, and economic functions within the USSR and PRC. Both the GULag and the Laogai were originally established to isolate and destroy alleged "enemies of the people," and subsequently to conscript a vast army of slave labor from the ranks of innocent men and women from all walks of life. In Russian the acronym *rabsila* (*rabochaia sila*, "work force") was soon conflated with

“slave force” (*raba*=slave). Before long the GULag and *laogai* acquired an additional economic function: to compel political prisoners to work for the state, to contribute to the economic and military growth of the totalitarian Communist state.

Brainwashing and Reeducation

Within this general framework it is noteworthy how and why the *Laogai* differs from the GULag and what these dissimilarities reveal about Russian and Chinese society and national character. One of the fundamental differences between the Soviet GULag and the Chinese *Laogai* is their attitude towards the “re-education” of political prisoners. In the USSR concentration camps were initially established to isolate enemies of Soviet power. Established as the first Soviet concentration camp in June 1923, Solovki had two aims: (1) to destroy a major center of Russian religious and cultural life that had flourished since the fifteen century and (2) to use Solovki as a laboratory to test methods of “managing” political prisoners.

At Solovki, for example, political prisoners were isolated from the common criminals lest their political attitudes and ideas infect the criminal population of the camp. But the authorities made no attempt to remold the thinking or attitudes of the political prisoners. For instance, renowned scholars incarcerated at Solovki, such as the “Russian Leonardo da Vinci” Father Pavel Florenskii, were allowed to conduct seminars on far-ranging philosophical and scientific topics for other political prisoners. Although the prisoners at Solovki were obliged to work, their work assignments were light compared to subsequent GULag practices. The Bolsheviks believed that manual labor in the service of building Soviet power was itself sufficient to alter the worldview of class enemies. Various techniques of torture were developed at Solovki. Recalcitrant prisoners were stripped naked and tied to posts to be devoured by swarms of vicious northern mosquitoes, or they were buried alive for voracious ants to attack them. Prisoners incurring the displeasure of the guards would be tied to heavy logs and hurled hundreds of steps down Sekirny Mountain to certain mutilation and death. However, at Solovki and throughout the Soviet GULag system, the human mind itself was left untouched, though the body was often starved, beaten, and destroyed.

The sole exception to this rule was the use in the 1970s, under Brezhnev, of special psychiatric prisons run, not by the Ministry of Health, but by the KGB to terrorize Soviet political dissidents. Even Stalin did not resort to this practice, which Solzhenitsyn condemned at the time as “spiritual murder,” since its aim was to destroy the dissidents’ minds. I was told by a Soviet doctor who was a *refusenik* that kindly Soviet doctors, during the height of Stalin’s reign of terror, would admit people to mental hospitals to save them from the GULag. To criticize the “workers’ paradise” and oppose Soviet power were considered signs of mental illness in the eyes of the KGB “psychiatrists” who worked in these prisons. Ethical psychiatrists who refused to provide the diagnoses the authorities wanted would find themselves thrown into prison. By labeling these dissidents “schizophrenic” or “paranoid,” the authorities tried to discredit the dissidents’ political ideas, which they viewed as heretical, dangerous, and inimical to social stability. And their solution was to sentence dissidents not to prisons or corrective labor camps, but to indefinite terms in psychiatric prisons operated by the secret police.

There, the Soviet dissidents were subjected to savage beatings by KGB thugs masquerading as hospital orderlies and injected with massive doses of mind-altering drugs with disabling side-effects that reduced the dissidents to a vegetative state. The dissidents were told by their “doctors” that, unless they publicly repudiated their political views and denounced their fellow dissidents, they would never be released from the psychiatric “hospital.” So gross were the Soviet violations of international standards governing the practice of psychiatry that the USSR was expelled from the International Psychiatric Association until it finally

complied with established professional standards of diagnosis and treatment.

Recent reports from China indicate increasing use of psychiatric prisons run by the Public Security Bureau to silence and discredit Chinese dissidents such as Wang Wanxing, who was confined for more than seven years for unfurling a protest banner in 1992 in Tiananmen Square.¹⁴ It is likely that Chinese security officials merely revived a technique of managing political prisoners that was pioneered by the Soviet KGB in the 1970s. And the application of this technique will no doubt increase in frequency until international condemnation, with sanctions, curbs this vicious practice.

In certain respects the incarceration of dissidents in psychiatric prisons is a logical extension of the Chinese practice of subjecting all political prisoners to interrogation, torture, "struggle," "brain-washing," and reeducation until they confessed to whatever crimes the authorities demanded. As survivors of the Laogai know all too well, the Chinese political prisoner would not be transferred to a labor camp to serve his sentence until he or she confessed, admitted guilt, implicated others, and accepted the state's interpretation of his crime. Consigning dissidents to psychiatric prisons simply does away with the pretense of legality in the PRC.

What the Chinese Communists did that was new was to universalize their inhuman techniques of brainwashing and reeducation and apply them to all its political prisoners. Why the Chinese communists deviated from the Soviet model in this respect is a question that needs further investigation. Was it perhaps due to differences in national character or cultural traditions? Why, in contrast, did the Soviet Union tolerate such a high degree of independent thought by political prisoners in its prisons and labor camps? It is stunning to read Soviet GULag memoirs by survivors such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Anatoly Shcharansky, Vladimir Bukovsky, and Andrei Siniavsky and learn that all of them experienced total intellectual freedom while a prisoner in the GULag! Shcharansky, for instance, upon viewing a French documentary film, "The Last Gulag," about Perm' 36 where he was incarcerated for years, nostalgically called the labor camp his "alma mater," a place where he met some of the finest people he ever knew and had some of the most stimulating conversations of his life. During his seven-year sentence in the GULag, Siniavsky was able to write three major books—*A Voice from the Chorus*, *Strolls with Pushkin*, and *In Gogol's Shadow*—in the guise of long letters to his wife. In many Soviet prison memoirs the survivors, paradoxically, experienced freedom of thought only in the GULag, since the Soviet police state enforced conformity of thought outside the camps. Moreover, in Soviet-classified scientific and design institutes run by the secret police and staffed by political prisoners, high-level seminars on the most diverse topics would be conducted in their leisure time by world-class scientists and scholars. Soviet authorities, apparently, were satisfied with classified research extracted from their political prisoners and allowed them freedom of thought as a harmless diversion.

Sharagas and Sharashkas

Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*,¹⁵ Leonid Kerber's *Stalin's Aviation Gulag: A Memoir of Andrei Tupolev and the Purge Era*,¹⁶ and Lev Kopelev's *Ease My Sorrow*¹⁷ all depict the workings of the sharashka or sharaga, which Jacques Rossi defines as:

1. A secret scientific research or design institute, where scientists and engineers, as a rule convicted of 'sabotage of the construction of socialism,' 'subversion of the defensive might of the USSR,' and so forth, work under the supervision of the state security organs. ... The term appeared in the 1930s.
2. In the early 1920s in order to reestablish destroyed industry, OGPU rented out the engineers and specialists it had arrested; meanwhile, enterprises were obliged to transfer to the OGPU account 60

to 70 percent of the salary due these specialists. An armed escort took them to work each day and brought them back to the prison . . . Over time, OGPU suggested that certain enterprises build appropriate confinement facilities within their own plant territory.

3.1. Later, state security organs themselves began to exploit 'their own' scientists, engineers, and other specialists, organizing special prisons and research institutes and gradually monopolizing scientific research efforts, and to some degree production in vital sectors of military industry and in police electronic technology as well.

3.2. For instance, in the early 1930s in the former Suzdal' nunnery, microbiologist prisoners developed bacteriological weapons. The most notorious special research institutes were located in Moscow, Rybinsk, Bol'shino, and Taganrog.¹⁸

4. Since the mid-1940s, all such special research institutes have been within the purview of an MGB special administration, which monopolizes scientific and technical efforts for the needs of the armed forces and of the police and security organs. Specialists and scientists, some of world renown, working in special research institutes 'work for the bread ration,' albeit one incomparably better than the normal one. Moreover, they have the right and opportunity to send monetary transfers home. They are permitted to correspond only with their closest relatives, who do not, however, have any idea where these individuals are or what they are doing. But, prisoners in some sharashkas are allowed visits.¹⁹

The best known Soviet sharaga was the one headed by the noted aircraft designer and political prisoner Andrei Tupolev. Moscow's Central Design Bureau No. 29, a special NKVD prison established in the early 1930s, worked on high-priority military and industrial problems. The cream of Russia's aeronautical world, including the rocket designer Sergei Korolev, were arrested and assigned to this prison workshop to design military aircraft. The workshop consisted of three separate design bureaus: one worked on a long-range, high-altitude bomber; a second, on a high-altitude fighter; a third, Tupolev's, on a dive bomber. Tupolev had been ordered by the NKVD to compile a list of imprisoned aircraft specialists, and the 200 individuals on the list were rounded up and consequently sent to Design Bureau No. 29.²⁰

A lesser-known sharaga, headed by the political prisoner Lev Termen, inventor of the electronic synthesizer (Theremin) and perhaps television itself (Lenin, upon seeing a demonstration of Termen's invention and discerning its intelligence applications, ordered the distance-seeing device classified as top secret), devised sophisticated listening devices to eavesdrop on foreign embassies in Moscow. One of Termen's assignments from Beria was to bug the Kremlin and eavesdrop on Stalin himself.

In my review of Laogai literature I have not encountered evidence of the systematic imprisonment in Communist China of leading scientists and technical specialists to staff special prison research institutes run by State Security. During the Cultural Revolution countless Chinese intellectuals were killed or reduced to manual labor in remote provinces. In this regard the Soviet Union was much more efficient and ruthless in its exploitation of its scientific and technical intelligentsia.

Cultural Sharagas and Sharashkas

My recent research in Magadan and Moscow points to the existence of equally important cultural sharagas and sharashkas within the Soviet GULag system, that is, cultural institutions staffed by artist-prisoners to carry out the economic and political objectives of the Soviet state. While the scientific sharashkas, described above, developed instruments of strategic, military significance – such as listening devices or radio-controlled, pilotless aircraft – cultural sharashkas served aims of equal importance to the Soviet state, namely,

promoting the ideological superiority of Soviet Marxist culture over that of the Western capitalist democracies and, at the same time, boosting economic production, and generating revenue for the Soviet treasury.

Captive Muses

In essence, cultural sharashkas in the GULag cities of Magadan, Vorkuta, and Noril'sk differed little from the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow or the Kirov Theater in Leningrad. Controlled by the security organs, all Soviet cultural ensembles, whether Gulag or "free" — the Russians saw little distinction between *malaia zona* (small prison zone=GULag) and *bol'shaia zona* (large prison zone=USSR) — both were obliged to perform propagandistic works approved by Soviet censors. The repertory in both zones was identical. Members of the cultural intelligentsia deviating from the official state aesthetics of socialist realism — such as the poet Osip Mandel'shtam, literary historian Dmitry Mirskii, or theatrical director Vsevolod Meierkhol'd — were arrested, tortured, interrogated, consigned to corrective labor camps, or driven to death. In both instances, the Muses were held captive, and the Soviet state arbitrarily shuffled their exponents from one prison zone to the other.

In Magadan, the administrative capital of the notorious Kolyma GULag, the Gor'kii Theater of Music and Drama was operated by the NKVD or secret police as a serf theater staffed largely by talented musicians, directors, actors, artists, and dancers drafted from incoming convoys of political prisoners. The city of Magadan itself was a GULag camp (Maglag), the commandant of which was Aleksandra Gridasova, wife of NKVD General and Dal'stoi director, Ivan Nikishov. The talented actors (Valentin Portugalov, Georgii Zhzhenov, Iurii Rozenshtaukh), directors (Ivan Ellis, Leonid Varpakhovskii), musicians (Eddi Rozner, Vadim Kozin, Gertruda Rikhter), dancers (Nina Gamil'ton, Margarita Turysheva), and artists (Vasilii Shukhaev, Georgii Vagner, Isaak Sherman) all came to Kolyma as political prisoners and were assigned by the NKVD to work in cultural sharashkas, the principal one of which was the Gor'kii Theater of Music and Drama in Magadan.

Little did the GULag officials suspect that the cultural sharashkas they created in the labor camps would lead to the preservation of art and artist in Soviet Russia and ultimately to the demise of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Soviet empire itself. Whether Communist China will create comparable cultural sharagas staffed by Laogai prisoners remains to be seen.

Resistance in the GULag

There are other significant differences between the GULag and the Laogai that should be noted. Following Stalin's death in 1953, waves of organized strikes and uprisings spontaneously arose in the GULag. From May 26 to August 4, 1953, 16,378 prisoners went on strike in Noril'sk. In the Vorkuta GULag 15,604 prisoners were on strike from June 19 to August 1, 1953. Between May 16 and June 26, 1954, there were 10,800 strikers at the Kengir (Zhezkazgan) labor camp. There were also mass escapes. All the protesters demanded their constitutional rights. Although the uprisings were brutally crushed, they led to significant reforms. The Noril'sk GULag (Gorlag) was closed down in the fall of 1953, and all special labor camps were abolished in the spring of 1954. The regime in the remaining camps was noticeably softened.²¹

Two factors made these organized uprisings possible in the Soviet GULag. First, political prisoners and intellectuals led these waves of protests. Second, political prisoners assisted one another whenever possible. If few mass uprisings have occurred in the Laogai, it is due to the Chinese policy of pitting political prisoners against each other and recruiting intellectuals as collaborators.

GULag Poetry

Within the Soviet GULag has arisen a large and remarkable body of poetry.²² The Russian tradition of memorizing and reciting poetry enabled poet-prisoners to create, retain, and eventually publish numerous poems or volumes of poetry, as well as memoirs and novels, depicting their experiences in the labor camps. Although the Chinese also have a long tradition of memorizing and reciting texts, a comparable body of Laogai poetry has yet to be produced, although the remarkable prison poems of Huang Xiang [a conference participant] may be the tip of a vast iceberg of poetic creativity inspired by Laogai experiences.²³

Signs of Humanity

There are documented instances of GULag officials assisting political prisoners and saving their lives. For instance, one camp commandant disobeyed orders and refused to send the poet Nikolai Zabolotskii to the Kolyma death camps. Maglag commandant Aleksandr Gridasova also saved a number of artists, actors, directors, and musicians by transferring them from Kolyma labor camps to cultural brigades and the sharashka at the Gor'kii Theater of Music and Drama in Magadan. Years later, when Gridasova found herself destitute in Moscow, the grateful artists she rescued gave her money and food.

Prospects for the Future

The day will come, perhaps in the next decade, when the People's Republic of China, like the Soviet Union, will collapse from the pressure of its internal contradictions. As long as the Laogai continues to exist and proliferate in Communist China, the PRC's celebration of its 50th anniversary, like comparable state ceremonies in the former Soviet Union, remains transparent and hollow. History has shown that states relying on repression of dissent will eventually disintegrate. Comparative study of the Soviet Union and Communist China reveals parallel and irreversible patterns of decline.

China today is going through a period of reconstruction quite similar to the restructuring of the Soviet economy under Gorbachev's perestroika in the late 1980s. There is a stagnant economy, unrest in the countryside, a growing army of the unemployed, rampant corruption among Communist Party officials, an ever-increasing technological gap vis-à-vis the West, overt disaffection with Marxism, and dramatic increase in crime. Both the USSR and PRC turned to the West - the Soviet Union for grain, Communist China for trade concessions - to extricate themselves from economic and technological stagnation and political instability. A symptom of this weakness and decline is the state's increasing reliance on corrective labor camps for political control and economic production.

Eventually abandoning its policy of appeasement and accommodation, the West will finally exert the economic leverage it has at its disposal to effect political change in Communist China, as it did vis-à-vis the USSR. Then Laogai memorials, like GULag monuments in the former Soviet Union, will arise at the sites of dismantled corrective labor camps in China. Just as Solzhenitsyn's revelations about the GULag altered the world's perception of the USSR and paved the way for its dramatic transformation, Harry Wu and the Laogai Research Foundation are changing the world's perception of Communist China and laying the foundation for its transformation into a pluralistic, democratic society.²⁴

Albert Leong, Professor of Slavic Languages at the University of Oregon, is collaborating with Harry Wu on a book, GULag and Laogai: Anthology of Soviet and Chinese Prison Memoirs, and writing a monograph, Captive Muses: Artists-Prisoners in the GULag. He recently completed a biography, Centaur: The Life of Ernst Neizvestny.

Notes

¹ Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag GULag* (Gulag Archipelago), III-IV (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1974), p.9.

² Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Collected Works), 5th ed., vol. 36, p.217.

³ Lenin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed., vol. 35, p.176.

⁴ Lenin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed., vol. 50, pp. 143-44.

⁵ Solzhenitsyn, *Arkhipelag Gulag*, III-IV, p.17.

⁶ Jaques Rossi, *The Gulag Handbook* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), pp. 403-05.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.92.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ CNN Cold War, Script to Episode 15 (China): "Red Spring," p.2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ CNN Cold War-Historical Documents: Mao's Telegram from Moscow to Liu Shaoqi (December 18, 1949), pp. 1-2.

¹² CNN Cold War, Script to Episode 15 (China): "Red Spring," pp.1-2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Erik Eckholm, "A Chinese Dissident's Ordeal: Back to the Mental Hospital," *New York Times* (30 November 1999): A3.

¹⁵ Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, *V krug pervom* (First Circle) [New York: Harper & Row, 1968].

¹⁶ Leonid L'vovich Kerber, *Stalin's Aviation Gulag: A Memoir of Andrei Tupolev and the Purge Era*. Edited by Von Hardesty. [Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996].

¹⁷ Lev Kopelev, *Utoli moiu pechal'* (Ease My Sorrow) [Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1981].

¹⁸ On one of the islands in Lake Seliger in the 1940s, a sharashka held kidnapped German scientists and rocket specialists. See Rossi, *The Gulag Handbook*, p. 388.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 498-99.

²⁰ Kerber, *Stalin's Aviation Gulag*, pp. 155-58.

²¹ See *Soprotivlenie v GULAGE* (Resistance in the GULag), ed. Semyon Vilensky [Moscow: Vozvrashchenie, 1992].

²² Vladimir Muravlev, ed., *Sred' drugikh imen* (Among Other Names) [Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1990].

²³ See Huang Xiang, *Forbidden Poems* (New York: Mirror Books, 1999). [Ed. Note: see also the testimony of Huang Xiang in this volume.]

²⁴ This is a revised version of a paper presented September 18, 1999 at the Voices from the Laogai conference in Washington D.C. Research on this topic was made possible by Short-Term Grants to Russia in 1998 and 1999 from the International Research and Exchanges Board.

Surviving the Soviet Gulag

George Bien

My time is limited, so I will have to be brief. I have a friend here from Russia sitting among us. He just arrived from Russia yesterday, and I asked him, "How can I compare the Holocaust and the Gulag in just ten minutes?"

He said, "No problem. You can do it in one minute. You just tell them that in the Holocaust they killed people by burning them and gassing them and in the Gulag they worked them to death or shot." Different methods, same brutality. The bottom line essentially is true but there is more to it. Before I go into this, let me just tell a few words about myself.

As I was introduced, I was born in Hungary. In 1945, as those who know the history, the Soviet army ran through Hungary and occupied it. The battle still was going on in Budapest, when my father and I were arrested by the Soviet security services, which at that time was called the NKVD. My father was accused of being a spy, which was nonsense. He was a doctor and as a matter of fact if we're talking about democracy here, he was an ardent democrat. I was a sixteen-year old kid who lived a pretty sheltered life. I had a portable radio that we listened to when there was no electricity. They found it during a house search and they accused me of being a spy as well. To make a long story short, they sentenced us within five minutes at the NKVD headquarters. They sentenced my father to fifteen years and me to eight years of hard labor in Siberia.

My father died within the first six months in the town of Odessa in the Soviet Union. I was in various Soviet Gulag labor camps. I spent about eight years in the far north of Siberia. I don't know how many of the audience members know the Kolyma region. The Kolyma region is way up north in the Arctic Circle. The temperature is minus 60-70 degrees Centigrade.

You may ask how did those people survive? We've heard all kinds of testimony here. One was five years in solitary confinement. One was ten years, beaten, etcetera. But how did they survive? How did I survive? The answer to this, at least in my perspective is, first—luck, second—youth. You still have strength. My father died within six months. He gave up. I wanted to live. And then there are those who have religious faith. I think religion saved many people—those who could pray or somehow rely on their faith to survive.

There was one other thing that has been revealed here in the testimony of anybody who has talked about the Laogai. That is, contact with family. In other words, how could those prisoners who were in the prison in China have any contact with their family? I don't know. In the Soviet Gulags, there was no way of communicating, none. My father and I were taken away from Budapest and my mother did not hear from me until eight years later. This was in 1953, six months after Stalin's death. This is the cruelest way of separating people from their families. People just disappeared. Not hundreds, not thousands. Millions just disappeared.

In 1953, March 5th, Stalin died, and by his death a horrible era ended. Almost overnight, everything loosened up. Even the security soldiers, who were guarding us, talked to us. They started to behave like

human beings. As Dr. Albert Leong described so well, the Gulags were essentially dissolved two years after Stalin died. Thus one man kept terror from 1924 until 1953 spread throughout a nation like the Soviet Union, with a population of 261 million people. How could this happen?

In 1955, they released all the foreigners: Germans, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Romanians, Polish, everyone. They just let them go home. I was released and returned to Hungary. Then in 1956, after the Hungarian uprising against the Soviet oppressors, I was fortunate enough to immigrate to the United States.

I wrote a book in Hungarian a few years ago about my experiences and somehow this book entered the Internet. People were reading it in Israel. I started to get letters from them, and they told their life stories and how they got saved or how they lived through the Holocaust. I became more interested in this subject. I went to the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC and I started listening to tapes of survivors who survived the horrible times from 1941 until 1945. The comparison is astonishing. I don't know who learned from whom – Hitler from Stalin, or Stalin from Hitler. Stalin was first, so obviously Hitler had to learn from Stalin. There was though one difference, one big difference between the Holocaust and the Gulag. In the Gulag you had a chance of survival. No question. I survived. Some survived. In Auschwitz, in the Nazi labor camps, some were not gassed right away. At first, many of them had to work hard, but they all knew that if eventually Germany was to win, they would be killed. The fact that there could not be any hope is terrible.

And another thing of course, the Holocaust was directed against one race mainly, the Jewish people. There were the Catholics and the Communists and others, but mainly it was directed against one race, while the Gulag was indiscriminate. Essentially, it was a class struggle as such, the proletariat against the bourgeoisie if you will, but who was defined as a class enemy changed all the time.

You may ask, "How can this happen? How can it happen that the entire world was standing by while the Nazis killed six million people? How can this happen?" You can ask similar questions about the Gulag, "How can this happen that 20 million people were killed in the Gulag and people just stood by?" I have no answer. We are all guilty probably.

How did I survive or how did some other people survive? I ask this question again. There were in these camps, in Auschwitz, in the Gulag, in the Far East, or wherever you go, there were some good people within the camp or outside the camp. There were good Germans, good Russians, good Soviets who did what they could to help. Just very briefly as an example, I was sixteen years old and had been arrested for only five weeks. We were taken for a walk by the prison guards. A Soviet soldier no more than nineteen years with a gun on his soldier all of a sudden threw a loaf of bread to me. Why?

I think that there is some goodness left in humanity. We are at the end of the 20th century, which has been a horror in so many ways. But perhaps our souls are becoming more refined. We are doing things like this—like this gathering here today.

Thank you very much.

George Bien, born in Hungary, is a survivor of the Soviet Gulag. His book, "Lost Years," is an account of his ten years in the Siberian labor camps.

Political Prisoners in Vietnam

Doan Viet Hoat

Thank you, Mr. Carr. Thank you all. I feel very honored to be here today to present my personal case to all of you here. I know that among the audience today there are many former political prisoners from Vietnam, China, and many other countries including Russia. I am especially pleased to hear some of the presentations informing us about the situation in Poland and Russia. In my own case, I was imprisoned twice. For my first prison term I did not stand trial. However, three years after the start of my second prison sentence, I finally stood trial for the first time. Because of the pressure from outside Vietnam, from international organizations and human rights organizations, they finally brought my friends and me to court and sentenced me to a twenty years imprisonment just because I was an editor of an underground paper asking for democracy and freedom for our country. Moreover, due to the pressure of international human rights organizations, the Vietnamese government lowered the punishment for "my crimes" to fifteen years in prison. The international interference continued during the time I was imprisoned. The Vietnamese overseas here also worked hard for the release of my friends and myself. Finally, last year, after eight years in the labor camps I was released. I want to present the situation in Vietnam both from my own case and on behalf of my friends. Many of them now are still in jail in Vietnam. There are at least 200 accused political prisoners currently who remain in the labor camps. This information comes from my personal experience, from the time I was imprisoned in the labor camps of Vietnam. I know that there are at least two hundred political prisoners, but, I believe that the Vietnamese prison system holds many more political prisoners that these numbers do not accurately reflect.

In the forced labor camp system in Vietnam as well as in China, political prisoners are imprisoned in a system where they live alongside ordinary criminals. Personally, I protested against this when I was in jail. Many of my friends who are political prisoners, also protested against this mixed prison system, because if we live with criminals, then that means we are considered criminals. My friends and I asked for freedom and democracy, and we believe that without freedom and democracy Vietnam cannot develop. But, Vietnam put us in jail, and we had to live with criminals. It was very hard for us, especially for people like myself. We have never before lived with murderers and thieves. Thus it was very hard for us for to adapt to our new way of life in prison.

The second thing that my friends and I openly protested against, even during the time I was in jail, was forced labor. We were against forced labor in the camp because of two reasons. First because it's illegal according to the Vietnamese court system. The courts can only sentence a person to imprisonment without forced labor. But all prisoners, when they go into the camps are forced to do labor. Most of the labor is hard labor; manual hard labor everyday for eight hours a day from early in the morning until four or five o'clock in the afternoon. The whole day is spent laboring outside under the sunshine or even in the rain. You cannot go back into the camps to rest in the noontime, for example. This reality was very hard for all prisoners, not only for political prisoners.

Moreover, forced labor is a form of exploitation of all prisoners because the prisoners have to produce their work quota of food to receive food. The government does not provide enough food for its prisoners,

so the prisoners have to labor to have more rice and more vegetables in order to survive. However, even with very hard labor, everyday they have only rice and vegetables to eat, and in many months during the year, there are no vegetables — just rice and salt. Working on minimal sustenance, we had to do hard labor everyday. This is very inhuman and exploitative of prisoners' labor.

Many political prisoners and I are also against another component of labor camps: the reeducation program. The Vietnamese and Chinese Laogai systems focus on reeducation. Through reeducation programs, the Communist Party intends to bring individuals back to society as a good citizen who obeys the government and accepts the policies of the Communist Party. You cannot voice your disagreement with the jailers, the cadres, or the government. As a political prisoner, I would understand the purpose of reeducation if it is applied to criminals who act to disturb the general safety and order of society. However, political prisoners are good people and good citizens. We are only against the government. We fight for freedom and democracy so we do not accept reeducation in the sense of accepting the government and the Communist Party's policies.

When I was in Nam Ha camp in the North (I was moved from the South to the North), a group of political prisoners and I sent a formal letter to the Prime Minister in 1994. We told the Prime Minister that we were against three aspects of the labor camps: the mixing of criminals with political prisoners, the implementation of forced labor, and the reeducation programs for political prisoners. The day we sent the letter, on April 1, 1994, we stopped cooperating with the jailers in the forced labor and the reeducation program. As a result, they sent me to a very faraway camp near the Laotian border. I was isolated in a cell for over four years of solitary confinement. I existed alone, without any paper, with no books to read, no pens to write, no friends, for more than four years simply because I was against the forced labor system.

I want you to understand my personal case and the case of the martyr political prisoners in Vietnam. All of you here, I know that you are very concerned about the system and I'm very glad that we have this kind of conference. I suggest that we should address the Laogai as a very serious problem for the international community. I suggest that we should set up some sort of international Laogai association that will work for the abolition of all Laogai systems in all Communist countries.

I know that many countries exist as free democracies. While prisons systems exist in those democracies, I firmly believe that their prison systems do not share any likeness to the Communist Laogai system. Political dissidents, as defined by communist regimes, are not considered criminals in free democracies.

While Vietnam imprisons political dissidents, these prisoners of conscience are not even recognized as political prisoners. Political prisoners are simply considered criminals. In Vietnam, for example, the government labeled me a "delinquent" or a criminal because the government refuses to identify political prisoners. As a former political prisoner, I would like to see political prisoners identified and treated apart from common criminals.

We have to end the forced labor system for all prisoners, not only for political prisoners because it is inhumane and exploitative for human beings. I suggest we should ask the United Nations to have a resolution to abolish all Laogai systems and forced labor systems in all regions around the world. I believe that if we can do these two things, then we can bring concrete actions to stop the exploitation and the torture of all prisoners, and especially all political prisoners.

Vietnam, China, North Korea, and Cuba are the four last Communist countries. Ten years ago, we witnessed the collapse of the Communist bloc in Eastern Europe and finally in the Soviet Union. I believe that in the next century, even as soon as the next decade, we will see the abolition of all Laogai systems. The last four Communist countries will become free and democratic. I strongly believe in that because I know that in our country, Vietnam, there are now many political and religious dissidents. They're now dissidents who are against the Communist Party policy and the government. They are asking for freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of political activism. They are asking not only for free market systems but also for free political systems and free cultural activities. The government currently continues to suppress those voices, and they continue to harass them. Now while few are held in a common jail, many dissidents including religious leaders, are put in their own prisons. Their prisons are in their houses, their pagodas, in their own churches. They are unable to leave their homes.

I think that we, Chinese and Vietnamese, here and abroad should work together with other democracy advocates around the world for freedom and democracy in China, in Vietnam, and in other countries. I suggest that we continue this work and cooperate with each other. Here in Washington D.C., we have some Vietnamese people who are working for that. They are human rights activists. They are democracy advocates and we are supporting our people inside the country for freedom and democracy for our country.

We believe that in the very near future, Vietnam and China will have freedom and democracy. Before we can reach that, all of us have to work harder. And we would accept the torture, the suppression of the Communist government, but we have to support our people inside our countries, in China and Vietnam. If we don't, then they cannot voice their protests and disagreement with the government. I also believe that the international communities have an understanding and compassion for the dissidents in China and Vietnam. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have supported us and supported the Vietnamese dissidents in Vietnam. I call upon you to continue your support and to discuss the suggestions that I have made in this speech. Thank you very much.

Doan Viet Hoat is a scholar and survivor of the Vietnamese reeducation camps. During his imprisonment he was recognized by several human rights organizations including Amnesty International as a "prisoner of conscience."

The Laogai and Development in Tibet

Steven Marshall

I appreciate the invitation to be here and I appreciate the fact that all of you are present. These remarks, which I will try to get through quickly, will focus less on specific abuses to individual Tibetan prisoners and more on the role of that system and what China says its top priorities are for Tibet, and that's economic development. The Chinese leadership has embraced the quest for prosperity, but they continue to believe that economic fundamentals such as accountability, transparency, and openness can be side-stepped along with political pluralism and individual liberty. As opening up to the outside world gains momentum in Tibet, the role of prison production has created problems that didn't used to exist in a closed Socialist system. International currents now mitigate towards the disclosure of information, but Chinese authorities conceal as much as they possibly can about prisons, prisoners, and prison production. Those who do provide any information to outsiders are sentenced to prison terms. They are accused of subverting the state, and of passing state secrets to foreign enemies.

Insofar as areas of Tibetan ethnicity and autonomy are concerned China's Laogai in their classic formulation — state farms, state ranches, state factories — are concentrated today mostly in Qinghai Province. The densest concentrations of those Laogai are the industrial prison facilities, which are clustered in and around Xining, the provincial capital. Jim Seymour in a book *New Ghosts, Old Ghosts*, published last year, believes that there are about 19 large Laogai scattered around Xining, industrial and agricultural combined. That tally is very close to what the Tibet Information Network knows about. Almost a dozen of those large Laogai, all of which are industrial, are very close to Xining. About six you can find right underneath a park called Nanshan, "South Mountain," on the south side of Xining. Those six Laogai produce hardware, steel products, plastics, hides, garments made of fur and leather, and they also do vehicle repairs. On the north side of Xining, below Beishan, which is "North Mountain Park," there are a couple more Laogai. They deal with steel products and wood products. In the suburbs west of Xining, there are three rather interesting large industrial Laogai. One of those produces hydro-electric equipment. Another produces products which support the Xining Steelworks which is one of the province's largest industries right now. The other one produces some sort of chemical which I can't identify. The eleventh one that I can specifically mention is very near Kumbum Monastery in Huangjiang County of Haidong Prefecture.

In the past decade, most of the prisoners in Qinghai Laogai were brought in from China's more crowded eastern areas. When they were released, they often had to stay in Qinghai. This is no longer the case as state subsidies have dwindled for the Laogai. They are forced to stand economically on their own two feet right now and are less willing to warehouse prisoners from elsewhere in China. Economic pragmatism and its market strategy have become guiding forces within the new prison production system, but the ever present political agenda is still very much a part of it.

Xining is a showcase in this type of adaptation. There are a dozen factories there that produce heavy industrial components which facilitate modernization and development throughout China, and they produce a wide variety of construction materials and consumer goods which could be transported and sold anywhere. Although this particular concentration of prisoners would account for thousands, we at Tibet Information Network can't provide specific information on them. Seymour states that the hydro-electric

equipment factory west of Xining is a main place for holding Tibetan criminals. A few people, the Tibetans there, are reported to be Tibetan political prisoners but we cannot actually provide information on them.

The strongest links between Tibetans and forced production are farther from Xining. Those that are currently dominating the news are in Dulan County in Haixi Mongolian and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai. Their place in the news doesn't come from political imprisonment but from their influence in the surrounding community, the county, the prefecture, and even the province that they are located in. There is a cluster of agricultural camps that are called Xiangride, and they produce a significant slice of Haixi's grain production. Into this local area, the Chinese would like to resettle with help from the World Bank about 58,000 mostly non-Tibetan, non-Mongolian farmers who they would bring in from the very crowded areas around Xining and Haidong. This settlement would be occurring within a relatively short distance of this group of agricultural Laogai called Xiangride. Based on assurances from Chinese officials, the Bank insists that there will be no mutual benefit of any kind between these Laogai and the new settlers in their communities. However, considering the interpenetration that occurs between market factors and considering that the Laogai are the principal market factor in those areas, that type of assurance probably doesn't have much basis.

These facilities mentioned so far are classic Laogai in that they aren't even called prisons. They're called state farms, state ranches, and state factories. Their initial purpose when they were created was to reform unacceptable social and political behavior through inculcating Socialist values through labor. Laogai camps therefore were expected to be successful in punishing you and changing your mind and beliefs, but they weren't expected to be successful economically. That has changed. They are expected to be successful economically, and they are now trying to integrate themselves into a market system. This has very important repercussions for everybody in the entire economy not just the people who work in the prisons.

In a location like Xining which is linked to just about every place in China by very good rail transport, a broad range of products can be produced and exported easily and cheaply. It's different in Tibetan areas, which by and large remain remote, road transportation is poor, and most of them are untouched by railroads at this point.

Utilization of forced labor reflects the fact that their top priority is to build their infrastructure, first of all, and secondly to exploit natural resources. I'll give you a few examples of how Tibetan forced labor is used in these pursuits, and the first one has to do with gold mining which is an excellent way to generate revenue for the state. A prisoner named Tsering Dorje was a trader from Kardze County in Kardze TAP in Sichuan Province. He was arrested in 1990 for putting up a pro-independence poster, given a twelve-year sentence, and ended up in a gold mine not far from the area where he was forced to do labor under extremely difficult conditions. He was afraid he wouldn't survive a twelve-year sentence. He was able to escape in 1993, three years after he was sentenced, and he described conditions where prisoners were compelled by beatings to fulfill daily excavation quotas. They were required to work very long hours, about 12 hours a day with very poor food, very little rest. Some of the Chinese prisoners there who had no relatives to bring them food and supplement their diet committed suicide. These prisoners would rather commit suicide than die from overwork, physical beatings, or long periods in isolation cells. Beatings were so fierce that broken bones and eyes knocked out of your head were reportedly common. If you tried to escape, you were met with flogging to your naked body. They put you in an isolation cell, and the door was not opened again until you came out, which was usually a period of several months. This treatment is still used today in China and Tibet. It is not a punishment that ended with the close of the Cultural Revolution.

In the realm of forestry, which is probably Tibet's most important national resource that is currently being produced, prisoners work in the service of forestry. In Lhasa, a monk prisoner named Legja Tarchen, arrested in March 1995, was sentenced to two years in the Laojiao for wearing a small badge with the Tibetan flag on it. One of his jobs in the Laojiao was to do construction work for the local forestry department, which is part of the Forestry Ministry. In Central Tibet is Polochamil Prison, the Tibetan Autonomous Region's #2 Prison where prisoners have had to work in cutting trees, sawing lumber, and producing other assorted forestry products. In Sichuan province, the capital of the Tibetan Nishaman Autonomous Prefecture (NAPA), there is a prison located within a forestry department compound where they saw lumber and perform vehicle repairs. Those prisoners help the forestry department run their operations.

The production of construction and infrastructure is very important. In Kanbing, which is the capital of the Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Kardze TAP), there is a cement factory two kilometers north of town. It is said to be the principal cement factory in that prefecture. Tourists walk along the road, right past it, but cannot see the prison within the compound. There probably are no less than 200 prisoners there. They work in that cement factory. That prefecture is now soliciting foreign investment partly through the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu, and they want people to come in, invest money, and build-up the infrastructure. To do construction there, they would have to use the cement that comes from that plant. A similar plant is just on the north side of Drapchi Prison in Lhasa, which has the largest concentration of Tibetan political prisoners. It's a small plant imprisoning 138 convicts. Most of them are Tibetan and some of them are political prisoners. Photographs indicate that this place wasn't even a forced labor facility until 1993 or 1994. It is a relatively recent development that this plant was converted into forced labor prison. In terms of consumer goods and foodstuffs, a prisoner named Drok Drakau was a university student in Lanzhou, the provincial capital of Gansu. He was detained, again for a political offense, in March of 1995, and was forced to work in a prison stitching gloves together, which had a remarkable range of materials for one provincial prison. Prisoners there did joinery, metalwork, iron smelting, soldering, wood turning, wool carding, weaving, yarn spinning, carpet weaving, leather shoe production, and vehicle repairs. Interestingly, the factory that he worked on had no sign on it of any kind that indicated that forced labor was used.

I will hurry this to a conclusion in respect to our final speaker. The Laogai are adapting. They are not a Marxist dinosaur doomed to extinction here. This is an important point. In Tibetan autonomous areas through the 1980s and 1990s they have been evolving very quickly. They have learned to produce the materials that are needed for infrastructure development. They have learned to produce materials that can be sent to other places. The Laogai, in modern China and Tibet, has learned to follow the lead of modern business which is downsizing, becoming more efficient in a response to market trends in an effort to become more profitable. As they do this they find it more and more important to conceal their tracks and the origin of their products. This is a direct contradiction of the principles of accountability which usually underpins economic development. So it's doubtful in this environment if any individual living in an economy where privatization is at a low level can be completely insulated from the character or the impact of the Laogai. The presence of the Laogai, affects everyone in the region. Thank you very much.

***All of the names of the prisoners mentioned have left Tibet. They are all in exile now and the use of their names poses no danger to their families.*

Steven Marshall is a researcher for the Tibet Information Network and the author of a comprehensive report related to Tibetan Laogai entitled Hostile Elements.

Keynote address by Richard Gere

September 18, 1999

I am very humbled to be here. I want thank you for inviting me, Harry and Kerry and the whole group here. I know how hard it is to put these things together and how courageous it is, for all of you. I am incredibly moved and humbled to be here with the real people who have suffered, the real people who have lived a very, very difficult life and have had the strength and courage to speak of it. I am sure you are filming right now, and believe me I am so spoiled rotten in terms of money and resources and facilities. I feel deeply ashamed when I hear these stories and how little I have given back.

I found myself when I was on the plane coming here looking down over Virginia and how beautiful it is and how lush and how much basic happiness we have in America — that we just expect. Of course we cannot be dragged out of our house and arrested and thrown in jail for no reason. It is impossible, unthinkable! It is so hard for us to relate to this as even a minute possibility in our lives, especially if we are white, and if we have some resources. Poor and black, maybe we expect it a bit more.

I met Harry about five years ago now. It was one of the talk shows and Harry was on TV talking about his book. I think it was on CBS and it was documenting Harry going back to prison. I was so incredibly moved! I sat there dumbfounded, watching the television. The courage of this man! I sat there with tears streaming down my eyes that there was a man who could suffer like that and turn that suffering into action for his own brothers and sisters. And I have since gotten to know Harry and I have realized that his sense of brotherhood and sisterhood is not just for his Chinese brothers and sisters, but it is for his brothers and sisters in the whole world. I think that is the important thing here. This conference is not just about China, or Tibet, but it is about all the suffering people who go through this madness that has been described today! It is unthinkable, today, it is unthinkable! It is unthinkable that Boeing makes deals with the Chinese. It is unthinkable that Rupert Murdoch is making deals with the Chinese and getting away with it. It is unthinkable that Airbus is making deals with the Chinese and getting away with it.

I scribbled a few words that occurred to me on the way down here today. They were really post-card images of words. They refer to my Tibetan friends who have gone through this and have come out speaking about it, my Chinese friends who have gone through this and come out speaking about it, my Central American friends who have come out speaking about it, my African friends who have come out speaking about it. They are holy troublemakers, they are sacred troublemakers. They are divine truth tellers. Societies do not purify themselves, they do not become what they can be, they do not reach their full potential without these sacred troublemakers to remind us of the reality of the world, especially when we are so comfortable. It was true, Harry was having a life here. Harry got out. Paldon Gyatso got out, Anni Panchaen got out. But they have made it their lives to write books, communicate, to talk about it constantly. I think partially for themselves to purge the pain it is necessary to talk about it. But I think the motivation is higher than that. It is to change the world. It is astonishing to me how one person can change the world. What an effect Harry Wu had on the world, that he said I am going to talk about this. I am going to make a film about this. I am going to keep pushing!

I am in the middle of shooting a film right now, and the last thing I had time for was come down here and do this. Harry came to see me, and of course I said yes. And that is what he has done his whole life, he goes and he grabs people by the back of the neck and he shakes them and he says this is the right thing to do!

And you look at him and you say yes, you can. Look at Harry, he had an effect! Mandela had an effect. I remember being at a benefit concert for Mandela in London, about twelve years ago, and it was astonishing there were 120,000 people in Wembley Stadium. The thought that this man who was still in solitary confinement in a jail in South Africa was generating this much energy, positive energy for change is astonishing! And they are no different than us. We all have that capability of really changing the universe if we focus on it and take responsibility. That is the issue here today, being responsible. In light of responsibility, the suffering becomes quite small, I think. It is about assuming that responsibility of telling the truth. It involves that wonderful concept of the Quakers of witnessing to the truth. Inherent in that witnessing to the truth is making sure that it is generous. It is not fueled by anger, and hatred, and revenge. It is generous. I not only want to free myself, I want to free you. I want to free my torturer from his madness, from his ignorance! I think that is really the message of the end of the twentieth century, compassion for the torturer, because he is crazed. He is ignorant, he is ill! And none of us will be free until all the torturers come to their senses, and the only way they will is through compassion.

There is a story that I have told many times, so I have to apologize to my friends who have heard it before, but it is just so incredibly moving to me that I am going to tell it again. I am obviously not allowed in China any more. The last time I was there, and the only time I was allowed was in 1993. I sort of forced the issue. I was invited by the film community and I said I will come there, but I have to go to Tibet and they very reluctantly allowed me to go to Tibet. It was horrific! I went there with a teacher of mine who had not been there since 1959. He had left with the Dalai Lama and what is now about 130,000 Tibetans. I spent two weeks in the Lhasa area, the Tibetan capital, hearing horror story after horror story of what has happened to these people. Truly Tibet is one large Laogai, no question about it. It is secret police everywhere; everyone is afraid. You can be arrested for having a picture of a Nobel Peace Prize winner. It is a place where they arrested a six-year-old boy, Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the Panchaen Lama, and arrested him because he was so dangerous.

On the last day that I was in Lhasa, I visited a very small shrine, and there was a prayer wheel. In Tibet they have very large prayer wheels to be turned, it is part of their practice. The prayer wheel is filled with prayers, usually the mantra of compassion, the jewel in the lotus, which is this incredible sense of altruism. It is a sense of brotherly and sisterly responsibility. There was this woman there. I guess she was about thirty-five, or forty years old and she was sitting down and chanting, turning this huge wheel and as the wheel turned one visualizes that these blessings of purification are being sent out to the whole world. It's a very powerful visualization. There was also an older woman who was wandering around this very small courtyard and she was muttering to herself and she was not well. She was limping and obviously not well in her mind. I had sat there for quite some time and finally approached the woman who was turning the prayer wheel through an interpreter and reluctantly she started talking.

She said who she was and I approached the subject of her friend and asked if she was okay. Again, very reluctantly she started to talk and it turns out they had just been released from prison. They had been arrested from their convent and there had probably been forty or fifty of them who had been arrested for having a "Free Tibet" flag and walking around the convent with it. They were all arrested and taken to jail. They were all stripped, they were all beaten, they were all tortured, and many of them were raped. All of them had had large sticks pounded into their vagina, clubs pounded into their bodies! Several had died. The older woman had been through this several times already. Her body was giving out and her mind obviously had. The younger woman was not well herself, she was recovering. I asked her how she dealt with the anger that she must feel towards her torturers. She went to a very deep place inside herself and she said, "you know, if they did not torture us, these poor people probably could not feed their families." I looked at her dumbfounded.

I could not believe she was actually coming from that place. I asked the question again, and she shook her head, and she said the question is so much larger than that. So much larger!

It is the only way I can make sense, if ever there can be made sense of this kind of madness, it is that the question is so much larger than any individual suffering. It is a question of basic ignorance. The ignorance is that there is a difference between you and me. That you are out there, and I am here. That your suffering is different from my suffering, that your happiness is separate from my happiness. And that is the definition of ignorance. There is no separation, there is none! When you are happy, I am happy; when you suffer, I suffer! There is no difference! That obviously has nothing to do with gender, with race, with culture, with anything, even with species! That is how big this issue is, there is no separation! And within that realization of interconnectedness is wisdom and within that wisdom torture is not possible, it is simply not possible! In that context of mind, all of these sick people who have fueled these law systems, or lack thereof, in totalitarian countries, the torturers, the jail keepers, they are really an object of pity. They are the ones who are lost, but it is only with them being transformed and seeing wisdom that anything will ever change.

I found myself babbling like this in some crazy way at the Academy Awards one night, and I think some people [in the audience] understood what I was talking about. The only way to change these people is with love, ultimately. People have to be responsible, absolutely. People have to be accountable for their actions, if they are not in this lifetime, than they are in the fullness of Karma. We are all accountable, but the only thing that transforms is love and forgiveness. I have to keep reminding myself of that when my friends have been tortured, my friends have been beaten, my friends have bullets still in their bodies, my friends have been killed. I have to keep reminding myself that that torturer is my friend also, a deeply sick friend, and keep my heart open even for them. And the out-pouring of love eventually will heal them. It is a long process, this kind of healing, but it is complete, and it will transform the whole world.

There is a wonderful line in *Kundun*, the film about His Holiness the Dalai Lama that Scorsese made. He said, "nonviolence takes a long time." This kind of healing which once it is done, it is complete, we never go back, we never get sick again, we never become ignorant again, it takes a long time. But it is the only one that is of value! Obviously that is an internal process for all of us to do, but there are people like Harry and Kerry and other organizations that are actively working to tell the truth about the world. My prayer is that it is always fueled by this sense of forgiveness and the higher plane of understanding, that the sick have to be healed.

There was a play that I saw many many years ago, when I was a young man. It was by a Spanish playwright, Arabau, and he had written this play called "They even put handcuffs on the flowers." It was about the Franco years. Franco was a dictator, quite vicious at times. They even put handcuffs on the flowers. I'm looking at these wonderful people here, at my Tibetan friends, and all my other friends, and I see them as the flowers of their cultures! The sensitive, the bright, the courageous, the truth tellers. They are the flowers of their cultures! And these sick people put handcuffs on them, even on the flowers! Obviously societies cannot sustain themselves when you kill off your best people, when you send them away, when you lock them up, when you destroy their bodies and their minds. There is no way the Chinese dictatorship will last. It has been fifty years now. If it lasts another twenty, thirty, forty years, it will not last a long time, it definitely will be over. No society can sustain that.

But ultimately in this kind of a world it is up to those of us who have voices, who have access to media, who have access to our friends. Harry started with nothing, nothing — look what he has generated in the world! We can all do the same thing, but we have to do it together and it is not just about the Chinese and

it is not just about the Tibetans, it includes all of us. It includes the American Indians, the South Africans, it includes the other Asian countries that are having problems, the South Americans, the Central Americans, all the poor underprivileged people in this world who are being tortured, and not having their share.

There is one other image that I would like to share with you of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We were talking about the demands that the Chinese government was making of him in terms of the possibility of a dialogue being engaged as to determining the possibility of a truly autonomous Tibet, if not independent, which it always was. And they wanted him to say that Tibet was always a part of China. He shook his head and said, "I cannot lie," and he pointed to his tongue, and he said, "This tongue has never lied." How could I say that? I think we all have to remember that and create tongues like that. That we can point to and say this tongue doesn't lie.

With that I thank you very much and I am sorry for this barking of a fifty-year-old man. Bless you all.

Richard Gere, Chairman of the International Campaign for Tibet, is a human rights activist and well-known actor.

Commentary from a Laogai Survivor:

“Frenzied Killing”

Liu Guokai

Presented September 19, 1999

The Chinese Communist Party is a one-party dictatorship that goes against the trend of history and stubbornly monopolizes social power. To that end, it not only suppresses the people's political rights, but also deprives the people of their basic human rights. It goes without saying that the progressive international community must condemn the Chinese Communist Party's perverse acts.

In the past, the Chinese Communist authorities denied all such denouncements as “interference in China's internal affairs” and simply ignored them. More recently, intertwined by economic ties with the outside world, they are obliged to use other methods to counter the international community's accusations. One of their methods is quibbling. They say that the right of existence is the most fundamental of human rights and that all other human rights are secondary and their implementation should be postponed. To maintain the people's right of existence, the argument goes, they (Chinese Communists) are devoting their energies to improving the billion plus Chinese citizens' standard of living,

The Chinese Communist power is disguising itself as philanthropic, as if it were really taking utmost care of the people's right to existence. Well, before talking about whether their false reasoning “right of existence is the sole content of human rights for the Chinese people, while all other rights should be swept under the carpet” holds water, let us examine whether they really guarantee the people's right to existence. A brief survey of facts suffices to reveal that the myth “the Great Party cares about human rights in China” is but another lie used by the Chinese Communist Party to maintain its dictatorial rule.

In fact, the Chinese Communist power has always denied the people's right to existence.

In the initial period of the Chinese Communist regime, in the movement “to suppress counterrevolutionaries” and the “land reform” movement, nearly one million members of the “landlord class” (landowners), “rich peasants” and arbitrarily defined “hostile elements” were killed by the Communists. The Communists said that the executed landlords were despots. Had those landlords really savagely oppressed and killed local citizens, it would be understandable to execute them after providing due process: legally collecting evidence of crimes, conducting open trials, appeals and rulings. The issue here is that most of those landlords and rich peasants only exploited local peasants economically. It would be understandable to call for a revolution to deprive them of land and force them to live by their own labor, but why kill them? So, did the Chinese Communists not deprive one million peaceful citizens of their right to existence?

In two to three years from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, the Chinese Communists' absurd economic policies resulted in the collapse of the nation's rural economy. As a result, approximately ten million citizens starved to death in the Great Leap Forward. This is yet another example of the Chinese Communists, in the name of ideology and for the purpose of maintaining control, committing all kinds of outrages and neglecting people's right to existence.

If the Chinese Communists try to absolve themselves by saying that the movement “to suppress counterrevolutionaries” and the “land reform” movement were launched to stabilize their power and to deter hostile forces, if they insist that the famine at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s was due to “errors in work,” then how do they interpret the movement “to deal blows at counterrevolutionaries and three vices” that was launched in 1970, twenty-one years after the Chinese Communist regime was established?

Most of those killed in the movement were labeled “counterrevolutionaries.” Quotas were established for the number of people to be killed. In the provincial capitals, for each scheduled execution, dozens of “counterrevolutionaries” were executed. In capitals of the prefecture, each execution included about a dozen killed, and in county-level cities, the numbers were in the single digits. Within each smaller city, several executions took place. I vividly remember how bulletin boards along Guangzhou’s streets were fully covered with execution notices. The youngest executed “counterrevolutionary criminal” was fourteen years old! Counterrevolutionary cliques bore the brunt. When all the members of counterrevolutionary cliques and organizations were killed, the party had to find more victims. So they targeted members of “counterrevolutionary” assemblies! An assembly could consist of a few guys hanging out together with no program, no declaration, leaders, or members — complaining about something, talking about social problems. This was labeled a “counterrevolutionary assembly,” and they would be escorted to the execution site and shot. With such frenzied “killing games,” the Communists robbed the people of their right to existence.

Somebody might say, “In the late 1970s and early 1980s, our Party conducted huge rehabilitation activities. All those things are history now. The movement ‘to deal blows at counterrevolutionaries and three vices’ happened nearly thirty years ago, the movement ‘to suppress counterrevolutionaries’ and the ‘land reform’ movement happened nearly half a century ago. You can’t judge today’s Communist power with a yardstick one or two generations old!”

Sure, if the Communists have sheathed their butcher’s knives, we might be able to calmly examine the bygone tragedies from a historian’s point of view. Alas, such is not reality! The truth is that since mid-1980s, “strike hard campaigns” and “killing games” have been going on all the time, with no sign of decline. The only difference is that those killed are no longer political prisoners, but common criminals.

But, do all those sentenced to death deserve to die? Let us leave aside for the moment the fact that the death penalty has been abolished in many countries, and let us judge things by the millennia-old classical Chinese law: a life for a life. Even by that standard, the fact remains that most criminals executed in the movements did not commit murder and do not deserve to die.

Did you injure somebody? Dead! Did you steal? Dead! Did you harbor a hooker? Dead! Even pickpockets have been executed!

Execution notices posted in Guangzhou streets:

- * Middle-aged man, no previous verdict. Rented room to prostitute for 600 RMB/month. Killed!
- * Young man, no previous verdict. Used to kick women’s private parts at night on circular road and flee by bicycle. Apprehended. Killed!
- * Village man, mid-50s. Went to Guangzhou. Found no job. Extremely hungry. Tried to pick pockets in Guangzhou Railroad Station. Clumsy, apprehended on first try. Target happened to be foreign citizen of Chinese origin. How outrageous, China’s reputation tarnished! Killed!

The day that the pickpocket mentioned above was executed, I peddled nearly twenty kilometers on bicycle and got to the execution site in Shangyuangang. When the police truck escorting a village man from Hunan Province was driving slowly past me, I knew it was he by the death penalty signboard on his body. Decades of hard farming labor made him look almost seventy. Never did he expect he would be killed for pick pocketing. Deadly pale, weak and limp, he was propped up by two strong policemen on either side.

Here is another example of the frequent use of the death penalty at that time. One day, a classmate rushed headlong into our classroom and yelled, "So terrible! So terrible!"

"What is so terrible?" all my classmates and I asked, unable to make heads or tails of what he said.

"One of my classmates at technical school was shot! He spent a lot of time and money on his girlfriend, but lost her. Angrily, he sprinkled sulfuric acid on the girl's face, for which he got 7 years. He refused to accept the verdict and appealed. The appeal coincided with the 'Strike Hard campaign.' The verdict was escalated to death penalty, followed immediately by execution... His parents were not notified... his mother saw the notice in street only the other day, and fainted in the street..."

It goes without saying that theft, pickpocketing, embezzlement, and etc. deserve to be punished, but the targets of the crimes are things, not human lives. Why then the death penalty? Crimes against people such as forcing women into prostitution, rape, and assault deserve heavy punishment, but not necessarily the death penalty. The way Chinese Communists indiscriminately kill criminal offenders directly reveals their frame of mind — people are nothing but dirt. An in-depth analysis reveals even further problems.

A common citizen can be killed for his first attempt at pick-pocketing. A grassroots cadre can be sentenced to death for embezzling 100,000 RMB, but what about high-ranking officials? Having failed in power struggle within the Chinese Communist Party's Politburo, Zhou Beifang and Chen Xitong fell into disgrace, their economic problems were immediately exposed. Why were they not sentenced to death for embezzling astronomical sums of money? What is more, Chen Xitong has been bailed for medical treatment and still enjoys a vice minister's treatment. For lucky high-ranking officials like Chen and Zhou, the huge red umbrella shields their crimes of embezzlement. Hence, we see that the Chinese Communist power is but a dictatorship of the bureaucrat-capitalist class, whether it flies the signboard of Socialism or Marxism-Leninism. It is a thoroughly anti-popular, anti-democratic regime, and on the one hand, it deters the people with cruel punishment, on the other hand, it protects its own buddies, even the disgraced ones. This is an important means for maintaining its rule.

Our pro-democracy friends are exposing the Chinese Communist authorities' irrational and barbarous Laogai system. I think that they must also expose and denounce the way the Chinese Communists treat the people as dirt and willfully murder their own citizens.

I am convinced that the Chinese Communist authorities are making a futile attempt to turn back the wheel of history. Democracy shall eventually supersede despotism - such is the irresistible trend. Once a democratic system is established in China, it will be the day of reckoning. Murderous files kept in Chinese Communist secret agencies' safes shall be exposed to light. Millions upon millions of people shall see through the Chinese Communists' cruel nature and shall be resolved to thoroughly crush this barbarous political system. Until that time, the Chinese Communist Party will continue to do its utmost to put off the day of reckoning.

EPILOGUE

A Fearless World

Bing Zhang, daughter of Laogai survivor

Standing here now, there is a voice in my mind, strongly urging me. Yes, I would like to run away! Some of my memories have been a nightmare for me. If I could make one wish in my life, I would lock those memories in a Pandora's box forever and no one would be allowed to see them. You would find a girl who was struggling for years to step away from the shadow of political persecutions.

My father, Zhang Xianliang, is one of the well-known Chinese dissidents from Shanghai. He joined the Chinese democracy movement in 1978, and has since actively appealed for greater human rights and democracy in China. Being an important participant of the Shanghai Democracy Wall movement of the 1970s, he wrote numerous articles and pro-democracy journals slowly exposing the autocratic corruption of the Chinese Communist Party, and together with his colleagues, demanded political reforms in China.

Late one night in August 1983, I realized that my father was a special person. The Shanghai police broke into our home and ravaged through our meager belongings. At age fifteen, I held my mother's hand tightly, and gazed upon the uniformed intruders tearing my family in two. My father was removed from the house and brought to whereabouts unknown. We were not informed of his prison location for many weeks. It was the beginning of many sleepless nights for me. My mother and I were under constant harassment and close surveillance by the authorities for over a decade. The police tapped our phone calls, read our mail, and shadowed us whenever we left our home. Our friends and relatives were intimidated into reporting our private conversations and deeds to the police. Everyday, my mother and I worried whether my father would ever come back home safely.

My childhood was filled with pain and fear that has continued into my adult life. When I graduated from high school near the top of my class, I was told that I could not receive higher education unless I signed a statement admitting to my father's crimes and renouncing his political opinions. I reluctantly signed under duress. How humiliating it was, for an eighteen-year-old girl to be forced to publicly condemn her father.

After finishing college, I was assigned to a national work unit but was refused acceptance, because I was the daughter of a counterrevolutionary. I found a job with a Chinese-American joint venture in another city, Guangzhou. Later the company was forced to fire me, as ordered by a local security bureau. My spirit was totally broken. I decided to leave my homeland. The government authorities at first denied my passport application with no specific reason. Shortly thereafter, mysteriously a passport was granted. After I flew to the United States, I discovered in shock how my passport came to be. My father had formally given up his right for appeal, realizing he would spend the next four years in prison, so that his daughter could start a new life in the United States. Although I did not ask him to make this decision, I know deeply from my heart that I will feel guilty for the rest of my life.

The Chinese Communist Party has been constantly eliminating its “enemies” on the grounds of “strengthening red power” in China, spiritually as well as physically. The Laogai system is by far the most horrible ruling machine that the Chinese Communist Party has produced. After spending eight years in the labor camps and prisons, my father deeply understands what this giant ghost can do to a regular human being. Shortages of food and water were common. Hunger strikes were the only way to improve the terrible living conditions. As a political prisoner, my father was also forbidden to read, write or speak to the other inmates. In addition to his laboring the camp farm fields, he was forced to sit facing his cell wall for several hours each day to “self-examine” his crimes. Visitation from family was limited and was often canceled without advance notice. My father lost body weight rapidly and suffered from several serious diseases. He nearly died from heart disease while in the camp. Not only was he denied proper medical treatment, but he was forced to keep his mouth shut to the outside world. He did manage to secretly write numerous poems on food labels, envelopes, and other scraps of paper, to document the terrible conditions inside. My father survived that system. My mother and myself, we are also survivors of a sort.

As for the many other victims of the Laogai system in China, we keep asking ourselves, will the others survive? If they are fortunate enough to walk away from these labor camps, will they be able to recover from the physical and mental abuses of the camps and regain some portion of a normal life again? As long as the dictatorship of the Chinese Communist Party and the Laogai system still exist in China, no citizen is truly safe from the potential cruelty of the system.

Standing here today, I hear a voice in my mind calling, “Leave me alone!” I am trembling again, the way I did sixteen years ago. I can see a little girl, her eyes full of torment and fear, helplessly clutching her mother’s hand. The moment I see that girl, I realize why I do not wish to forget my memories. There is the need to retell our stories over and over, so that those who will listen will help in the cause. Only then can we walk hand in hand, to build a fearless world for our children. A fearless world — it might only be a dream for my father, but it should be the future for the next generation.

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LAOGAI RESEARCH FOUNDATION

In 1992, former political prisoner Hongda Harry Wu established the Laogai Research Foundation (LRF) to gather and disseminate information on the Chinese gulag, known as the Laogai—the most extensive forced labor camp system in the world today. Since its inception, the LRF has expanded its scope to document and expose a wide range of systemic human rights abuses in the People's Republic of China.

Through the Laogai Survivors' Project, the LRF interviews survivors of China's Laogai camps. These brave individuals are an invaluable source of information on this system, and their insight into its inner workings provides essential information, both for history, and for the world's understanding of the current human rights situation in China. Through exhibition of the Laogai Photo Exhibit, the LRF shares its secretly obtained footage of China's camp system. The LRF publishes an annual Laogai Handbook, a newsletter, and special investigative reports on human rights in China. The Laogai Research Foundation also assists television and radio media in preparing documentary pieces on human rights abuses in China.

LRF's offices in Washington D.C. and California serve as the base of the Foundation's research and publicity activities. The Directors of the Laogai Research Foundation are Harry Wu, Wei Jingsheng, and Jeff Fiedler.

The Laogai Research Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. All deductions are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law.

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