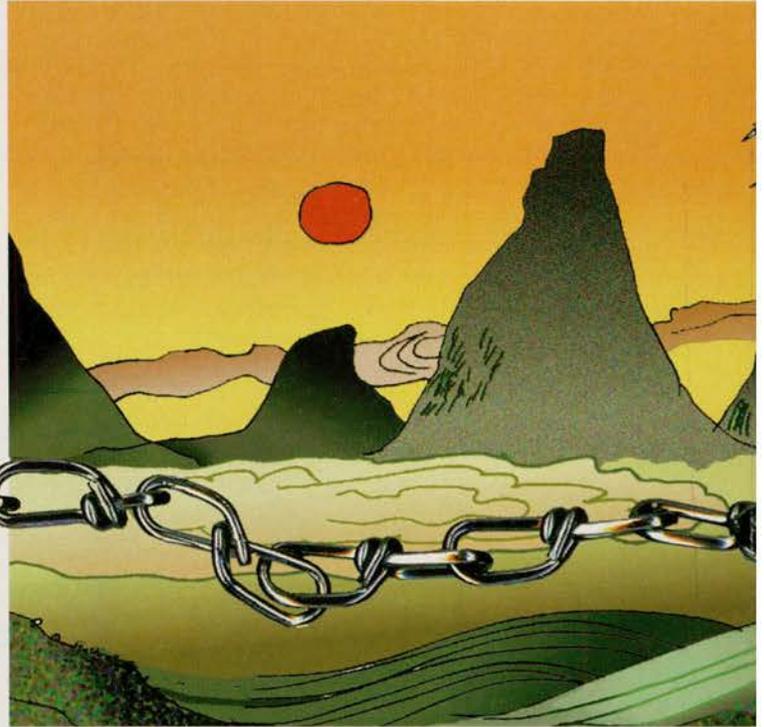


TEN YEARS AFTER TIANANMEN

Some Unsung Heroes of the Struggle

We never know anything about most of the people who work and suffer to build democracy in other countries—for us, they are anonymous. As a result, the phrase “human rights” becomes almost an abstraction; the words sound impressive, but they are bloodless and impersonal. The brief stories that follow are an effort to give a face to a few of our colleagues in China who have struggled to build a free society. All of them participated in the pro-democracy movement, which we will commemorate on June 4, and all have paid a heavy price for doing so.

In some respects, they were ordinary people whose lives and aspirations were not so different from our



own or those of colleagues we see every day. They wanted to do the kinds of things we expect to be able to do: run for public office, organize other workers, express their opinions freely and publish their work, and, yes, enjoy life with their families and friends. Yet, what is ordinary and taken for granted in a democratic society requires extraordinary heroism in a country where human rights have yet to be won. So the stories here tell of courage and persistence in the face of obstacles that we can hardly imagine. We honor these people by becoming aware of what they have suffered. But there will be no happy endings for them—or for the many others like them—until all the people of China enjoy the rights we take for granted.

Zhao Changqing

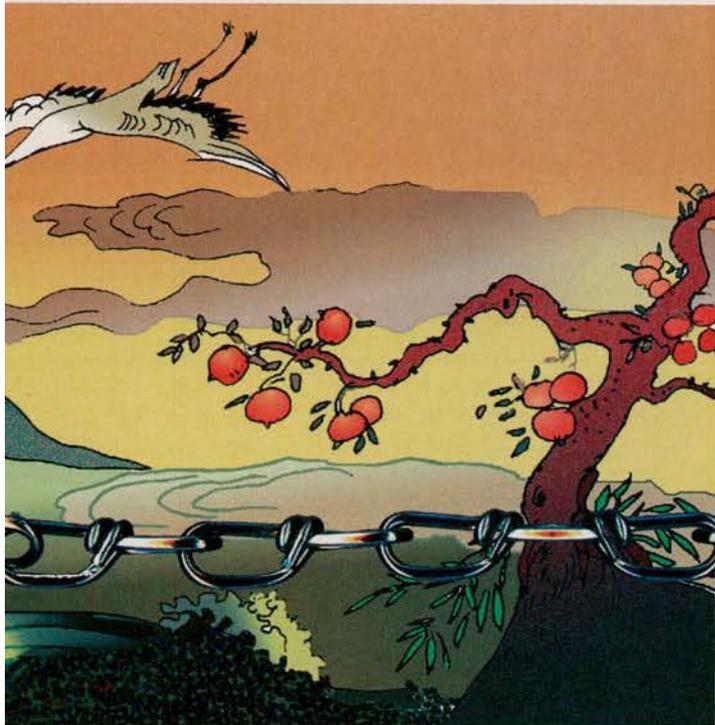
In January 1998, Zhao Changqing, 28, a teacher of politics at a middle school attached to Factory 813 in Shanxi Province, got in trouble with the authorities for engaging in two quintessentially democratic activities: He conducted a public opinion survey of workers about

Because the Chinese government exerts tight control on information about dissidents and others in China, finding current information is often difficult and frustrating. We are indebted to Human Rights in China, a New York-based organization run by Chinese exiles, for gathering and disseminating much of what we report here. To find out more, visit their web site (www.brichina.org).

the reasons for long-term losses in the factory. Then, he used the results as a platform when he sought election as representative to the local people's congress.

The factory workers' response to the poll was enthusiastic. In an open letter in which he discussed survey results and announced his candidacy, Zhao says he got back one hundred thirty-nine questionnaires of the one hundred ninety he distributed, and one hundred thirteen of these were usable. The workers also seemed open about expressing their dissatisfactions. A majority (eighty) gave “bad management” as a reason for the factory's long-term losses; and eighty-two identified “using public funds for banqueting” as a serious form of corruption (forty-seven mentioned “using public funds to hire prostitutes”). Zhao points out in the open letter that Mao Zedong himself did public opinion research, and he quotes Mao's support of the principle in the essay “On Investigation Work,” where Mao said, “Without research, there is no right to speak out.”

But Mao Zedong notwithstanding, the results of Zhao's survey and his call for change were apparently too much for authorities. In a second letter, foreseeing that he might be excluded from the elec-



ILLUSTRATED BY BRU ASSOCIATES

tion, Zhao urged factory workers to “treasure their democratic rights” and write in his name on the ballot. We don’t know whether any were brave enough to follow his advice, but we do know that he was not allowed to run; and immediately following the election on Jan. 14, Zhao was detained for one month. When he was released, he found he had lost his job. Then, two months later, he was detained again. The formal charge against Zhao was “endangering public order.”

In the first open letter to the workers at Factory 813, Zhao credits “the excellent education I received” as the source of the ideals and values that led him to undertake his campaign and that continued to guide him:

At university graduation I wrote in the albums of many classmates the slogan, “Serve the people, struggle in the interests of the people,” as words of parting. I believe that from now on in the course of my life, I will be able to act upon the precious principles I received during my years as a student in order to fight for the people’s welfare, to fight to the end!

Zhao’s family spent months trying to find out whether he had gone to trial for the activities sur-

rounding the January election. In August, they were told he had been sentenced to prison, but they were unable to find out for how long. As far as we know, Zhao Changqing remains in prison.

Liu Nianchun

Liu Nianchun, 49, a teacher and student of Chinese literature, is also a veteran democracy and labor activist. He has been imprisoned many times for his political activities, beginning with the Democracy Wall Movement, a grassroots protest movement of the late 1970s. At that time, Liu was expelled from Beijing Normal College shortly before graduation, and then he spent three years in prison for “coun-

terrevolutionary propaganda and incitement,” i.e., being critical of the government. He continued his activism during the 1989 pro-democracy movement, and in 1994, he spent more than seven months in detention for attempting to establish the League for the Protection of the Rights of the Working People.

In May 1995, after helping to initiate a pro-democracy petition and signing another petition calling for a “spirit of tolerance in China’s political life,” he was seized and held incommunicado. Eventually, he was sentenced to three years of “re-education” in a labor camp, a sentence that was extended by 216 days because he “refused to reform.”

When Liu went on a hunger strike to protest the arbitrary extension of his sentence in 1995, he was subjected to electric torture and beatings, and he became extremely ill. Despite his increasingly poor condition, he was denied medical treatment.

Although Liu’s wife, Chu Hailan, and his mother, Wu Huifen, campaigned persistently and courageously for his release, their efforts resulted only in their being harassed and interrogated and lied to about Liu’s whereabouts. At one point, Liu was detained for months before Chu Hailan was told where he was. During that time, she went from public office to public office demanding to know his whereabouts—and fearing he had disappeared for good. When Liu was sentenced to the labor camp and officials finally allowed Chu to visit

him there, she found, when she arrived, that he had been transferred to a camp that was a five-day train ride away.

Last year, Chinese officials released Liu on a medical parole and exiled him to the United States with Chu Hailan and their daughter. When he arrived, he spoke before a New York press conference sponsored by the organizations Human Rights in China and Human Rights Watch. Liu talked about his own experiences and about the sudden change in his life:

Standing before you today, I feel very strange, as if in a dream. Only two days ago, I was in a re-education-through-labor camp in China. I was extremely sick, and it was very difficult to get a medical examination and even more difficult to obtain treatment. My living conditions were despicable. The police also enlisted convicts to keep close watch over me.

Liu urged those listening not to take his release into exile as a sign that the human rights situation is improving in China: "The very fact that I am here, forced to leave China in order to receive medical treatment, is a serious violation of human rights in itself."

And he was careful to put his own release in the perspective of the billions of Chinese citizens who are still denied human rights:

We must urge the Chinese government to match deeds with words and desist in openly trampling on human rights. China has a population of almost 1.3 billion people. If China were to establish a framework of human rights and democracy, there would be significant improvement and protection of human worth for the entire world.

Mo Lihua

Mo Lihua was an instructor in the education program at Shaoyang Normal College in Hunan Province when the pro-democracy movement swept through China. In a memoir, Mo writes that she had never paid much attention to politics, and there was apparently nothing out of the ordinary in the life she lived with her husband, who was also a teacher, and her young son. But the events of 1989 and their sequel were to transform her into a defiant advocate for justice, a political prisoner, and eventually, an exile.

Mo recalls that on May 20, 1989, she was planning to go shopping for summer clothes when she met some students she knew. She found they were on their way to Beijing to join the protests in Tiananmen Square and were planning to set themselves on fire to "sacrifice [their] lives and blood for the democracy movement." Mo wrote that she "grew choked up just listening to them. What innocent, lovable young students they were! With tears in my eyes I urged them not to sacrifice themselves but to enjoy their youth." She pressed some money on them, and with two hours to go before the train was scheduled to leave for the capital city, Mo returned home and told her husband of her conversation: "We both felt very uneasy about just standing by and watching as these two young people went to risk their lives in Beijing. On the spur of the moment, I decided that the only solution was to go with them to Beijing."

Mo Lihua returned home to Shaoyang before the June 4 crackdown occurred. The evening of the crackdown, she spoke publicly of her grief for those who

had died in Beijing, and the next day, at a large memorial ceremony held by the city's students, she led the people in a chant, "Save our students!"

"This," she says, "is how I grew to be a thorn in the side of the Communist Party authorities that they just could not ignore."

Mo was arrested and held for six months in rat-infested detention centers where female inmates shared a common bed and used a hole in the floor as a toilet. Then she was put on trial.

Although officials tried to pressure Mo into confessing that she harbored "counterrevolutionary aims," she refused, maintaining that she was innocent of any crime. She was permitted to have a lawyer at her trial but was forced to accept one approved by the government. She describes the first interview with her lawyer, in which he describes the ground rules under which he will operate, with bitter wit:

The first time Chen Qiumin came to see me in the detention center, he declared: "I am a Chinese Communist Party member, and I will take care of matters according to party directives. Now, the higher levels have instructed me that I cannot present an innocent plea for you. I cannot defy orders from above. Taking on a case like this one is risky for a lawyer."

Mo Lihua's trial was held in a public auditorium in order, she says, to give the people and university students of Shaoyang a real-life "legal lesson." The state used perjured testimony and then found her guilty. However, Mo was allowed to speak and believes that she was able to vindicate herself. During the trial, Mo writes:

I completely acknowledged all of my activities because under no stipulation of Chinese law did any of them constitute a crime. My analysis was so justified and correct, several members of the audience listening to the case even expressed their support to me, and the public prosecutor was constantly the subject of the audience's jeers. He himself realized that he was in the wrong and didn't dare to speak too harshly.

Mo was sentenced to three years in prison and a one-year deprivation of political rights. While she was incarcerated, Mo taught in the prison school and worked in the prison's garment factory. When she returned home, she found she had lost her job; her husband had been demoted and come under increasing pressure at his job; and her 11-year-old son had been humiliated in school. "I still remember," she says, "seeing how my son had sat crying throughout my trial. He had been a lively, talkative boy, but while I was in prison he had become quiet and reserved. The brutality of the Chinese government's political movements had even cast a dark shadow over the heart of my little boy."

A few months later, in October 1992, Mo granted an interview to a French reporter and subsequently learned she would be arrested. She left China for Hong Kong. The following year she was granted political asylum by the Swedish government, and she and her family moved to Sweden where they continue to live.

Hu Jian

Hu Jian was a young faculty member at Taiyuan Industrial University when the pro-democracy demonstrations began in 1989. The most famous of those

were in Beijing, but students, intellectuals, and workers demonstrated in cities across China. Hu decided to join his students. A fellow teacher, now in exile in Sweden, remembers Hu marching at the front of the earliest demonstration in Taiyuan on May 5, 1989. When arrests began, not long after the June 4 crackdown, Hu's name was on the city's most wanted list.

Hu Jian hid in the Shanxi countryside for two months. But he appeared in Beijing in August, hoping to present a petition to the National People's Congress. When the soldier he approached recognized his name, Hu was arrested. That night he was beaten and tortured, and the torture, which included the use of electric cattle prods, continued throughout his months of detention. By the time of his trial in June 1990, Hu appeared weak and disoriented. His mother appealed the guilty decision, questioning how he could have defended himself in such a weakened state.

Hu was sentenced to ten years, plus three years deprivation of political rights, on the charge of involvement in the "illegal organization" of a "self government association" established by students at Taiyuan Industrial University during the "chaos" of May 1989.

Hu went on several hunger strikes to protest the torture inflicted on him in prison and was declared "mentally ill" in January 1994. His mother, who became more and more concerned about his deteriorating condition, spent a year and a half appealing to authorities to release her son for medical treatment. In the fall of 1995, he died at the age of 43. His mother was told that he died of "natural causes" but was not permitted to see his body. All her requests to see the official death certificate or results of any autopsy have been ignored.

Hu Jian wrote the following poem while he was in prison.

Wind

You, so carefree and unrestrained,
As I cannot be,
My dreams shattered.

You blow through the forest,
Scores of trees bow down before you.
The mountains send you soaring,
The stars surround you,
But you don't care.
Paint the sky pitch-black,
Soak the earth drenching-wet.
When the roar of thunder passes,
You appear gentle and soft.

I envy you, so carefree and unrestrained,
Though I cannot be,
My dreams shattered.
Only when I have burned to ashes,
Blow me a gust of wind.

—Translated by Kris Torgeson

Xiao Xuehui

Xiao Xuehui was an associate professor in the philosophy department at Southwestern Nationalities University at Chengdu in Sichuan Province until 1989. Although she did not see herself as a political person but rather as a "complete bookworm," she participated in the pro-democracy movement and was subsequently charged with "counterrevolutionary propaganda and incitement."

Xiao had already run up against officialdom in the late 1970s when, as a student, she edited an unofficial campus literary journal, *April Fifth*, which was banned as part of the crackdown on the Democracy Wall Movement. As a professor, she had written several works on philosophy and sociology. Two of them were very controversial because they articulated views that were at odds with official Communist Party doctrine about human nature and morality.

Perhaps for that reason, Xiao Xuehui was treated very harshly by the authorities following her arrest, first being detained for a year and a half at the Xindu Detention Center where she was reportedly beaten regularly, worsening already serious health problems.

When Xiao was released from prison in 1991, she attempted to continue her academic career, but her efforts were thwarted at every turn. Following her release, she had to serve a two-year sentence of deprivation of her political rights, and she was stripped of her academic credentials and banned from teaching as part of that sentence. A series of lawsuits, filed to regain her credentials, have gone nowhere. In a January 1994 lawsuit, Xiao stated, "If necessary, I will go on filing suits indefinitely until the matter is concluded in a fair and reasonable fashion."

Since being released, Xiao has lived under close surveillance, with police stationed outside her apartment. Her parents have been persuaded to denounce her, and many of her friends, fearing contamination, avoid her. Those who still stay in touch have been frequently harassed and interrogated.

Though she is not permitted to teach, Xiao continues to write on issues such as ethics, humanism, human rights, and freedom of the press. But most journals refuse to publish her work because she is a former political prisoner. Recently, she told a friend that she had managed to get an article accepted. And because she had seen an advertisement for the magazine mentioning her article and a preprinted table of contents in which her article appeared, she was sure it would be published. When the magazine appeared, however, her article was not there.

Last summer, Xiao submitted a paper to the World Congress of Philosophy, which was to be held in Boston, and she was invited to attend and read her paper. But when she sent in an application for a passport, it was denied. She could get no explanation for this denial, and after knocking on many bureaucratic doors, she finally wrote a letter to China's premier. Eventually the date for the conference came and went; nobody ever explained why Xiao had not been allowed to attend the conference, nor did anyone acknowledge that there had even been such a refusal.

Although the Communist regime has been unable to silence Xiao Xuehui, it continues to make sure that words like these, which she wrote in 1993, will reach as few ears as possible:

The most serious threat to humanity today is the prolonged disregard for human rights by systems of autocracy, which have stifled the consciousness and dampened the spirits of so many people. In order to protect humanity, we must first safeguard human rights, for only then can we really begin to speak about solving the many other problems facing human existence. □

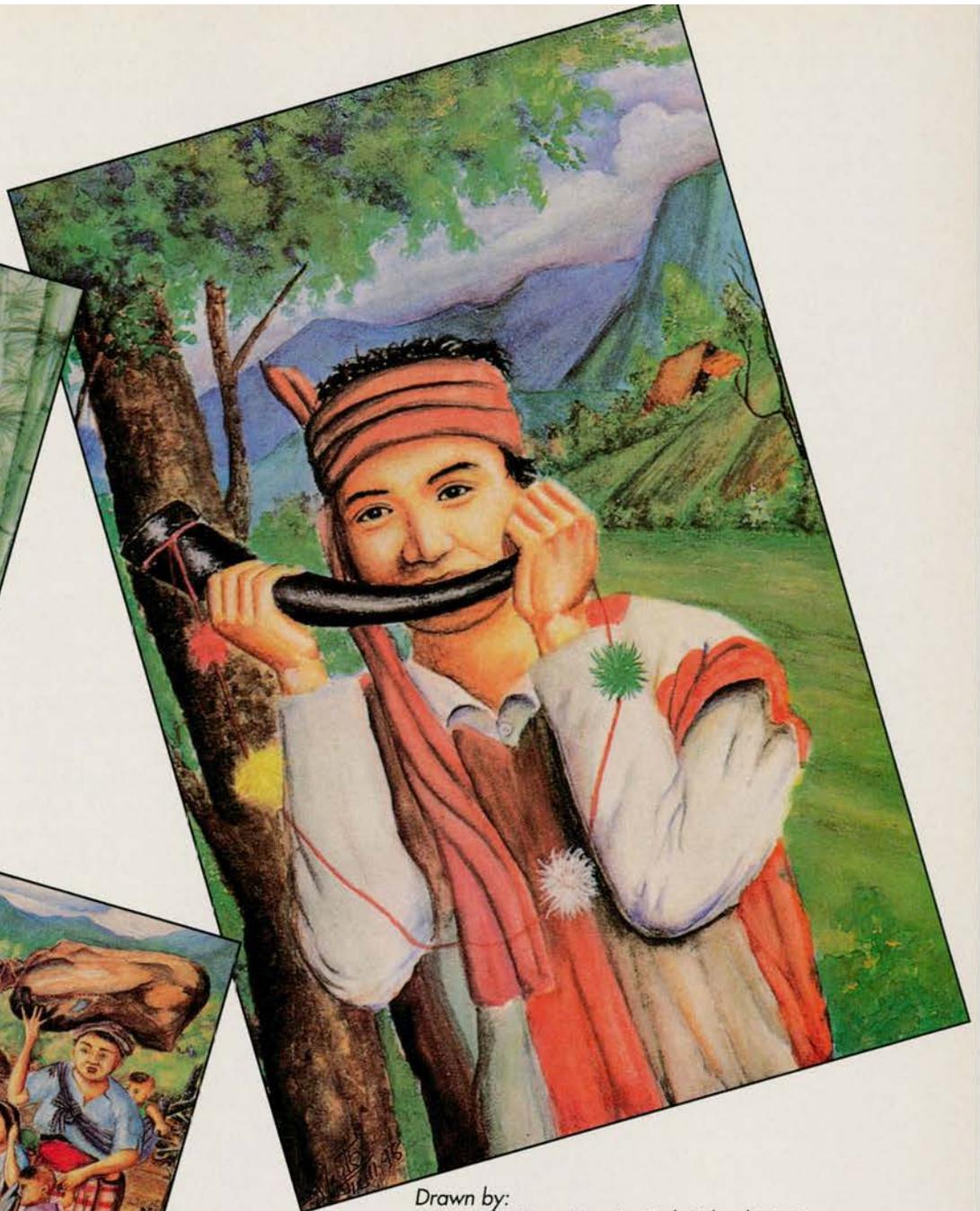
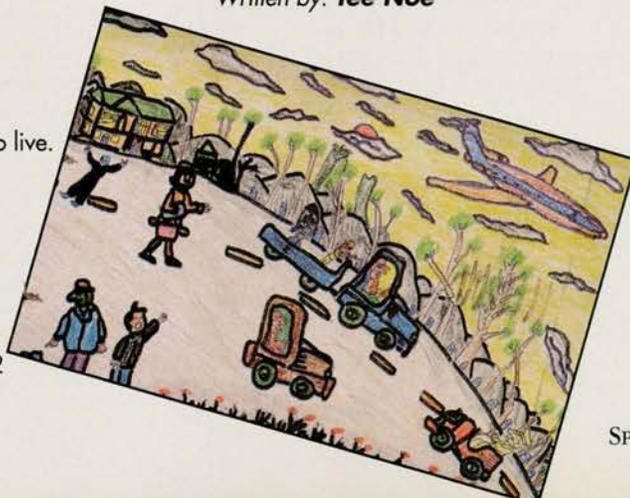


Drawn by:
Saw Tin Aung Win,
 Mae La FSP (Further Studies
 Program) School



Drawn by: **Saw Alpha,** Mae La High School No.1
 Poem:
 If greed, love for power, and anger can come to an end,
 This flourishing and wonderful world will be an ideal place to live.
 But now it is
 Written by: **Kyauk Yaing**

Drawn by: **Saw Eh Ler,**
 Mae La Primary School No. 12



Drawn by:
Saw Klo Say, Mae La High School No.2

Poem:
 When you hear the sound of my horn,
 March forward without hesitation.
 O Karen people, be awake and march forward
 As the dawn breaks!

Written by: **Tee Noe**