

A DISSIDENT AND HIS DAUGHTERS

BY ZHANG LIN

In this excerpt from an unpublished memoir, a dissident reflects on the hardship his political activities and subsequent political persecution brought on his family, in particular his elder daughter.



Author photo courtesy of Beijing Spring.

Xiao became pregnant they held a traditional wedding feast to formalize their relationship.

China's Democracy Movement continued to boil beneath the surface, in spite of official suppression of dissidents. After a visit from dissident Li Hai, Zhang Lin closed down his office and began participating full time in the underground movement. In particular, he helped foreign journalists thwart the Chinese Propaganda Department to access rural areas where peasant discontent was fermenting. The activities of Zhang Lin and his colleagues began to attract official notice, and a series of arrests took place. Finally police began appearing at Zhang Lin's door.

To this day, the hardest thing for me to forget is that when my wife was alone and needed me most, I could not be by her side. Because I had taken some American and Canadian journalists to interview villagers near Bengbu, Anhui Province who had suffered persecution at the hand of local officials, the local authorities were very hostile toward me. In 1994, civil rights were more threatened than they had been in years. If you accompanied foreign journalists investigating the "dark side of socialism," you would be accused of espionage and of having illicit relations

with a foreign country, and you faced certain imprisonment.

For that reason, after April 1994 I was unable to show my face in my hometown. But one evening I slipped back home to see my wife, and she spent the whole night weeping in my arms. Our child was about to come into the world, we had no money and I faced the loss of my freedom. Our future looked very bleak.

People liked to gossip in our town. The next day, when I visited a friend from my days in the democracy movement, a man I had long suspected of being a spy showed up. He only stayed a few minutes, then said he had to go downstairs to answer his pager. I took off immediately and went to look for Wang Tingjin.¹ Aware of the danger I was in, Wang warned me not to try to leave Bengbu on a main road, and gave me a ride out of town on his bicycle along a side path. After that narrow escape, I didn't get another chance to see my wife before she gave birth.

Waiting for my return, my pregnant wife cried herself into exhaustion every day. When she gave birth, she experienced a massive hemorrhage and lost consciousness. The doctors asked my mother, "If we can only save one of them, who should it be?" Scared out of her wits, my mother said that they should save my wife at all costs, because without her the child would have no one to raise her.

My poor daughter was almost sacrificed! Hearing my wife's sobs on the phone, I yearned desperately to go home and embrace her and our baby daughter. Thinking back, we put so much of our heart and soul into the cause of Chinese democracy. We gave up so much love, suffered so much, and paid such a high price for this cause.

In the end, the local authorities charged me with cohabiting illegally with Ji Xiao, and claimed that our courtship had been indecent behavior. For this crime, I was sentenced to three years of Reeducation Through Labor (RTL). Incensed at the absurdity of this charge, I went on a two-month hunger strike, devoting every fiber of my being to it. I had lost all hope in this regime, and all will to live.

What I didn't know at the time was that Jiang Zemin had secretly ordered a depoliticized handling of political cases. I later realized that after Jiang took the reins of government in 1994, almost half the democracy activists were thrown in jail on trumped-up charges, and the other half were convicted on unsubstantiated charges in violation of the regime's own laws.

I first met my daughter three months after she was born. That day, I was suddenly taken to the interrogation room and saw my whole family waiting there. I looked at my baby for a long time, and could not control my tears. Unable to care for my family, I could only ask my wife to be strong in the face of hardship. My only consolation was that although my own child would not experience a happy childhood, my efforts and the price I was paying in prison would benefit all the children of China.

The free peoples of the world cannot understand the brutality of China's Communist regime. After many years of far-reaching political oppression, Chinese people who live by their conscience have been largely eradicated, and the morals of the general populace have deteriorated to an appalling degree. When democracy activists take a stand against the regime and for the people, we get little support from ordinary people, who isolate us out of fear that they might be implicated and persecuted along with us. Some even beat us when we're down. For that reason, I was afraid that my wife would come to even greater harm following my arrest, and when I got out of prison, my worst fears were confirmed.

My prolonged hunger strike weakened my immune system. I was covered in festering sores, I stank and I was receiving no medical treatment. People around me treated me like garbage and hurried past with their noses covered. No one would give me water. I had to lean on a wall while helping myself to a little water from a cistern.

After my hunger strike I had no strength left, and no appetite. Other people would stand in line with their rice bowls, but all I could manage was to swallow a few token mouthfuls of pumpkin or green vegetables. I ate less in a week than I had previously eaten in one meal.

I became weaker and weaker; I had no strength to work, and had difficulty walking. But I refused to be a slave. I was transferred to a farm detail, and Yang Mingqiu, the overseer, insisted that I give the appearance of working. When I refused, I was beaten, stripped of my shirt and given electric shocks. I went on another hunger strike, my ninth.

I can no longer remember how many times I went on hunger strike during that period, eating only tiny amounts of food in between. Having to endure the Communists' abuse and humiliations, I felt deeply aggrieved and lost all hope.

At last, one day my wife came to visit me with our daughter. Afterward, she informed Human Rights in China of my condition. Liu Qing and his colleagues made a strong appeal on my behalf. Only then did the authorities send me to a hospital, where I was admitted half dead.

I still remember sitting on a chair on the verge of death, looking at my daughter and thinking of the miserable fate that awaited her. My tears fell like rain. All that kept me going was my concern that with my wife sick and weak, there would be no one to take care of my daughter.

On May 25, 1997 I had completed my three-year sentence, but the Nanhu RTL unit still refused to release me. Unable to contain my anger, I went on yet another hunger strike. After a week I was told that the higher-ups had ordered my release.

I made several phone calls while on my way home, but there

was no answer, which made me very anxious. I had no way of knowing whether something had happened, and I had a bad feeling, because my wife and daughter had not visited me in more than a year, and I had not received so much as a letter.

When I stepped out of the railway station, there was no one there to meet me. I rushed home and found my wife cooking in the kitchen. When she saw me, she didn't smile or speak. I hurried into the bedroom, and found our daughter on a wooden stool holding a reading primer. She was startled and ran to her mommy, who was standing by the door, and turned to look at me, full of curiosity. No wonder she didn't recognize me: she'd only seen me three times in the previous three years.

I gradually learned that during the three years I had spent in prison, my wife had stopped loving me. Finding this life of suffering and constant fear unbearable, she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and had twice attempted suicide. She had no faith left in our future together, and had only remained at home waiting to hand our daughter over to me. The fact was that she had fallen in love with another man, and had decided to leave me.

After returning home, I entered into regular correspondence with Human Rights in China, which published two political declarations and nine poems I wrote. One evening, Liu Qing telephoned me and warned me that I was in danger again. I had just been released from prison and had no intention of going back without a fight. I fled that night with the help of Wang Tingjin.

But I didn't dare to go far, because I didn't know who would take care of my young daughter. My poor daughter: she had been born into a life of misery, had never felt her father's love, and now had lost her mother's love as well. I simply could not leave her behind.

I then remembered Wei Hui, who had shown great courage after the June 4th crackdown. A shop floor manager, he had ordered his staff to stop production, and led a group of workers to mobilize students for street protests, stopping traffic and taking a stand against the Communist regime. When I sought out Wei Hui, he generously agreed to help me. That very day, he went to Wang Tingjin's home to pick up my daughter. I then left Bengbu and my own flesh and blood for the far corners of the earth with unbearable pain in my heart.

My only consolation was that although my own child would not experience a happy childhood, the price I was paying would benefit all the children of China.

On one of the many stops I made while I was on the run, I encountered an old college friend who showed concern for my plight and offered to help me flee to America. After years of suffering and political persecution, I had aged in body and soul, and suffered from the post-traumatic stress syndrome most labor camp prisoners experience. The symptoms included severe anxiety, autistic behavior, nightmares, memory loss and insomnia.

Chinese labor camps are very different from South African prisons under apartheid. Nelson Mandela was always treated humanely. He was allowed to read foreign newspapers and magazines, communicate by letter and telephone with friends from around the world, receive visitors and spend a night with his wife once a week. His was a prison that only restricted his freedom of movement.

In Chinese labor camps, on the other hand, you are a slave without any rights, and you live in degradation and constant fear. Prolonged imprisonment tends to produce neurosis. By the time you leave prison, you've completely lost your bearings. The amount of information you have access to during a year in a Chinese labor camp is less than a free person in the United States encounters in one week. I was completely unable to cope.

As a prisoner in a Chinese labor camp you live a life of slavery that revolves around the fact that you are not allowed to make any decisions concerning yourself or anyone else. Every minute of every day is decided for you. You even have to ask permission to urinate. If you fail to obey orders like a machine or beast of burden, you are beaten savagely and threatened with death.

Only spiritual resistance is possible. You can resist reform through labor, ideological remodeling and being turned into an animal, but as you become accustomed to resisting and regarding everything around you with hostility, you begin to turn in on yourself like an ascetic monk. In time, you become a prisoner of your own thoughts. When you leave prison, you find yourself unable to socialize and unwilling to listen to others. How can such a person participate in political activities?

In those days I was barely able to listen to what other people had to say, and couldn't get through a book or article. Unable to write more than a hundred words at one sitting, and plagued by an inability to concentrate, I was incapable of carrying out the most basic tasks. Constantly confused and worried, I nearly lost my sanity.

After I made my way to America, I became a dynamic democracy activist in public, but back in the solitude of my apartment I was invariably agitated and depressed. Unable to read or finish writing an article, I would sit all day on a broken chair I had picked up off the street, smoking and drinking and fantasizing about how I would deal body blows to the Chinese Communist regime and overthrow it in one stroke. Hunger would eventually force me out of the apartment to buy a sandwich, but most of the time I just sat there brooding and procrastinating.

Thinking back to my time in America, I recall that when I walked along Broadway in Queens, I saw the street filled with energetic Blacks, Hispanics, Koreans and Indians, most of them recent immigrants who shared no common language or traditions. By Chinese standards, their lack of knowledge of the local language would have qualified them as illiterate, yet in New York's democratic system, where they made up more than half the population, they could enjoy a comfortable, respectable life. In comparison, my peasant compatriots in China, who were literate and numerate, spent their days covered with dirt, satisfying themselves with salted vegetables and

rice, drawing only a few hundred yuan in income from a year's labor in fields depleted by over-cultivation, and plagued by exorbitant taxation. Writing about the situation filled me with worry for the future.

My poor daughter had been born into a life of misery, had never felt her father's love, and now had lost her mother's love as well.

For this reason, in October 1998, Wei Quanbao² and I gave up our life in America, and in the spirit of Lin Juemin³ returned to China to immerse ourselves in the democracy movement. We were like moths to the flame. It is not surprising that after my return more than 20 police officers spent 48 hours interrogating me, asking, "What did you come here for?" They used the pretext of "surreptitiously entering China" to subject me to three more years of abuse under administrative detention in an RTL camp.

While in New York I had missed my daughter terribly and telephoned her often. But I didn't see her until two years later, at the end of 1999, while I was still in prison. My parents made the long journey with her to the Guangdong RTL camp. When I saw my daughter, to whom I had become a stranger, all sorts of feelings welled up in my heart, and I didn't know what to say to her. My parents told me that she had cried and cried on the way to Guangdong, saying she didn't want to see this father she didn't know.

After I had entrusted my daughter to Wei Hui's care, he had decided that if she was to grow up like a normal child and not suffer discrimination from other children, he would have to tell her that he and Li Yue were her real parents and that I was her uncle. He had also given her a new name: Wei Baobao. She had no relationship with me, and didn't know what had happened to me, so it was natural that she didn't want to see me. During the trip to Guangdong, my parents kept telling her that I was her real father, but she didn't believe them and was very confused and upset.

My parents had selfishly thought that as I was already 40, this daughter was all that I had to depend on for the future. For my part, I was furious that they had failed to respect the wishes of my daughter's foster parents and had spoken so insensitively to her when she was too young to understand. Not surprisingly, on returning to Bengbu, my daughter didn't know what to think, and kept asking people who her real father was and where her mother was. Wei Hui and Li Yue were very concerned about the harm that had been done to my daughter, and did not let my parents see her again.

In November 2001, I was once more released from prison and returned home. The next day I went to visit my daughter. She didn't recognize me at all, and paid no attention to me. Wei Hui and Li Yue were very understanding and told me that my daughter belonged to all of us, and that whoever among us had the time to look after her would do so.

I went to see my daughter whenever I was free, but she never took much notice of me. Neighbors told me that she would often ask furtively who her real father was and where

her mother had gone. I feared that she resented me for having failed her as a father. After a year, she finally came to live with me because it was more convenient for her schooling.

Living with her, I gradually came to realize how much she had been traumatized those past few years. When she went to live with the Weis, she was three years and four months old, and could already remember things. Suddenly finding herself in a strange home was terrifying, and she cried for her mama every day for weeks. The photos taken of her during those days show a child old beyond her years, with an expression of profound sadness.

Fortunately, the Weis put their heart and soul into taking care of my daughter, and she gradually recovered her emotional wellbeing. She was very fortunate to have gone into the care of such extraordinarily good people, who lavished her with care and affection in her time of distress. My daughter and I will always be in their debt.

But the fact remains that in a time of peace my daughter was brought up by strangers as if she were a war orphan. Nothing can make up for the emotional trauma she suffered. My poor daughter was so young and innocent and had suffered so much. What comfort could I give her? All the more since I was still experiencing political persecution, surveillance and control by the Communist regime, and could be thrown in prison again at any time.

I have come to detest China's corrupt education system. This system affects everyone and everything, and sets up barriers wherever you turn. At first my daughter was not allowed to go to school. Later, she was allowed to attend an elementary school for a fee of 3,000 yuan.* When I returned home, I planned to transfer her to an elementary school located where I was a registered resident. My mother and I knocked on countless doors, but simply could not complete all the necessary red tape. It was only thanks to Li Yue's backdoor connections that we eventually managed to obtain official approval for the school transfer.

Individuals have no protection against this system. Even the children of corrupt Communist officials are not immune to institutional corruption in the education system. At least they can use their ill-gotten money to send their children to schools abroad, but ordinary Chinese children have no choice but to endure all manner of ill treatment. This is why I have long wanted to launch a movement for the protection of children's rights, and have planned an Internet petition to collect the signatures of a million parents from 100 cities when the time is opportune. Following is my letter of appeal:

Whenever I see my gaunt young daughter carry her heavy schoolbag to school, I feel indescribably sad. Her school workload is as heavy as her bag. Her daily routine makes my heart ache: getting up a little after 6 a.m., combing her hair and washing up, gathering her school supplies, eating breakfast, going to school, coming back home at midday for lunch and homework, then coming home again in the afternoon to do more homework until 10 p.m., when she finally goes to bed. If she's late to school, the teacher will punish her by making her stand by the classroom door. My daughter is busy

with school-related activities 16 hours a day, and has no time to play or have fun. She doesn't even get enough sleep.

The reason children have to work so hard has nothing to do with genuine educational requirements, but rather with the ruthlessness of the Chinese education system. On the one hand, teachers' ethical and educational standards are pitifully low. On the other, school authorities who are only concerned about their own parochial interests impose unrealistic examination standards. The schools impose the full burden on the children, forcing them to perform endless drills and memorize huge quantities of useless information.

When a child fails to do all his homework, the teacher humiliates him by making him stand by the classroom door or by hitting him on the hand with a ruler. I could never bring myself to hit my daughter, and cannot bear the thought of someone else humiliating or striking her.

In order to protect my daughter from this humiliation, I constantly urged her to complete her school assignments; she began to resent me as some kind of slave-driver and began to ignore me. It made my heart bleed. The way she saw it, if fatherly love involved this constant pestering, she wanted none of it.

According to China's recently promulgated Labor Law, employees are not meant to work more than 40 hours a



Photo: Reuters.

week. How can we make our children toil at their school assignments for 14 hours from seven in the morning to nine in the evening, with barely enough time to eat and go to the bathroom? They can't even play and have fun on weekends. Do we really have to torment children, the flowers and the future of the motherland, in this way?

The Minors Protection Law and the Elementary and Middle School Education Law stipulate no penalties, and have consequently never been enforced. Since the government is incapable of solving this problem, it seems that civil society will have to be mobilized to deal with it. As the writers Liu Xiaobo and Yu Jie⁵ have noted, the corruption of the education system poses a serious threat to our nation's future and to every Chinese family. We cannot simply sit idly by and ignore the problem.

I call on all parents of young children to seriously consider this problem, join our movement and express your concern by adding your signature. Showing your love and care for all children will similarly benefit your own child.

I also call on all adults to pay close attention to this problem. Your child may still be in kindergarten, already in high school or university, or you may not yet have started a family. But you are very likely to have children, and your children are likely to have children of their own who will also be going to school. Surely you don't want your child to suffer the torments young children today experience in school. That's why you owe it to yourself to consider for a few minutes whether you should take a stand and sign your name.

Confucius taught us that as you treat others, so you will be treated yourself.⁶ We can extend this to say that as you treat other people's children, your own children will also be treated by others. Mencius taught: "Treat the aged of your own family in a manner befitting their venerable age and extend this treatment to the aged of other families; treat your own young in a manner befitting their tender age and extend this to the young of other families."⁷ The sages all told us the same truth: if you love others, you will be loved. As long as the children around us are protected, our children will be protected too!

Now let us love and take good care of our children, and allow them to grow up in a healthy way. They are our greatest joy, and this is our most important hope!

At the end of 2001, after I was released from prison, I talked several times with people from the U.S. embassy in Beijing about the possibility of returning to the United States, as my green card application had been approved in June 1999 while I was there. Immigration services officials agreed to help me reenter the U.S., but said I would need a Chinese passport to do so. The problem was that in 1997 the Chinese authorities had blacklisted me, canceled my passport and barred me from leaving and entering China for five years.

For more than a year, I asked the Public Security Bureau countless times to restore my freedom of movement. They stubbornly refused to issue a passport to me, and never gave me a single scrap of paper explaining why. They also kept lying to me, saying that I would get my passport "in a few months."

During this period I married, and my wife gave birth to a baby girl. Who would have imagined the boundless misfortune I would bring upon my dear child. It began even before she was born, when the neighborhood committee repeatedly demanded that my wife have an abortion. Groups of two and later of seven or eight neighborhood family planning committee busybodies began barging into our home like commando units breaching enemy lines. They tried to intimidate us with their weird and hideous demeanor, and even threatened to take my wife by force and perform the abortion on a butcher's table.

These men and women told us again and again that they had been doing their job in the same way for the past twenty years. China's family planning committees are responsible for the deaths of hundreds of millions of unborn children, lives given by God, often against their expectant mothers' wishes.

Although under increasing pressure, we couldn't bear the thought of killing the fruit of our love. Every day, my wife would hide in a different place to avoid her persecutors. In the end, we left our home and rented a room in a different neighborhood, but we were so terror-stricken that we dared not go outside. Finally, after months of torment, our baby was born into this terrifying world.

I waited outside the delivery room while my wife was in labor. Of the twelve infants who were born that day in that hospital, eleven were boys. This is a sobering statistic: several girls had undoubtedly been aborted. Although the Chinese government prohibits doctors from performing ultrasound tests to determine the sex of the fetus, state-run hospitals are so corrupt that doctors routinely do so for a 200 yuan bribe.

Since the Chinese government strictly enforces a one-child family planning policy while providing no social security, Chinese couples in the countryside will do anything to ensure they will have a son who will provide for them in old age. With so many more boys than girls, where will the boys find wives when they grow up? There is a real danger that this demographic imbalance will ultimately lead to violent upheavals in which a dozen men will fight over one potential bride.

After our daughter was born, I contacted our local neighborhood family planning committee in Bengbu dozens of times over the course of five months to register her as a member of our household.⁸ In the end, they informed me I had to pay a fine of 13,000 yuan, supposedly ten years' advanced payment of society's dependent care expenses. Nor would they tell us whether our daughter would be entered in the household register in the foreseeable future.

Who would have imagined the boundless misfortune I would bring upon my dear child, even before she was born.

They also threatened that if we did not pay the full amount within one month, we would have to pay an overdue fine of two percent per day. That would work out to 94,000 yuan a year, or almost a million yuan in ten years or two million in twenty years!

Of course I was unable to pay this fine. And if I waited until

my daughter was twenty to pay the fine that they had imposed on her for being born, she would not be able to pay it off in a lifetime, and neither would her own children. If the neighborhood planning committee has its way, it will rob me and my descendants for several generations. In fact, according to the Family Planning Law our child was born only a few months early, but corrupt officials were determined to use this excuse to extort as much money as possible from us.

The family planning committee is backed by dozens of government agencies. Ordinary citizens have to contend with countless bureaucracies throughout their lives. It's like being sucked into a black hole.

In Anhui Province, where average per capita annual income is below 2,000 yuan, low-income urban families can receive a government income subsidy of 1,200 yuan, but probably half of these people receive nothing at all, myself included. Poor rural dwellers receive no income support whatsoever. Old people who fall ill and have no children to support them might just as well close their eyes and wait for death.

So on the one hand, the Public Security Bureau would not let me take my daughter out of China, and kept looking for a pretext to throw me back in prison. (They were not satisfied with the more than eight years they had already kept me in prison, or with their destruction of my family only because of my concern for the miserable lot of the Chinese people.) On the other hand, other government departments devised means to rob me. This is what it's like to be in the clutches of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The thought that they could enter our home at any time and take anything they wanted scared me and my family out of our wits. My parents were so worried that they couldn't eat or sleep. Although the entire contents of our home weren't worth more than 5,000 yuan, they were all we had to lead our modest life. I had heard that this sort of thing was a common occurrence in the countryside. Countless peasants have seen their families broken up and dispersed far from their home village.

Almost two years after my release from prison, I was still suffering from various chronic diseases that were a direct result of the mistreatment to which I had been subjected. In particular, the psychological trauma I suffered meant I was unable to find work, quite apart from the fact that in China just about all democracy activists are unemployed. I had to deplete my meager savings to survive, and worried constantly about having no means of livelihood in the future. Not only did I receive none of the income support provided for poor people, but I had to pay a 3,000 yuan arbitrary "support fee" for my elder daughter in addition to her school fees. I also had to pay for all her vaccinations.

This makes me think of the more than one billion ordinary Chinese who struggle to earn a few thousand yuan a year while corrupt government officials bent on "advancing with the times" extort tens of thousands from them. Everyone in China knows that it's hard to find a clean official these days. They are differentiated only by the degree of their greed. As we say in Chinese, "tyranny is crueler than a tiger," and "oppressive officials are like ravenous wolves."

I had originally hoped to bring my elder daughter to the

United States while I was there, but the Chinese authorities refused to issue her a residency permit, without which she was unable to obtain a passport to leave the country. It was only when she turned six, just in time to be included in the census, that she finally obtained a residency permit. My mother told me many times how her feet were swollen from all the running around from office to office she had to do in applying for my daughter's permit.

In a life of trouble and hardship, children are our only means of fulfilling our dream of a beautiful life. When everything has been taken from us, they are our only hope.

To the end of my days, I will deeply regret the fact that I only spent a little over a month living with my daughter before she was seven. By God's grace, I now have a daughter I can be with and bring up together with her mother.

I believe that there is no greater source of happiness than bringing children into the world and raising them. We are allotted a short time on this earth, just a few decades. We all



A father and daughter in Jinan. Photo: Reuters.

die, and whatever happiness or sadness we experience is transient. We can only live on in our children and in the generations that follow us. Children are the only physical legacy of our existence as unique individuals.

In a life of trouble and hardship, children are our only means of fulfilling our dream of a beautiful life. When everything has been taken from us, they are our only hope.

Raising a child is no easy thing. When she was five months old, my baby daughter would spend hours playing in my arms, constantly peeing and pooping, as babies do. She loved it when I rocked her in my lap. Her nonstop babbling struck me as an expression of deeply felt mysteries. She loved to touch my face and grab my ears with her delicate hands. Her beautiful little hands reminded me of the verse by e.e. cummings: “nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands.”¹⁰ Yet myriads of even smaller hands belonging to unborn babies are destroyed in their sleep.

Gazing into my daughter’s clear eyes, more beautiful than the stars in heaven, makes me shudder to think of the unborn more numerous than the stars in heaven who have been killed over the past twenty years by heartless family planning bureaucrats, and who have thus been robbed of their opportunity to become babies with the same angelic look as my daughter. Were their tender lives really unworthy of this world? Were these unborn babies really unworthy of sustenance? Did these little angels really have to be murdered? The very cosmos bleeds and weeps with them.

China has deteriorated to such a degree that there seems no hope of avoiding a tragic fate. In the past I was willing to risk my life to make a difference, but now all I hope for is to leave China with my wife and two daughters and escape this wasteland full of evil and filth. After twenty years of effort toward China’s democratization, and my health irreparably damaged by eight years in prison, I can see no meaningful progress in China.

As I wrote this article, my mother and my wife were by my side watching me anxiously. After I finished it, they entreated me not to have it published. I told them that with this article I might be able to help tens of millions of little lives as precious as my dear daughter, or at least to speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Finally my mother said that if I had to publish this article, I should put her name on it; she’s already 64 years old, she was willing to bear the consequences in my stead, even go to prison or die for me so I could remain behind and raise her granddaughter. Her words brought tears to my eyes, and made me realize how much Chinese people treasure their children. So many Chinese, in hopes that their next generation might live a little better, will endure anything and sacrifice everything, even down to the one life that is theirs.

Translated by Paul Frank with Stacy Mosher

This translation is edited from Zhang Lin’s longer Chinese essay. The original Chinese article is posted with this translation on the Web site of Human Rights in China.

TRANSLATOR’S NOTES:

1. A former mathematics professor in Anhui, Wang Tingjin was imprisoned for two years in 1979 for his participation in the Democracy Wall Movement. He was subsequently sentenced to two years of Reeducation Through Labor on April 21, 1998 for assisting exiled dissident Wang Bingzhang to enter China illegally, and to another three years of RTL on March 13, 2000 on accusations of attempting to cross China’s border illegally.
2. Wei Quanbao published an underground magazine, *Mengya*, in Shanghai during the Democracy Wall Movement. He left China to live in the U.S. in 1994. Identified as members of the China Democracy and Justice Party, Zhang and Wei were caught immediately after slipping across the Chinese border from Hong Kong, and both were sentenced to three years of RTL.
3. Lin Juemin (Lin Chueh-min), 1886–1911, returned to China after studying in Japan, and was one of the 72 martyrs executed by the Qing government after a failed uprising in Guangzhou in 1911.
4. In order to attend a public school in China, a child must be registered as a legal resident where the school is located.
5. Liu Xiaobo and Yu Jie are prominent dissident writers based in Beijing.
6. *Analects of Confucius* 15:24, James Legge trans., Clarendon Press, 1893.
7. D.C. Lau trans., Mencius, Penguin Books, 1970, p. 56.
8. If Zhang Lin’s daughter were not included under his hukou, or household registration, she would not be eligible for government-funded education and other social services.
9. China’s family planning law allows family planning officials to regulate the circumstances under which children are born, including the timing. An unofficial English translation of China’s national family planning law can be accessed at: http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/database/poplaws/law_china/ch_record052.htm. Specific information relating to family planning in Zhan Lin’s home province, Anhui, can be found on this Web page: <http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/database/chinadata/anhui.htm>.
10. This verse is from cummings’ poem entitled “somewhere i have never traveled.”