The Price of Freedom

Night’s curtain fell softly, like an iron net, that day
So freedom might withdraw from history’s memory
Life that day became a theatrical prop for dictators
For prying wide the bloodied eyes of corpses

To one side, history
Tiananmen records one bloody event after another
On the other side, the mausoleum
Dictators celebrate their grand, repeated massacres

The Goddess of Democracy lifts high her torch
Stands tall and unafraid between history and the present
Blood pulsing hot in their veins, the Chinese people
Are at a loss, all around them
A place they do not know

The Army is deployed throughout Tiananmen Square
A forest of tombstones in neat array
Pander to death in the darkness
Already the death bugles ring out
Faint green ghostly lights
Play over grave-like faces

History will never forget
[June 4, 1989]
This day
The Goddess of Democracy’s noble countenance
Gazing into the distance
Students workers city folk hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder
Standing guard beside her

On one side, an invitation from hell
On the other, the splendid dreams of youth

When the moment finally came
It seemed 40 years in the waiting
The people’s souls woven into a wreath of rainbow brilliance
[June 4, 1989]
That day
The Goddess of Democracy wore it lightly on her brow
Bullets rain down like hail
Slowly rose the eternal heavens

This day
The hot-blood of the Chinese people
Was in full bloom on Tiananmen Square
There were green petals
And a green hope
Looking haughtily down at the solid black bricks
At the wickedness spreading over them
And the imperial thinking sprouting there

The day will surely come
The Goddess of Democracy’s gaze will sweep over time and space
Here comes Lin Zhao³
And here comes Zhang Zhixin⁴
And there, Yu Luoke⁵
Here come the countless brave souls of victims
Transformed into a huge banner of freedom and democracy
Rising slowly in the sky
Above the motherland
Here, in the East

Translated by J. Latourelle

Notes
1. The Museum of the Revolution and Chinese History stands on the east side of Tiananmen Square.
2. Mao’s Mausoleum stands on the south side of Tiananmen Square.
3. Born in 1932, penname of Peng Lingzhao. A student of Peking University, she was labeled a rightist after publicly showing sympathy toward rightist schoolmates. Lin was imprisoned in 1960 for being a counterrevolutionary and killed in secret by authorities in 1968.
4. Born in 1930 in Tianjin, Zhang Zhixin was a Communist Party member who believed Mao had corrupted true Marxist ideals. She was a fierce critic of Mao’s personality cult during the Cultural Revolution. Imprisoned in 1969 and executed in 1975.
5. Buddhist cycle of death and rebirth.